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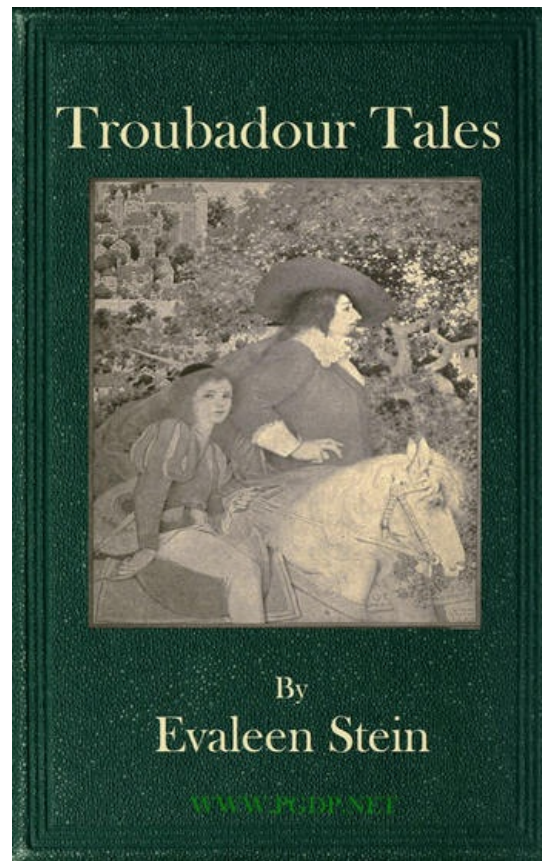
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## Troubadour Tales



# Troubadour Tales

By Evaleen Stein



With Illustrations  
By Virginia Keep  
Maxfield Parrish  
B. Rosenmeyer &  
Edward Edwards

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To My Mother

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## THE PAGE OF COUNT REYNAURD

### HOW HE EARNED THE FAVOR OF KING RENÉ AND WON A SILVER CUP FOR CLEVERNESS IN THE LATIN TONGUE

"PIERROT! Pierrot! are thy saddle-bags well fastened? And how fare my lutestrings? Have a care lest some of them snap with jogging over this rough bit of road. And, Pierrot, next time we pass a fine periwinkle thou hadst best jump down and pluck a fresh bunch for my Barbo's ears."

The speaker, Count Reynaurd of Poitiers, patted the fluffy black mane of his horse Barbo, and loosened the great nosegay of blue flowers tucked into his harness and nodding behind his ears. Barbo was gaily decked out; long sprays of myrtle dangled from his saddle-bow, and a wreath of periwinkle and violets hung round his neck; for the Count Reynaurd was not only a noble lord, but also a famous troubadour. That is to say, he spent his time riding from castle to castle, playing on his lute or viol, and singing beautiful songs of his own making.

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In the days when he lived, which was many hundred years ago, there were numberless such poet-singers strolling over the sunny land of France, and especially that part which lies to the south and is called Provence. Many of the greatest of these kept little pages to wait upon them and carry their musical instruments; and so it was that Pierrot rode a little white palfrey by the side of Count Reynaurd, and carried his lute, and gathered the periwinkle for the gay bouquets that decorated Barbo's ears.

It was May-time, and they were journeying through the lovely land of Provence, which was quite enough to make any one happy, and the count and Pierrot were fairly brimming over with good humor as they rode along. They were bound for the old town of Aix, where in those days stood the palace of the good King René, whom everybody loved.

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Now, King René himself was a troubadour, although he could not wander about over the country as did the others, but was obliged to stay in Aix and govern his people. Yet he spent hours and hours every day writing poetry and making up music for it; and he delighted above all things to gather about him all who could finger a lutestring or sing a merry song. There were always dozens of fine troubadours staying with King René, and he was never weary of adding to their number, and of seeking out the best in France; and so it chanced he had heard much of the great skill of Pierrot's master and also of another noble lord, the Count William of Auvergne. The friends of each of these boasted that none other in all France was worthy to be called the champion of the troubadours. So René had sent messages to both, inviting them to come and visit him, and to hold a contest of song, saying he would give a beautiful collar of jewels to the one who sang the better.

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In response to this invitation, the Count William was already in Aix, having come the day before, after a long journey from his castle in Auvergne. He was now resting, awaiting the Count Reynaurd, and pleasing himself in thinking of the glory of winning the jeweled collar; for he fully expected by and by to carry it off as his prize.

Meantime, Count Reynaurd and Pierrot trotted gaily along the road to Aix. The almond-trees were in flower, and from one of them Pierrot had broken a little switch covered with rosy blossoms, with which he now and then tapped the flank of his little white palfrey, who would then kick up her heels and frisk along at a rollicking pace. Pierrot's own legs looked lovely in party-colored hose, the

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right being a beautiful pearl-gray and the left a delicate robin's-egg blue; his doublet was of pink silk embroidered in silver and slashed with white satin; and on his head he wore a jaunty cap with a long feather. He was a handsome little fellow, with bright eyes and dark curls, and as gay and lively as the great black crickets that live in Provence.

His master, Count Reynaurd, looked very stately in a suit of plum-colored velvet, with a collar of fine lace fastened with a golden violet, which he often felt, so as to be sure he had not lost it and that it was still tightly clasped. For the gold violet was a prize that the count had just won in the town of Toulouse, whither, every May-time, all the troubadours used to go and hold great contests, called the Games of Flowers. At these games each one sang a song, and the most skillful received prizes, a violet of gold and a rose of silver being the most wished for.

So Count Reynaurd was very proud and happy thinking how finely the violet would serve to clasp the collar of jewels he expected to win from King René, and he smiled pleasantly when Pierrot called out to him:

“See, my Lord! are not those the high towers of Aix?”

Count Reynaurd looked ahead, and, sure enough, far in the distance rose the city of Aix. They set their horses a-galloping, and in a little while found themselves riding through its quaint, crooked streets, till they reached the great square where stood the king's palace. This was a very beautiful one, strangely built, with two ancient round towers and a wide porch with many pillars; all about it was a lovely garden full of orange and acacia trees, and sweet roses and jasmines clambered over everything.

Count Reynaurd and Pierrot dismounted at the palace gate, and were led into the great hall where sat King René, wearing a blue robe embroidered in bright flowers. He was an old man, and his hair and long beard were quite white, but he was gay and happy-hearted as Pierrot himself. When he saw the Count Reynaurd enter the hall, he arose from his throne and came down and embraced and kissed him, and patted Pierrot kindly. For René was not like most kings, who are very particular to have everybody about them as stiff and uncomfortable as possible.

Then presently the Count William, who had been walking in the garden, hearing of the arrival of Reynaurd, came hurrying in, his own little page Henri following close upon his heels. He greeted Count Reynaurd very cordially, for he had often met him at the games of Toulouse, and the little pages Henri and Pierrot soon became the best of friends also.

As the day was now drawing to a close, the good old king invited them all into the banquet hall, where were already gathered numbers of troubadours, and minnesingers who were the troubadours of Germany. Some were eating and drinking; some were telling stories or making up poetry; while still others were playing on all sorts of musical instruments, and were altogether having the jolliest kind of time.

Reynaurd and Pierrot were very hungry after their long ride, and so were glad to sit down at one of the long tables while the king's seneschals brought in roasted boar's-head and venison pasties, and large baskets of the fine white bread of Provence and of brown marchpanes, which were nice little old-time French cookies full of raisins and covered with nuts and poppy-seeds.

Pierrot waited upon his master very prettily, and then feasted upon dainties to his heart's content, all the while listening with delight to the gay songs of the troubadours and minnesingers. By and by his curly head began to nod, and he fell asleep while still munching a marchpane, and slept so soundly that he had to be shaken when it was time to go upstairs, where a little cot was spread for him close to the great canopied bed of the Count Reynaurd.

So the days passed merrily on. But when, time after time, King René fixed a day for the contest between the Counts Reynaurd and William, they would plead that they were not ready; for they had grown so lazy and pampered by the life they led in the palace that they dawdled away their time in idle pleasure.

At last the king grew impatient, and declared that he would shut them up, each in his own room, where they must stay for ten days composing their songs; and he commanded that then they should appear before him, and be judged and rewarded according to their

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skill.

So Count William and Count Reynaurd were escorted up the palace stairway to their chamber doors, and each agreed, upon his knightly honor, which was a very solemn vow indeed, that he would not set foot beyond his threshold until the day appointed by the good king; and it became the duty of Pierrot and Henri to bring food and wait upon their noble masters.

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But these two masters fared differently in their song-making. In the apartments of Henri's lord, things went far from smoothly; for, although Count William was really a very accomplished troubadour, yet when he found himself shut up and obliged to make a song, not a word could he write. Indeed, poets declare that this is often the way with them; most beautiful verses will suddenly pop into their heads, sometimes in the middle of the night, so that they have to jump up in the dark to get pencil and paper to write them down before they forget; while, many times, if they have paper and pen ready, so contrary are their wits that very likely they can not write a word! And so it was with the Count William.

He fussed and fumed, but not even the least little bit of a rhyme could he make; and the more he wished it, the more impossible it seemed to become. He strode up and down the room; he snatched his paper and tore it into bits; and then he scolded Henri till the poor little fellow tiptoed out in his little pointed velvet shoes, and fled to the garden, where he sat down under an orange tree, and consoled himself with some fresh cookies that one of the kitchen scullions brought out to him. As he crunched down the sugary morsels he now and then flung a crumb to the pretty goldfishes in a fountain by his side; and then he wondered what any one wanted to make up poetry for anyway, especially when it was May-time and one might sit in King René's garden, and above all, on a day when King René's cooks were making sweetmeats.

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Meantime, across the corridor from Henri's master things were going on very differently with the noble Reynaurd and Pierrot. As luck would have it, this count was getting on famously. He had composed a most beautiful poem, and lovely music by which to sing it, and was altogether so pleased with himself and all the world that he snapped his fingers joyously, and fetched Pierrot a playful slap on the shoulder, crying, "Hey, Pierrot, just listen to this!" And then in a loud voice he began to sing.

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Pierrot was so delighted that he clapped his hands, and declared he was quite sure his lord would win the prize, and shame the Count William into everlasting silence. Then he helped himself to a couple of great golden oranges from a basket he had just brought to Reynaurd, and strutted out to air himself, and to boast to Henri of his master's superior skill.

Meantime, Count Reynaurd sang over and over his new song, each time roaring it out louder and louder, till his lungs fairly ached.

While all this was going on, the Count William, in a great rage, was still striding up and down the floor of his chamber, which happened to be across the corridor and at no great distance from that of the happy Reynaurd. And, as it happened also, when Pierrot went out he forgot to close the door behind him—a fact which Count Reynaurd had not noticed. The door was very thick and heavy, and fitted badly between the stone walls, so it was not to be wondered at that Pierrot did not manage to latch it.

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As it was, the loud voice of Count Reynaurd came rolling forth, and suddenly the Count William, angrily pacing the floor, stood stock-still and pricked up his ears.

Now, the count's ears were famous for being extraordinarily sharp, and he was also wonderfully apt at remembering anything to which he had once carefully listened. He knew in a moment the voice of Count Reynaurd, and then a broad smile crept over his face, and he listened harder than ever.

As Reynaurd kept singing over and over again, it was not long till Count William had the whole song by heart, and then, seizing his own lute, he began practising it very softly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed to himself. "Thou great foolish Reynaurd! Canst thou never learn how to hold thy tongue? But never mind, I will play such a trick on thee as will teach thee a lesson thou'lt not soon forget. Ha, ha, ha!" And then he practised longer, till he knew both the poetry and music as well as Count Reynaurd himself.

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The next day, Pierrot, still exulting over his master's skill,

happened to meet Henri in the garden, and asked how his noble lord was getting on.

"Oh!" said Henri, "finely. He has just made a lovely new song!" And with that he hummed a snatch of the melody he had heard Count William singing, and which he thought his master had composed.

As Pierrot heard the music he could scarce believe his ears; first he was speechless with astonishment, but at last he sputtered out:

"It is not true—it is stolen! That is my dear master's, the Count Reynaurd's!"

"Pierrot," burst in Henri, "I would have thee understand that my noble lord, the Count William, does not steal, and is a far better singer, anyhow, than thy great Reynaurd!"

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From this matters went from bad to worse, till the two little pages were just on the point of coming to blows; but, fortunately, at this point one of King René's seneschals caught sight of them, and, hastening up, gave each a sound cuff on the ear, crying out as he did so:

"Ho, ye saucy little knaves! Know ye not the good king will have no brawlers upon these palace grounds? Take that, sirrahs! and see to it that ye behave more seemly hereafter."

The pages being thus forcibly separated, Pierrot ran as fast as his legs could carry him up the palace stairs, and burst into his master's chamber, panting out indignantly:

"Dear Lord Reynaurd, the wicked Count William has stolen thy beautiful song and will win the prize! And I tried to stop Henri, and —o-o-oh—" Here poor Pierrot, still smarting under the cuff from the seneschal, quite broke down, and was obliged to double his fists very hard and bite his lips to keep back the angry tears.

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At first Count Reynaurd gasped with astonishment, and then jumped up in a towering passion. But by and by his wits came back to him, and he remembered that Count William had always been a good friend of his; but then his heart misgave him as he remembered, too, that Count William was a famous joker, and loved a jest above all things.

The more he thought of it, the more sure he felt that William only meant in some way to tease him, though he could not understand how he had learned the song. Just then his eyes fell on the door, that Pierrot in his haste had left unfastened, as usual; and then it flashed through Count Reynaurd's mind how Count William had found out about the music. Reynaurd, moreover, had no doubt but that, before the king, William would probably sing the piece as his own,—a thing which he could easily do, as René had announced that they would be called on in alphabetical order, according to the names of their domains; and as Auvergne thus came before Poitiers, Reynaurd knew that Count William would sing first, and that it would then be hard to make the people believe that the song was his and not William's; yet he determined, if possible, to try in some way to get the better of him.

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He thought and thought very hard for a little while, and then suddenly he said to Pierrot:

"Pierrot, dost thou still remember the Latin tongue that good Father Ambrose taught thee last winter in our castle in Poitiers?"

The little page assured his lord that he did, for he was really a clever scholar in the Latin tongue, which both his master and the Count William understood but indifferently.

Then Count Reynaurd called him close to his side, and whispered a plan to him that seemed to please them both mightily. Pierrot at once took the goose-quill pen that Reynaurd handed him, and after screwing up his face and working very carefully, he wrote these lines:

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Hoc carmen non composui,  
Quod cano, quod cano!

and this he took great pains to teach his master.

The next day Count Reynaurd sang his song over again and again, and Pierrot purposely left the door ajar. Count William noticed that after every stanza there were two new lines added in another tongue:

Hoc carmen non composui,  
Quod cano, quod cano!



At first this puzzled Count William very much indeed.

"Faugh!" he said to himself at length, "that ridiculous Reynaurd is seeking to give a learned air to his poetry! I dare say he has picked up those lines out of some old manuscript, and thinks to pass himself off for a great scholar."

Then Count William tried to make out the meaning of the words, which were fitted into the rhyme of the stanzas in such a way that they could not well be left out. He studied over them till he thought he understood them, though, as it turned out, he was quite mistaken. But as it was a common way with the troubadours to end every stanza with similar lines, which they called the refrain, Count William suspected nothing, and set himself to work to learn the new words.

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The time that the king had allowed the rival noblemen was now almost up, and in two days more the song-contest took place.

The great banqueting-hall had been beautifully hung with garlands of flowers and gay banners. At one end of it the king's throne stood on a dais, and over it swung a scarlet canopy like an enormous poppy-flower turned upside down. In the middle of the room were placed long tables, and in the palace kitchens the cooks were running about busying themselves preparing the great feast that was to follow.

By and by King René came into the hall and took his seat on the throne. He wore a rich robe of purple velvet, embroidered all over in the brightest silks and gold; after him came a great troupe of troubadours and minnesingers, some carrying their own harps or viols, and some followed by little pages who bore their masters' belongings.

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As the good King René looked at his gay company and the brilliantly lighted hall and the long tables, his eyes sparkled with delight, and his heart swelled with joy when he thought of the coming contest; for he was never so pleased as when thus surrounded by his dear troubadours, whom he loved to make in every way as happy as possible.

Then, when all was ready, a gaily dressed herald came into the hall, and kneeling before the king, and bowing to the assembled company, announced the coming of the two counts, William and Reynaurd. All the other troubadours and minnesingers stood up, and King René smiled graciously as the two noblemen entered, followed by their pages, Pierrot and Henri, each of whom carried a viol bedecked with long silken ribbons.

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When the counts had saluted the king and taken their places before him, he commanded a seneschal to bear in the prize; and so the beautiful collar of jewels was brought in upon a silver tray and placed on a carved bench beside the king. Then a herald stepped out, and, lifting the collar upon the point of a flower-wreathed lance, displayed it to all the company and announced the terms of the contest of song about to take place.

This ceremony was a great deal better and prettier than the customs of most of the other royal courts of that time. In all the lands except where King René lived, when the people desired entertainment, they used to gather together to see contests called tournaments, in which noble lords tried to overthrow one another with real lances on which were no garlands. But King René could not endure such barbarous displays, and so in his palace no one fought another except with pretty verses, and the best poet was champion.

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When all the usual ceremonies had been gone through, the king called Count William to step forth first and sing his song. There was a merry twinkle in the count's eyes as he took his viol from Henri, hung the silken ribbons about his neck, and then, after striking a few soft notes with the tips of his fingers, began to sing, as his own, the song made up by Count Reynaurd. He went through the whole piece, although each time when he came to the Latin lines he mumbled them over so that the words sounded indistinct, and one could not be certain just what they were.

When he had finished, the king was delighted, and all the listeners clapped their hands and wondered how it would be possible for Count Reynaurd to do better. Indeed, they looked rather pityingly on Reynaurd, as one already defeated.

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Then, when the cheers had somewhat quieted down, King René commanded Count Reynaurd to stand forth and take his turn for the prize. Reynaurd quietly stepped out, and, saluting the king, said:

"My royal liege, the song to which you have just listened was not the work of Count William of Auvergne, but of myself, Reynaard of Poitiers."

At this, as Count Reynaard had expected, every one looked incredulous, and Count William pretended to be very indignant, and declared that he had not been outside of his own apartments for the ten days; that he had not set eyes on Count Reynaard through all that time; and altogether he appeared to be terribly angry that Count Reynaard should hint that the song belonged to him.

Count Reynaard, however, asked but one thing of the king, who readily granted his request. It was that Count William be commanded to sing the song once more, and that each time he should sing the Latin lines as plainly as possible. [24]

Count William looked somewhat abashed at this proposal, and began to suspect that a trap had been laid for him. However, he could not refuse to do the command of King René, especially when it seemed so simple a thing; and so he was obliged to sing again, and say the Latin words plainly, all the while very angry with himself because on the spur of the moment he could think of no other words to put in place of the Latin refrain, which was so cleverly woven into each stanza that it could not be left out without spoiling the rhyme.

The king listened attentively, for, as the Count Reynaard knew, René was a good Latin scholar himself; and presently, when the refrain came into the song: [25]

Hoc carmen non composui,  
Quod cano, quod cano!

King René began to laugh; and he laughed and laughed till the tears fairly ran down his cheeks; for what do you think the words really mean? They mean:

I did not make this song,  
That I sing, that I sing!

When the king at last managed to stop laughing for a few minutes, he translated the lines so that every one could hear.

At first Count William looked very blank; then, realizing how cleverly the tables had been turned upon him and he had been caught in his own prank, he enjoyed the joke as much as anybody, and laughed the loudest of all. Indeed, such a "Ha, ha!" as went up through the whole banquet-hall was never before heard, and the very rafters seemed to shake with glee.

The good king was so delighted with the entertainment that he called Count Reynaard and Count William both before him, and taking a hand of each, he declared that the jeweled collar must be divided equally between them. He at once ordered his goldsmiths to set to work to make it into two collars instead of one; which they could very easily do, as it was so wide and heavy. [26]

Then the king had a lovely silver cup brought in for Pierrot, because of his cleverness in the Latin tongue; and afterward the whole company of troubadours and minnesingers and pages sat down and feasted so merrily that, years later, when Pierrot himself grew to be a famous troubadour, he used often to sing, in the castles of the French nobles, of the gaiety of that great festival.

# THE LOST RUNE

## THE LEGEND OF A LOST POEM AND THE ADVENTURES OF LITTLE ELSA IN RESTORING IT TO HER PEOPLE

Eery, airy,  
Elf and fairy,  
Steep me deep in magic dreams!  
Charm from harm of water witches,  
Guide where hide the hoarded riches  
Sunken in Suomi streams!

As the strains of Elsa's voice floated up and wandered away among the cottage rafters, "Bravo"! cried her father; "bravo, little one! Already thou singest like the April cuckoo!" Elsa, the little Finnish girl thus addressed, smiled with pleasure, and nestled closer to her father's reindeer coat as he proudly patted her fair hair and gave her an approving hug. [28]

The two were sitting on a rude bench drawn out from the cottage wall; and here they had been all the evening, singing snatches of strange old songs, and toasting their toes at the turf fire that blazed in the great fireplace.

It was barely September, but in the far North, the winter begins early and the winds sweep with a bitter chill across the wide plains of Suomi, the old name by which the Finnish people love best to call their land.

Elsa's father and mother—the mother was now drowsing over her knitting, on the other side of the hearth—were well-to-do peasant farmer folk. They owned the land, called from their name the "Sveaborg farm," and the cottage, which was large of its kind; that is to say, it had two rooms besides the great living-room and the loft.

One of these extra rooms, however, was set apart for the use of occasional travelers; for in Finland, through the country, inns of any kind are very few, and at that time, as now, certain of the better farm-houses were set apart as places where travelers might be sure of entertainment for the night at least. As Elsa's home lay on one of the main roads, the cottage now and then sheltered one of the few strangers who sometimes journey through the land. [29]

The other little chamber belonged to Elsa, who was the only child; but the main business of living was carried on in the great room with the hearth. It was a quaint place, broad and low; the walls were covered with a rough plaster, and overhead the rafters showed brown with smoke; just below these were fastened two slender poles from one of which hung festoons of dried herbs, while on the other were strung a great number of large flat brown rings, which were nothing less than the family bread for the winter. For the Finnish peasants do not trouble themselves to bake too often, and they like their bread made into these curious ring-shaped loaves which they thus hang away until needed; nor do they mind how hard and dry it becomes. [30]

On one side of the cottage walls were several large presses where cheeses were making; and opposite these were two little doors that seemed to open into cupboards; cupboards, however, where no Finnish child would ever think of looking for jam or sweetmeats, for, as is the custom of the country, behind the doors were fastened in the thick wall two shelf-like beds, where Elsa's father and mother slept.

But the chief feature, the heart of all the room, was the great fireplace; at one side of it was built a huge brick oven, in which Elsa's mother baked the queer flat-bread for the family, and sometimes, when the nights were very, very cold, she would make for Elsa a little bed on top of the warm bricks, which was always so cozy that the little girl did not care that it was a trifle hard. [31]

The broad hearth in front of the oven was also of brick, and this hearth, as in every peasant's cottage, was the favorite gathering place. Here through the long winter evenings, and days when the sun barely peeped above the horizon, they loved to sit and sing over their quaint old songs and repeat in verse the strange and beautiful stories that have been handed down in Finland for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years.

Indeed, all Finnish peasants have always been wonderfully fond

of music and poetry, and, to this day, as in Elsa's time—which was nearly a hundred years ago—in almost every house may be found at least one of the curious harps of ancient shape, which the people make for themselves out of bone or wood. There are but few peasants who can not sing some old story to the music of this instrument which they call "kantele."

Elsa's father was an especially skilful harper, and Elsa herself seemed to inherit a large part of his passion for music and poetry. He had made for her a little kantele of her own, and to the soft weird music she struck from its strings, she sang her little song,

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Eery, airy,  
Elf and fairy.

These lines, however, were but the beginning of a song intended to charm and overpower the wicked water-witches; for, as all the world knows, Finland is the home of all manner of fairy folk, of elves and gnomes and wizards and witches; at least so all Finnish folk declare; and innumerable are the charm-songs and incantations and marvelous tales handed down from generation to generation, telling of the witches and fairies of Suomi.

Elsa knew a great number of these song-stories and delighted above all things to learn a new one. But, as she sat by the fire, the warmth at last made her drowsy; presently the harp fell from her hands, and still leaning against her father she dropped into a sound sleep.

The next morning was crisp and frosty, but the sun, rising in a strange slanting ring, tempered the September chill almost to mildness. Indeed the sun behaves very oddly in Finland; it was then circling round the sky in its autumn course, never setting, as in our country, but staying up a little way all night, and all the while weaving its spiral rings lower and lower down the sky. By and by it would hide altogether and not show itself for many weeks. So while the light lasted every one was making the most of it.

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Elsa was astir early; breakfast had long been over; she had swept the house with the broom of birch twigs, and was now outside the cottage helping her mother churn.

As she pushed the wooden dasher up and down, the wind blew the color into her cheeks and her hair about her face. She wore a close little woolen hood, a homespun dress and a long apron embroidered in bright colors, and on her feet were wooden shoes.

All at once Elsa's quick ears caught the sound of wheels.

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"See, mother!" she exclaimed, "there is Jan of the Ohlsen farm; but who, thinkest thou, is the stranger beside him?"

Fru Sveaborg shaded her eyes with her hand, and sure enough, saw, jogging up the road, a pony dragging one of the odd two-wheeled carts of Finland. As she looked, it turned into the narrow lane of birch trees leading to the cottage.

Jan drew rein.

"Good morrow, neighbor Sveaborg!" he called out.

Then as the Fru left her churn and came toward them, he said:

"This traveler is Herr Lönnrot, from Helsingfors, who is journeying through the country. Last night he passed at our farm and to-night he would spend at thine. He wishes much to speak with peasant Sveaborg about certain matters he is seeking to learn." Then catching sight of Elsa, "Good morrow to thee, Elsa! How comes the churning? It hath made thy cheeks red as cloud-berries!"

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Elsa shyly drew near her mother, as the latter greeted Jan, and, courtesying to the stranger, assured him of a welcome at their home.

Jan then jumped from the cart to help Herr Lönnrot, who was an old man. He had a gentle face with kindly blue eyes, and his hair and beard were gray. He was wrapped in a long traveling cloak, and walked with a staff. As Fru Sveaborg led the way to the cottage door he coughed slightly and drew his cloak closer about him.

Within the living-room, the Fru hastened to set before them fresh milk and bread, and then she and Jan gossiped a while over farm matters, while the stranger, who seemed weary, went to rest in the little guest chamber, which was always in readiness for travelers.

In the afternoon, as Elsa sat by the fireplace spinning, Herr Lönnrot came into the room, and seating himself on the bench, began to talk to her.

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"Art very busy, little one?" he said; "canst thou not sing a song for an old man? I trow yonder tiny kantele fits thy fingers as if fashioned for them!"

"Aye, sir," answered Elsa shyly, "if thou really wishest, I will sing the little charm-song I have just learned."

With this she took the kantele, and drawing a wooden stool beside the bench began to sing. Though her voice rose somewhat timidly at first, presently she lost herself in the music and poetry, and sang many of the strange Finnish songs.

As Herr Lönnrot listened to the little girl his eyes brightened and he smiled with pleasure; and when, by and by, she ceased, he drew her to his side and stroked her hair.

He then questioned her carefully about the songs that she and her father knew, and told her that he himself was even then traveling through Finland for the express purpose of gathering together all the songs of the peasant folk, though not so much for the music as for the sake of the words, which he was most anxious to learn. He told her further, how, for many years, the great scholars of Finland had been certain that a great and wonderfully beautiful song-story, a story of heroes and wizards and fairies, had become broken up and scattered among the people, just as if some beautiful stained-glass window should come to pieces, and the different fragments fall into the hands of many different persons, and be scattered about so that no one could make out the first picture unless all the pieces could be found and fitted together again.

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Now the song-story, Herr Lönnrot said, was made up ages before; long before people had paper or pens with which to write. So the story had been handed down from parents to their children, who sang it from year to year simply from memory; for people had wonderful memories in those days.

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It had begun so very long ago, however, and the whole story was so long, that the peasant folk had gradually forgotten parts of it; in some families one part or rune, as the people called it, would be handed down from generation to generation, and in others, some other part.

Now Herr Lönnrot was a physician of much learning, and aside from his work of healing the sick, he had a great fondness for beautiful stories. He had spent much time among the peasants especially to learn such parts of the lost song-story as they might happen to know, and was now devoting his old age to gathering up as many as possible of these runes.

And then, he told Elsa, he intended to fit them together and write them down so that none should ever again be forgotten, and so that the whole world might read this great Finnish story.

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"Ah," said Herr Lönnrot, with kindling eyes, "every one who has love for old Finland should help save this wonderful song, for 'twill be to the glory of our nation, even as the songs of Homer have been to the glory of the Greeks!"

And in this Herr Lönnrot spoke what is perfectly true: for all wise persons know that to add a beautiful poem or song or story to the collection that every nation gradually makes up for itself, is rightly considered a far more glorious thing than to discover a whole mountain of gold and diamonds. And so the Herr wished greatly to find and restore this beautiful scattered story to the poetic wealth of Finland and of the world.

He then went on to explain to Elsa that the scholars found these songs to cluster about three ancient heroes, and of these, one, the mighty wizard Wainamoinen, was the most powerful of all.

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Here Elsa, who had been listening attentively, smiled.

"Yes," she said, "I know many songs of Wainamoinen and the rest."

"Of that I am sure," said Herr Lönnrot; "but there is one rune that tells of the birth of the harp: how Wainamoinen fashioned the first kantele from the bones of a magic fish, and how he sang with such marvelous sweetness that all living things drew near to harken to him. Of this rune I have heard many peasant-singers speak, but have sought in vain for one who can teach me the whole of it. And I must find it before I can complete the story!"

Here Herr Lönnrot sighed, and dropping his head upon his breast seemed lost in thought. Presently a fit of coughing seized him; and then he continued:

"Dost think, little one, that thy father knows aught of this rune?"



Elsa thought very hard trying to recall the rune; she was obliged to answer:

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"Nay, sir; in truth he hath taught me many runes about Wainamoinen and the others, but I know not how the harp was born. But," she added, "my father will be home at supper-time; he is helping thatch neighbor Friedvic's new barn, and perhaps he can tell thee!"

"Perhaps," said Herr Lönnrot. "Thy neighbor Jan told me he thought thy father knew something of this rune I seek."

Even as they talked, a whistle sounded without, and Elsa clapped her hands joyously.

"There is my father now!" and bounding to the door she flung it wide open. As the peasant Sveaborg stepped within, seeing Herr Lönnrot, he took off his cap and greeted him kindly, for strangers were always welcome at the Sveaborg farm.

When the Herr told him why he was journeying through the country, and of the lost rune he was seeking, Elsa's father grew much interested.

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"The birth of the harp! Ah, sir," said he, "I know not the whole rune myself, but I know of a peasant who does. I have heard him sing it, and truly 'tis of marvelous beauty! But he is very aged, and odd, sir"—here peasant Sveaborg tapped his forehead meaningly "and will teach it to no one else. Even now, I have been told, he is very ill, and like to die. I know not if thou canst learn aught from him, but if thou wishest, I will take thee thither to-morrow." And while they were busy arranging the trip for the morrow, Fru Sveaborg came in, and with Elsa's help soon set out the evening meal.

As they ate their bowls of *pimeä* or sour milk, which is the chief part of every Finnish meal, Herr Lönnrot entertained them with wonderful stories of his travels and news of the outside world, till all were charmed; and Elsa, especially, thought him the most delightful traveler their roof had ever sheltered. Her admiration for him deepened as the evening wore on, for the Herr, though evidently in feeble health and weary from his journey, yet talked so pleasantly that all were sorry when by and by he bade them good night.

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The next morning at breakfast, Herr Lönnrot did not appear; but the family did not think it strange, and supposing him still resting, did not disturb him. Fru Sveaborg placed some breakfast for him in an earthen dish, which she set in the oven to keep warm. Then she went about her work.

But as the morning passed on, and still he did not come from his chamber, she became uneasy, and sent Elsa to tap upon his door. As Elsa lightly knocked, the door swung open, for there are no locks in Finland, and there lay Herr Lönnrot, motionless, on the floor of the room! The aged physician had evidently arisen, and made himself ready for the day, when, overcome by weakness, he had fallen in a swoon.

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Elsa, thoroughly frightened, ran to the living-room, crying out:

"Mother! Mother! Herr Lönnrot is dying!"

At this the Fru hastened in, and with Elsa's help, raised the frail old man and placed him on a bench; and while her mother did what she could to make him comfortable, Elsa hurried to the fields to send her father for the village doctor.

As it was a long journey to the village it was almost nightfall before the peasant Sveaborg reached home.

Meantime Herr Lönnrot had passed from the swoon into a high fever, and all day his mind had wandered, and he had talked strangely; sometimes of his home and his journey, but more often of the lost rune of the magic harp, which seemed to trouble him sorely.

At last the doctor came, and after examining his patient, said that he was suffering from the effects of a serious cold, and that he must be kept quiet and well cared for.

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Then as Herr Lönnrot continued to toss and murmur, the doctor asked Fru Sveaborg if she knew of aught that troubled him. As the Fru looked perplexed, Elsa spoke.

"The rune, mother! Hark! even now he is speaking of it!"

And as they listened, the poor Herr, who had not the least notion of what he was saying, exclaimed:

"The harp! Ah, yes, I must go seek it! the magic harp"—and here he broke off into low, unintelligible words.

At this the doctor looked grave, and said that it was a pity that anything seemed to be on the patient's mind, as it might make the fever harder to overcome. He then measured out some medicines, and took his leave, after giving Fru Sveaborg directions for caring for the aged patient.

The next day, under the faithful nursing of Elsa's mother, Herr Lönnrot seemed better, though still very weak, and when the doctor again saw him, he said that with continued good care he thought all would go well, but that the Herr must not think of going on with his journey for a week, at least. After this visit from the doctor, Elsa's father, who had been waiting at home in case he should be needed, told Fru Sveaborg that he must go to finish the work he was doing at a neighboring farm, and as it would take him a day or two, he would stop on the way and send the Fru's sister to help her care for the sick stranger.

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When her father was gone, and her mother busy about her work, Elsa drew out her wheel, and as she sat alone spinning as hard as she could, she yet found time to think of a great many things. She thought of the lost rune of the birth of the harp, and of good Herr Lönnrot, lying on his bed and chafing and worrying with every hour that his journey was delayed. Then she thought of the peasant Ulricborg, and of what her father had told of his reported illness.

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"Ah", said she to herself, "what if he die before Herr Lönnrot can travel thither! Then the rune may be lost forever, and dear Herr Lönnrot can never, never finish the beautiful song-story!" The more she thought about it, the more Elsa became convinced that something should be done, and that without delay.

She turned over in her mind a great many plans, and presently an idea occurred to her that made her smile happily; and, jumping up, she ran out to where Fru Sveaborg was arranging her milk-pans in the sun.

"Mother," said Elsa, "mother, I wish to go to the peasant Ulricborg!"

"Why, child," exclaimed her mother in amazement, "what dost thou wish with the peasant Ulricborg?"

"I wish to learn from him the lost rune, so that Herr Lönnrot can

finish the beautiful song-story! He may die before the Herr can see him!"

"But," protested her mother, "thou canst not go alone, and thy father is too busy to go with thee now."

"But, mother," said Elsa, "'tis no such great journey; thou knowest I went thither once with father in the sleigh two years ago, and truly it seemed not far!" Elsa did not realize how swiftly a sleigh will speed over many, many miles. "I shall meet carts on the way, and I can stop at the Ringstrom farm to-night."

Now Fru Sveaborg was a simple soul who had never been far beyond her own home, and as the child pleaded so earnestly to go, at last she consented, although somewhat against her will.

Elsa was overjoyed, and at once made her little preparations to start. She got a small basket of birch bark and in it her mother placed some black bread and cheese, a few herrings and a bottle of milk. Then putting on her thick woolen cloak and hood, and taking her kantele in one hand and the basket in the other, off she started.

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Fru Sveaborg bade her good by. "Be careful, child!" she said; "keep to the highroad, and be sure to stay to-night at the Ringstrom farm!"

"Good by, mother!" Elsa called back, "and do not fear for me; I know the way!"

With this she tripped down the lane of birch trees and turned into the road to the east. By and by she was overtaken by a little Finland pony trundling along a two-wheeled cart. As the driver of the cart happened to be a young boy she knew, she was glad to climb in beside him. They rode thus for a number of miles till they reached a cross-road where Elsa's friend told her he must turn off; so she jumped out, and thanking him for her ride, bade him good by and trudged on along the highway.

Presently she began to feel hungry, for it was long past noon, and looking about, she saw a pretty tuft of green moss under a tall birch tree; and sitting down, she opened her basket and ate some of the contents. She thought she would rest a little while before going on, so she wrapped her cloak close about her and leaned back against the birch tree,—till—by and by—her eyes began to blink and blink, and before she knew it the little girl was sound asleep.

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She did not know how long she slept, but at length, just in the midst of a beautiful dream about magic fishes and harps and wizards, she gave a shiver and waked up.

She rubbed her eyes for a minute, and involuntarily drew her cloak closer, for it had grown chilly.

At first, as Elsa gazed around, she thought she must still be asleep and dreaming of cloudland! But presently she realized that she was not in the clouds, but in the midst of a dense fog, such as often comes up in Finland without warning, and covers up the fields and woods as completely as any cloud might do.

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Now, being a Finnish child, Elsa's first thought was of the hobgoblins and prankish fairies of the fog who, as every Finlander knows, float about in their mantles of mist seeking to do mischief to unwary travelers.

So Elsa at once began to sing in a high, clear voice a little charm-song; not the one she had sung in the farm house to Herr Lönnrot, but a song intended especially to ward off the wicked fairies of the fog. It began like this:

Fogs of Finland,  
Floating inland,  
From the fairy-haunted sea,  
Have a care now,  
See ye bear now  
No unfriendly folk to me!

As Elsa sang she cautiously stepped along, she knew not where; till, faintly through the thick shrouding mist, there came the soft tinkle, tinkle of a little bell. Listening, she knew at once that it must be fastened to the collar of some cow, for such bells in Finland are very sweet-toned and clear.

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Sure enough, in a little while she heard the trampling of hoofs, and the whole herd, drawn by the sound of her voice, was thronging about her.

But Elsa was used to the herds on her father's farm, and was really glad to feel the warm breath of the gentle little Finnish cows.



As the leader came close to her she put up her hand and patted its nose; then slipping her fingers through the narrow leathern strap from which the bell hung, she walked along beside the cow.

This proved to be the very best thing she could have done; for the herd was going home, and the cows seemed to know their way instinctively, even in spite of the white fog.

They walked thus a long way, till after a while the fog began to lift somewhat; and though it was growing dusk Elsa could distinguish the outline of a comfortable-looking farmhouse. It was not the Ringstrom farm, where she had expected to pass the night, but a strange place that she had never before seen. The usual lane of birch trees led up to the house, and behind it was a long, low barn, whither the cows seemed to be directing their way.

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As she walked along beside them she was thinking of what she had best do, and she found herself very much perplexed. In truth she had set out upon a very difficult errand for a little girl, and had good Fru Sveaborg had the least idea of the distance or possible dangers of the journey she never would have given her consent; while had Elsa's father been at home,—but then it is useless thinking things might have been managed differently. Meanwhile there was Elsa trudging along in the midst of the herd, wondering much who were the dwellers at the farm, and, on the whole, not a little frightened.

By this time she had a pretty definite idea that she had started on a rather reckless undertaking, and she fancied that perhaps the people at the farm might think so too, and would not allow her to go farther; and as she was determined at any risk to reach the peasant Ulricborg and save the rune, she decided at last that she would not go to the house.

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So she kept with the herd, and when the cows reached the door of the great barn, she slipped in between them, unseen in the fog and gathering dusk; for though the sun would not quite disappear, it hung low and dim on the horizon and shed but faint light through the misty air. Within, the barn was arranged much like the one at her home, though on a far larger scale. In one corner was a large pile of soft sweet-smelling hay, and going to this Elsa set down her basket and kantele, and curled herself up for the night.

As she looked about through half-shut, sleepy eyes, she saw in the center of the wide earthen floor a stone fireplace, and there over some blazing fagots stood a great iron kettle; beside it two ruddy-faced girls were hard at work stirring the long marsh grass that was boiling for the cows' supper. Elsa would have very much liked to make herself known to these girls, for she was used to doing things openly and did not at all enjoy hiding there in the corner; but then she thought of the precious rune and the possibility that they might stop her journey, and so she remained quiet. As she nestled down in the soft, warm hay, however, she thought to herself that they could not possibly mind having a little girl sleep in it for just one night, and so reasoning she kept on drowsily watching the movements of the two girls.

[55]

After a while they dipped out the soft food and fed the cows; and then, when they had milked them, one of the girls poured out a bowlful of new milk and set it beside the stone hearth, and then they both went off singing toward the house.

Now Elsa knew, as every little Finnish farm girl knows, that the fresh milk was set there for the fairies; for should any roving band of elfin people chance to wander thither, they might be vexed and do mischief if they did not find a fresh, sweet draft awaiting them. So Elsa felt quite safe, sure that the fairies would not trouble her; and, by and by, lulled by the soft breathing of the cows, she fell asleep.

[56]

Very early in the morning she awoke, and though at first much bewildered, she soon remembered everything, and determined to slip away before any one should find her.

So fastening her cloak and taking her little belongings, she again set forth. As she stepped out in the early morning light, a white frost glittered over the fields; and as she gazed around seeking the road, she saw a faintly-marked path that seemed to lead to the highway. She made a little breakfast from the things she found in her basket, and then walked on; but the path, instead of leading to the highroad, took her farther and farther from it, for she did not know that the farm whither the cows had led her was a long distance from the way she wished to follow.

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Indeed Elsa was lost; and as she went on the country grew wilder and more rugged. Before she knew it the path had disappeared altogether and she could find no trace of it; and as far as she could see, there was no living being near.

All the while she was becoming more and more frightened, yet still bravely she went on, vainly seeking the road. Before long she came to a dense wood of firs, and thinking that perhaps the way lay just beyond, she slowly entered the forest, stepping timidly between the dark resinous trees. Once or twice she trembled as a fox crossed her path, but, by and by, as she looked ahead, her heart fairly stood still with terror. For there in the distance, where a great ledge of rocks cropped out of the ground, she saw a large brown something; and the more she looked the more certain she felt that it was a bear. [58]

And true enough, it was a bear, "honey-paw," as Elsa would have said, for so the Finlanders call the brown bear, because of his great liking for wild honey. Now, as it happened, this particular honey-paw was for the time so intent upon his own affairs that at first he did not see Elsa. He was walking carefully round and round the great mass of rock, hunting a good spot where he might curl up, bear fashion, and sleep through the coming winter. He had been looking at these rocks for many days, as is the custom of bears, trying to decide which of the little caves they offered would suit him best for his long sleep; and he was still perplexed about it when he happened to look in Elsa's direction.

The little girl was standing still, frozen with terror, when he saw her. Perhaps he would not have noticed her had it not been for the red hood she wore, which, of course, could be seen for a long distance. When honey-paw realized, however, that some one was looking at him, he was greatly displeased; for when bears are selecting their winter hiding places they like to keep the matter as secret as possible. So with a little growl of resentment he started toward her. At this Elsa uttered a scream and, dropping her basket, took to her heels, running as fast as she could, she knew not whither. The bear followed, at an awkward pace, but when he came up and sniffed at her basket she was already far in the distance. [59]

As good fortune would have it, in her wild flight Elsa had come to the edge of one of the great bogs that cover so large a part of Finland, and her light steps had taken her some distance over its uncertain surface. On she went, springing lightly from tussock to tussock of the coarse grass, till at last she reached a little space of firmer ground, and sank down, exhausted, upon the fallen trunk of a willow tree.

Meantime honey-paw also had come to the edge of the bog, but after a few cautious steps had found himself too heavy to gain a foothold on the soft ground, so with another sniff or two he turned about and trotted off. [60]

When Elsa saw him going away, she was so worn out with fright, and so very tired, that she did just what any other little girl would have done: she began to cry, and cried and cried as if her heart would break. She sat there sobbing a long time, and was quite sure she would have to stay in that little spot the rest of her life, till the wicked bog witches found her or the bears ate her up; for she did not think she could ever venture on alone.

Indeed she cried so hard that she did not notice that she was quite near the bank of a good-sized river that flowed to the east, nor did she know that after a while a large flat-boat drifted in sight. It was laden with a great number of bark-bound barrels, and on the deck a man stood guiding the boat with a long pole. As it floated slowly along, the boatman saw Elsa, and called out in surprise. [61]

"Ho, little one! what dost thou in yonder bog? Art lost?" When Elsa heard him, she quickly looked up, and begged piteously that he take her away from that dangerous spot!

"That will I do right gladly," said he; and directing her how to reach the bank in safety, he guided his boat to land and then helped Elsa aboard.

He gave her a little box on which to sit, and told her that the heavy barrels arranged in rows in the boat were filled with turpentine which he was floating down the river from the pine woods farther inland. Then looking curiously at Elsa, who sat there still tightly holding her little kantele, which she had unconsciously kept through her flight from honey-paw, he said:

"But who art thou, little one?"

The man had a good face and a kindly manner that quite [62]

reassured Elsa, who, now that her fear of the bear was relieved, had begun to wonder who her companion might be. When she told him her name, "Ah," he exclaimed, "I know thy father well! But whither art thou going all by thyself?"

When Elsa told him of her journey to the peasant Ulricborg, he looked astonished, but told her to have no fear, as he would see her safely to the Ulricborg home, which was down the very river on which they were floating, and at no great distance from the bank.

As the boat glided along Elsa's new friend beguiled the time by telling her of the great pine forests whence he had come, and explaining how the pitch and turpentine were harvested. After a while when he asked if she would sing him a little song, she gladly assented; and striking the strings of her little harp, she sang a Finnish boat-song, her voice ringing out clear and sweet on the frosty air, through which some big snowflakes were beginning to fall. She had scarcely finished her song when she noticed that they were no longer in the center of the stream, but that the boatman was deftly turning his craft sidewise and guiding it toward the bank.

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In a few minutes he had made it fast to a stout oak tree that grew near the water's edge, and then helping Elsa out, he took her hand and led her up a narrow path between tall grasses and yellowing willows; then turning into a lane they came toward a small weather-beaten house standing in the midst of a little group of fir trees. The door stood open, and a short distance from the house they spied a bent old woman gathering pine cones in the forest close by. She had her apron filled, and presently, turning around and seeing her visitors, she straightened herself as best she could and came toward them with greetings. As she drew near, Elsa saw that her face was withered and wrinkled, and her hands brown with toil.

"Good morrow, Dame Ulricborg!" said the boatman, "and how fares thy goodman to-day?"

"Ah," answered the dame, "he is very weak and grows more feeble every day. This twelve-month past he hath scarce left his bed, and 'tis weary work for an old woman to keep the kettle boiling and the thatch mended over our heads."

[64]

"True," said the boatman, sympathetically, "thou hast done well, Dame Ulricborg!" Then looking down at Elsa, he added: "Here is a little girl come to see thee."

The old dame looked curiously at Elsa; then, as the latter held up her little skirt and asked the dame if she might not help carry the cones, she grew more kindly and led the way to the house. But the boatman, seeing Elsa thus safe at her journey's end, bade them good by and hastened back to his boat.

Now, Dame Ulricborg very much wondered what the little girl could possibly wish with her; but as it is considered unkind to question a guest as to his coming, she said nothing, but waited for Elsa to make known her errand.



As they drew near the door of the house, Elsa hastened to explain to her how she had come, and how she hoped to learn the rune from the lips of the aged peasant Ulricborg. At this the old woman, who had listened attentively, shook her head. [65]

“Ah, little one,” said she, “thou little knowest how feeble he hath grown! He hath strange fancies, too, and I doubt if he will wish to let thee learn it. He hath never been willing to teach it to any one. But,” she added, “thou canst at least ask, if thou wishest.”

By this time they had reached the threshold of Dame Ulricborg’s home, and stepped within. The house was bare, but not uncomfortable; some rings of flat-bread hung from the ceiling; there was a spinning-wheel, two or three benches, and, on the wall over the fireplace, a kantele.

The dame told Elsa to draw one of the benches near the fire and warm herself, while she went into the next room to see how her sick husband fared, as she had been obliged to leave him all alone when she went to gather the cones. [66]

By and by the dame came back, and shaking her head sadly, said to Elsa:

“Nay, to-day ’tis useless; his thoughts are wandering and he will notice nothing. ’Tis often so when he grows overweary. But thou must bide the night with us, and it may be in the morning he will be better.”

So Elsa helped Dame Ulricborg build up the fire till it blazed brightly with the crackling resinous cones, and then as the afternoon waned, she made herself useful in many little ways as they set out their simple evening meal.

Elsa thought no *pimea* and black bread had ever tasted quite so good, for she was very hungry after her long day, and Dame Ulricborg smiled at her enjoyment. Indeed by the time Elsa crept into the queer little cupboard bed that the dame spread for her, she had so won the latter’s heart that she bent over and kissed the little girl with a pathetic tenderness; for it had been a long, long time since poor old Dame Ulricborg had had any young life about her. Her own little girl had slept in the village churchyard for many years. [67]

The next morning, after they had breakfasted together, the dame told Elsa that she might see peasant Ulricborg, who seemed somewhat brighter with the new day. So taking Elsa by the hand she led her into the room where lay the sick peasant.

He looked very old and feeble; his hair was white as snow, and his thin cheeks drawn into innumerable wrinkles. Elsa went timidly over and stood by his bedside, and in a low quivering voice she

made known her request. She told him of Herr Lönnrot's labors to save the beautiful song-story of Wainamoinen, and of his great desire to learn the lost rune that peasant Ulricborg alone knew; how he wished to write it down, so that it might never again be forgotten and that all the world might enjoy its beauty.

As she spoke, the old man looked at her with dim blue eyes, and seemed to listen as one in a dream. When she ceased, he appeared for a moment lost in thought; then he said slowly and dreamily:

[68]

"Yes, thou shalt learn it, Aino; thou shalt hear of the birth of the harp, of the magic fish and of the mighty hero Wainamoinen, little Aino."

"'Tis our own little maid, Aino, that we lost so long ago!" whispered the old dame to Elsa, as the tears streamed down her face; "thou art so like her!"

But she hushed her whisper, as suddenly the old peasant began to sing in a weak, quavering voice that seemed to grow stronger as he sang, the beautiful lines telling how the ancient Wainamoinen fashioned the first harp, and how he sang till all the birds forsook their nests, the fishes their deep sea homes, and all the creatures of the woods, nay, the very trees themselves, trooped forth from the forests that they might listen to his enchanting music.

As Elsa heard, the tears came into her own eyes, for she was a poetic little soul and quickly touched by anything beautiful. When the peasant Ulricborg had almost finished the rune, he suddenly broke off and lay back on his pillow exhausted. He lay for so long a while with closed eyes, that both the dame and Elsa grew frightened; but presently he again looked at them, his vision becoming brighter; in a little while all seemed to grow clear to him. He gazed kindly at Elsa, for something about the little girl seemed strangely to soften the old man. He noticed her little kantele, and it seemed to interest him, as he motioned her to lay it beside him. He looked at it a while, and tried once or twice to touch its strings to music, but his strength failed him.

[69]

Presently, he said feebly:

"Ah, I thought thou wert Aino come back for me!—but never mind—the rune thou wishest, I can not show thee its music now,"—here he looked sadly at his stiffened fingers, "but the rune itself, yes, thou shalt have it, little one!" Then he added slowly, as he gazed dreamily into Elsa's shining eyes:

[70]

"For thou, too, wilt love it truly!"

Here, as he paused a while, Dame Ulricborg could scarcely hide her amazement, knowing how often before he had wilfully refused the same request from others. Indeed, the peasant Ulricborg had all his life loved poetry with a singular passion; and this particular rune, which had come down in his family, he seemed to set apart as something almost sacred; he treasured its verses as misers hoard gold pieces. Whether he thought it too beautiful to be made overcommon, or for what reason, no one knew; that was his oddity. So, while he sang it sometimes to those he considered worthy, he would teach it to none.

And now at last, as he promised it to Elsa, Dame Ulricborg thought sadly that the promise came too late; for how could he teach it to the little girl, when every breath was such weary effort? And she knew he was unable to write readily even if he had the strength.

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But having rested a little, he motioned her to bend down, and then he whispered something to her. She listened with a look of surprise, and then hastened into the living room, and opening a little cupboard, searched, till in the farthest corner she found a small box, and this she brought to the bedside. As she opened it, out fluttered some thin old sheets of paper, closely written over and yellow with age.

The old man's eyes kindled as he saw these, and as he marked the utter surprise of his wife.

"Ah, dear heart," he said, "thou didst not know—the priest wrote down the words for me—long ago—I loved it—and wished to keep it—and I hid it away"—but here the dying peasant, too exhausted for further speech, paused, and then, turning to Elsa the blue eyes from which the light was swiftly fading, murmured to her:

"Take it, little one; 'tis the rune—do with it as thou wilt."

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Elsa was so overcome that she fell to crying bitterly, and neither she nor Dame Ulricborg noticed the sound of sleighbells, for the

ground was covered with a light snow. In a few minutes, however, the cottage door opened, and in came Elsa's father, all anxiety for the safety of his little girl. When Elsa, hearing him, came into the living room, he caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately, for he had been greatly alarmed on learning of her journey, and had set off in hot haste to find her.

Herr Lönnrot, too, who had grown much better, had insisted on coming with him, and was even then slowly walking toward the cottage door, for he was still feeble from his illness. He, too, was delighted to find Elsa safely cared for; but both he and Elsa's father hushed their voices when she told them of the peasant Ulricborg. They stepped softly into the other room, and Herr Lönnrot's practised eye, for you remember he was a physician, at once saw that his skill could do nothing to help the old man. As the Herr gently smoothed the coverlid the sick peasant gave a faint smile to the faithful old wife who still bent over him, and then, as Elsa stood reverently holding the yellow papers between her little palms, he turned to her a long lingering look that seemed to say:

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"Farewell, little one! and farewell to the beloved song, that I have cherished so jealously all these years. I must leave thee now, but I leave thee in loving hands—farewell." And then peacefully, as the wife laid her withered cheek close to his, his spirit passed away to find their little Aino.

Afterward, when Elsa gave to Herr Lönnrot the precious papers on which the rune was written, at first he looked at them in amazement; but his heart filled with delight when he learned what the papers contained. He drew Elsa to him, and kissing her forehead declared that she had not only pleased him beyond measure, but had done honor to old Finland in helping complete the immortal poem he was striving to save.

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When, some weeks later, Herr Lönnrot went away, after providing for the comfort of Dame Ulricborg, he journeyed back to Helsingfors, the capital city of Finland; and told the scholars who were studying the poetry of the land how the little girl had been the means of bringing to light one of the most beautiful of the runes. Then the scholars had a little silver medal made which they sent to Elsa, and which she took great pride in keeping through all her life; and no doubt her great-grandchildren still keep it to this day.

As for Herr Lönnrot, he lived to put together the runes he had collected, and when he had finished he called the poem "Kalevala," which in our language means "Land of Heroes," because it tells the wonderful story of the heroes of that ancient land.

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And some day, perhaps, you will read this "Kalevala," for it is one of the noblest and most beautiful poems in all the world. And then when you come to the rune which tells of the birth of the harp, you too will be glad that the little Finnish girl was the means of saving it from being lost forever.

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# COUNT HUGO'S SWORD

## HOW THE PEASANT BOY GEOFFREY BY HIS BRAVERY AND DEVOTION PREVENTED A DUEL OF GREAT NOBLES AND BECAME PAGE TO THE GOOD KING LOUIS

"Tee dee, deedle de de!" shrieked the cockatoo, from his perch high up in the gabled window of the old inn. "Tee de!" He was a pink and white cockatoo, with a beautiful tuft on top of his head; one of his legs was chained to a carved wooden perch that projected from the window-sill, while with his free claw he carefully balanced a large silver spoon, of antique pattern, from the contents of which he was very deliberately dining. For he was no common bird. Monsieur Jean the landlord of this "Guillaume-le-Conquérant" inn, of the ancient town of Dives, being something of a bird fancier, had but lately bought him, and for fear he might fly away, was thus keeping him chained to the window of monsieur's own apartment until he should grow used to his new home. As he now slowly picked from his spoon the last morsel, and swallowed it with a great ruffling of feathers all the way down his throat, again he shrilled out in a high-pitched mimicking tone, "Tee deedle!" and this time a little boy looked up quickly from the courtyard below.

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The boy was seated on a bench under a plane-tree, and held in his hands a sheet of yellow parchment on which was written a musical score, whose large black notes he was trying to hum over.

"Fie, Cockie!" he cried, as he looked up, "dost thou not know 'tis a wicked sin to mock me when I am learning the holy mass music?"

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But Cockie only screwed his head to one side, shook his empty spoon, and peered down with an impudent stare, as with a sigh the little boy once more applied himself to his task. In a few moments, however, he was again interrupted, this time by a call from beyond the kitchen:

"Geoffrey! Geoffrey! come hither and help catch this fowl for the Count Hugo's soup to-morrow!"

After a hot chase, Geoffrey succeeded in catching the fat hen and handing her over to the white-capped cook of the inn kitchen, and then he once more sat down and took up his parchment; for though a serving boy through the week, on Sunday he took his place with the little choristers of the Dives cathedral, and Father Anselm had allowed him to take the score home with him, so that he might practise in his leisure moments.

But as he now tried to go over the black notes, there was a mournful cadence to every tone, for Geoffrey was very unhappy. Usually he was gay as a bird, and indeed sang very like one; but to-day he had a weight on his mind, as he sat there in the courtyard of the quaint old inn.

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It was long, long ago that Geoffrey lived—nearly six hundred years. The inn in which he served had been built in the Norman town of Dives nearly three centuries earlier by the great Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror, whose name, which in French (for Normandy is a part of France) is Guillaume-le-Conquérant, the inn still bore in Geoffrey's time as it bears to this day. The Duke William had built the house because he wished to have some safe and pleasant stopping place during the time he was overseeing the finishing and freighting of the fleet of boats which lay near by in the river Dives, and in which he meant to sail to the conquest of England.

And so, with such illustrious beginning, the inn had become very famous among the nobles of Normandy, and grown larger and larger, till, in the days when Geoffrey lived, it was a very beautiful place indeed. The courtyard, which one entered through an arched gateway covered with guelder roses, was surrounded by ancient wooden buildings; their dark mossy beams were put together with white plaster, and their innumerable picturesque peaks and gables and wooden galleries and winding stairways were richly overhung with masses of the most lovely vines; for roses, wistarias, clematis, and jasmines clambered everywhere. There were two gardens also; one for the kitchen, the other full of lilies and clove pinks and French daisies, and numberless sweet old-fashioned flowers; for

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Monsieur Jean, the innkeeper, had much taste and loved both flowers and birds. Indeed, besides several cockatoos, he always kept dozens of peacocks that trailed about the courtyard squawking and spreading their gorgeous tails every time a new guest entered the gateway. There were fine pigeons, too, and rabbits and chickens, and no end of interesting things.

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Geoffrey thought it a charming place to live, and he did not in the least mind the work he had to do; for all were kind to him, and moreover, he was happy in being able to give some of his earnings to his family at home, who were very poor. His father was a peasant living on the estate of the young Count Boni, of Château Beauvais, and had it not been for the kind-heartedness of this count, the poor peasant would have had hard shift to keep his little children in bread; for in those days the country had been so wasted by wars that the peasant folk had almost nothing left on which to live. But the Count Boni had always been most generous and considerate to the people on his estate, and especially to Geoffrey's father, who was honest, and intelligent above his class. The count it was who had secured for Geoffrey the place at the inn, and it was he also who had spoken to the monks of Dives of the boy's sweet voice, so that the good Fathers had become interested, and were taking much pains in teaching him music.

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And now we come to the reason that Geoffrey was so unhappy as he sat under the plane-tree, vainly trying to practise his lesson; for he was thinking all the while of a deadly peril that threatened this good Count Boni, to whom he was deeply grateful for so many things, and whom he truly loved next to his own father.

His knowledge of the count's danger had come about in this way. It had happened that, the day before, Geoffrey had been sent to the Château Beauvais, which was not far distant from Dives, to carry some rabbits which Monsieur Jean had promised to Isabeau, the little daughter of the count. When Geoffrey reached the château and inquired for the little Lady Isabeau, he had been sent into the garden, and there he found her crying as if her heart would break! Now this grieved Geoffrey very much indeed; as he quite worshiped the gracious little girl who used often to visit their cottage when he lived at home, and who had sometimes gaily carried him back with her for a day's happy romp in the beautiful château grounds.

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When he asked her the reason of her tears, she had told him between her sobs:

"O, Geoffrey! my dear father, the count, is to fight a dreadful duel with the wicked Count Hugo, who will surely kill him with his evil sword! I heard nurse Marie talking with the gardener, and they say he will surely kill him! Oh! Oh! Oh!" and here poor little Isabeau fairly shook with the violence of her sobbing.

Geoffrey tried as best he could to comfort her, but to no avail; she could not be induced even to look at the rabbits she had so much wanted; so at last he was obliged to set them down quietly, and sorrowfully take his leave, though not until he had questioned some of the château pages for more particulars of that which the little girl had told him. He thus learned that Count Boni had indeed been challenged to a duel by the old Count Hugo, who lived in a castle beyond the city of Meaux.

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Now in those days, when people got into disputes about things, even a bit of property, instead of settling the matter in courts of law as we do, it was quite customary to fight a "judicial duel," as it was called; that is, the two men disputing appointed a meeting-place where they tried to wound each other, generally with swords, and the one who succeeded in disabling, or as sometimes happened, killing his adversary, was adjudged the better man and the winner of his case. This was certainly a strange and cruel way of doing, but six hundred years ago people did many strange and cruel things. Had young Count Boni merely engaged to fight an ordinary duel, that would have been bad enough, though it would not perhaps have been a matter of such concern; for the count was brave and a good swordsman,—and, ah, well! one must expect a duel now and then.

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But that which caused Isabeau, and Geoffrey, too, when he learned of it, such grief, was that her father was to fight the Count Hugo; for this nobleman was known to be most wicked and unscrupulous. It was his custom to pick an unjust quarrel with some noble whose lands he coveted and falsely claimed; then he would challenge his victim to a "judicial duel," which always resulted in the noble being slain, and his estates being seized by Hugo. For no



one had ever been able to stand against the wicked count, who fought not merely to wound, but to kill, and who had the reputation of being the most skilful and merciless swordsman in all France. Indeed, his cruel sword had slain so many noble lords that people declared it was bewitched; that Count Hugo, who had been a crusader, had obtained it from the heathen Saracens, who had forged it under some evil spell. They insisted the more on the unholy power of this sword, as Count Hugo himself seemed to regard it with great superstition and always preferred it to any other weapon; though, indeed, many people even went further in their talk, and asserted also that the count had got his unhallowed skill from some heathen wizard, and that any sword would, in his hands, be certain to deal a fatal thrust.

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And so it was that when he chose a victim for one of his duels, it was considered equal to a death warrant; though he always took care to make the nobles he challenged so angry that they would not listen to reason, and would fight him regardless of the fate of all who had crossed swords with him before. This, too, it was whispered, was a part of his sorcery—though perhaps really it was because the high-spirited Norman noblemen were no cowards, and would let no one assail their honor or seize their property if they could possibly help it.

The more Geoffrey thought of these things, and of the many kindnesses of Count Boni, and then as he saw in memory the sweet, tear-stained face of little Isabeau, his singing became more and more melancholy, till at last he stopped altogether, and gave himself up to thinking. He knew from the inn servants that the Count Hugo was expected there the next day, and that the duel was fixed for the following morning just outside the walls of Dives.

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“Oh,” he thought, “if it only, only could in some way be prevented!” Now Count Boni himself would have been very indignant had he known that anybody was thinking it should be prevented; for, just as Count Hugo had desired, he was very angry with his adversary, and had no wish to avoid the encounter. But that could not prevent Geoffrey from wishing it might be avoided for him.

Indeed, Geoffrey had learned many things. He had a quick intelligence, and was very observant, and many travelers came to the inn; so he was by no means so ignorant of affairs as many little boys of his age. He had heard it said that the Norman nobles had long sought in vain for some pretext to rid themselves of the wicked Hugo, who was a rich and powerful lord and seemed to lead a life charmed against all attack, for he had been many times openly assailed. As to his shameless dueling, since that was then within bounds of the law, they could do nothing. So how, thought Geoffrey sadly, how could he, a poor little peasant boy, hope to do anything where the great nobles seemed powerless!

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But, by and by, he was aroused from his reverie by Monsieur Jean, who wished his help in the many preparations demanded of the inn folk by the important guest of the morrow, this hateful Hugo who was coming to kill his dear Count Boni! Ugh! had it not been bad enough to have to catch the chicken for his soup? How he wished it might strangle him! And how poor Geoffrey hated himself now because he was compelled to assist in this and that arrangement for the entertainment of the murderous nobleman and his many followers. How he wished they were all at the bottom of the Red Sea!

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But at last, after much labor, that disagreeable day wore to an end for the little boy, though when he went to bed and tried to forget his troubles, he dreamed all night of poor little Isabeau, and seemed to hear her piteous sobs and to see the hot tears streaming down her pretty pink cheeks.

Early the next morning the inn was astir, and busy with more preparations for the expected guests. And, sure enough, just before midday, in through the rose-covered gateway galloped four outriders, wearing the crimson livery of Count Hugo, and insolently jingling their bridle reins and clanking their great gilded spurs.

Shortly after their arrival the coach itself dashed into the middle of the courtyard with a great clatter of hoofs and wheels, followed by a long train of mounted and liveried servants, and lackeys, and pages, and men-at-arms; for traveling in those days was none too safe without a guard of spearmen and lancers. The coach was painted a bright yellow and richly gilded; on the panels of its doors

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the count's crest and coat of arms were blazoned in blue and crimson; and no sooner had its wheels stopped than the lackeys jumped from their horses and, running to its side, flung open the doors, which they respectfully held back as still others assisted the nobleman to alight.

Count Hugo was a heavily-built man of middle age, with cold, cruel eyes, and mustachios of grisly gray; he was richly dressed in a green velvet suit with crimson satin facings and ruffles of the finest lace; his shoe buckles sparkled with diamonds. Geoffrey, who from a quiet corner was watching everything, involuntarily clenched his fists as he saw the evil-omened sword, encased in an elaborately-wrought scabbard, poking hatefully out from under the tail of the count's beautiful velvet coat.

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As Hugo, followed by his retinue, crossed the courtyard, there was a great bowing and scraping from Monsieur Jean and all the inn servants; the peacocks spread their gorgeous tails and screamed at the tops of their voices; the pigeons puffed and pouted and strutted about; the cockatoo shrieked loudly and flourished his silver spoon; and the rabbits ran away with their ears flat to their heads with fright, and hid under the cabbage leaves in the garden until the commotion of the count's arrival had somewhat subsided.

But at last the great man had been ushered into his rooms, where he had breakfasted on the most elaborate products of the cooks' skill; while on the spits in the great inn kitchen huge haunches of venison and beef were turning and browning in front of the blazing fire, and the white-capped and aproned scullions were running about with big ladles and spoons in their hands making ready the dinner for the large company of guests.

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Geoffrey had, at their bidding, done many errands, and last of all had brought up from the garden a great basket of vegetables. He had wished, as he tragically jerked them out of the ground and brandished them in the air, that each separate carrot, leek and radish might stick in Count Hugo's wicked throat, and stay there forever! Now at length tired out, he sat down to rest on his bench under the plane-tree.

As he sat there, presently through the arched gateway there entered a man dressed in a frayed waistcoat of ragged satin, knee breeches of blue plush much the worse for wear, and leather leggings from which half the buckles were gone. Slung around his neck by a gay green ribbon hung a viol, and in one hand he grasped a slender little chain that held in leash a small monkey wearing a tiny red cap. This motley figure was one of the strolling jongleurs, half juggler, half troubadour, who flourished at that time in all parts of France, and managed to eke out a living from the pranks of their monkeys and the practice of the "gay science," as it was called; that is, by the singing of songs which they themselves usually made up and set to music.

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As this particular jongleur entered the courtyard, he spied Geoffrey, and strolling over to the bench amiably seated himself beside the boy with a friendly "Good morrow, my lad!"

"Good morrow, sir," answered Geoffrey, rather absently.

The jongleur then caught sight of the coach drawn up by the inn wall.

"Ah," he said, "small wonder none came forth to welcome us. Other guests are ahead of me, I perceive." And, as the monkey climbed upon his knee, he added: "Had thou and I fared hither in yonder yellow cart, Pippo, we should have had the whole inn at our feet. And monsieur, the landlord, would have been down on his knees humbly beseeching to know when my Lord Pippo would be pleased to dine! Hey! Pippo! is't not true?"

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But Pippo, paying no attention to him, began mischievously to finger the strings of the viol with his little brown claws, and the jongleur, with a gay laugh, turning to Geoffrey, inquired:

"To whom does yonder gaud belong?"

"It is the coach of Count Hugo," said Geoffrey; "he came to-day, and is to fight a duel with Count Boni, of Château Beauvias, to-morrow morning."

"So!" said the jongleur with a short whistle; "well, then, their countships had better let no grass grow under their noble feet, for the king hath but just issued an edict forbidding all such dueling from now on, henceforth and forever."

"What, sir?" said Geoffrey, suddenly rousing up excitedly; "what

is that thou sayest?"

"Well, well, little man! thou seemest to take this matter somewhat to heart! I was merely mentioning the new edict of our blessed King Louis Ninth, God save his soul, which forbids dueling! It seems our sovereign lord hath grown weary of the foolish practice whereby he hath lost so many noble subjects, and moreover, being a wise monarch, hath become convinced that all disputes should be settled in the courts of law, which he hath been studying much since his return from Constantinople, where the law is held in high esteem—in short, he will have no more 'judicial duels'; and yesterday when I and Pippo were in Rouen, we heard the king's heralds as they solemnly proclaimed the new edict to the people."

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"Oh!" exclaimed Geoffrey delightedly, "thank the blessed saints, then, the duel can not be fought to-morrow!"

"Hold, hold," said the jongleur, "not so fast, my lad—"

"Nay," cried Geoffrey, "but how dare they when the king forbids?" and, dragging the jongleur up by the hand, he added: "Come with me now and we will seek the wicked Count Hugo, and tell him the news! Come!"

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"Nay, nay," the jongleur replied, "not I!"

"Why, is it not true?" demanded Geoffrey.

"True as gospel," said the jongleur, "but thou art but a child; dost thou fancy two noble lords, bent on the sword play, would for one moment be stayed by the word of a poor strolling jongleur? Nay, I should but receive a drubbing for my pains if I sought to inform that cruel Hugo. I prefer, thank you, to keep my bones whole; especially as I could do no good. Moreover, let them spit each other, if they so desire! I do not care, youngster, how many duels they fight!"

But when he looked down and saw the grief in Geoffrey's eyes, he softened, and added: "But since thou seemest to care so much, little one, I would risk the drubbing, by my faith, I would! if 'twere to any purpose. But I am older than thou, and somewhat a man of the world," here the jongleur straightened himself up; "and I swear to thee, 'twould work naught but mischief were I to seek out yonder count and strive to prevent his encounter to-morrow. He would simply be angered, and would not believe me, or would pretend not to, because he does not wish to be stopped till he hath killed this Count Boni you tell me of, and got his lands. Naught but the king's heralds themselves could hinder that affair." And then, as he meditated, he added: "'Tis a monstrous pity, though! When didst thou say they fight, little one? In the morning? A monstrous pity! For the heralds will no doubt arrive in Dives to-morrow afternoon; they were to come hither on leaving Rouen. Thou knowest they must proclaim the edict through all the cities of the realm!"

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Six hundred years ago printing and newspapers and the telegraph were unknown; and so when a war was to be undertaken, or peace settled upon, or a new law made, the king sent his heralds about through all his dominions, and they made proclamation to the people, with a great flourish of trumpets and much quaint ceremony.

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But here Pippo became engaged in a squabble with a fat peacock, and the jongleur rising, separated them, and then strolled off toward the inn kitchen; for he had journeyed far, and the savory smells wafted out into the courtyard suddenly reminded him that he was very hungry.

Geoffrey, thus left alone, fell to thinking, and he thought and thought as never before in all his life. So the heralds were on their way to Dives, if what the jongleur told was true, and he believed it was; and the jongleur had said, moreover, that these heralds could stop even the wicked Hugo from carrying out his designs. Geoffrey felt that this was true also, for he knew that not even noblemen dared openly defy the king. And then he reasoned, perhaps more wisely than he knew, that Hugo stirred up and fought these "judicial duels" merely to increase his property and not to satisfy his personal honor; and that if nothing were to be gained, Hugo would surely not fight. The king had forbidden his subjects to acquire property that way; the great thing, therefore, was to prevent the encounter in the morning, so that the heralds might have time to come to Dives and make their proclamation, which would certainly put an end to the whole affair. But how, how could he, Geoffrey, do this?

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At last, however, an idea occurred to him that made his eyes brighten and his cheeks flush. If he could only get hold of that

bewitched Saracen sword of Count Hugo's, and hide it, why, probably, as the count was known superstitiously to prefer it to any other weapon, he might be delayed hunting for it till the heralds came.

As Geoffrey thought over this plan, he reflected that if he got possession of the sword it must be that night, as the count wore it constantly all day long; and though he felt like a highwayman and a robber even to plan it, for he was an honest little lad, yet he said to himself there was no other way to save Isabeau's father.

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And so, full of his project, as a preliminary, he got up and sauntered past that part of the inn where he knew was the count's sleeping chamber, and noticed that it had one window opening upon one of the little wooden galleries which was approached from the outside by a winding stair. The window was barred with heavy wooden rounds; but as Geoffrey measured with his eye the distance between these bars, he felt sure that if he made himself as flat as possible, he could squeeze in through them. It would not be so easy to get the sword out, but perhaps he could manage it somehow; he *must* manage it!

Having thus made up his mind as to what he would do, Geoffrey passed the rest of the afternoon and evening in a fever of impatience. After supper was over he hid himself in the garden behind a rose bush, and as he watched the inn it seemed as if the last of the clatter would never die away, and people would never settle down and go to sleep! But at length—after weeks, it seemed to Geoffrey—the last candle flickered out and the inn became quiet.

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He waited, however, an hour or two longer, knowing the habit of the maids to lie awake and gossip in the dark. But when he heard the Dives watchman passing the inn gateway and calling out, "Midnight! and all's well!" he crept out, and keeping close in the shadow of the wall, reached the stairway to the gallery by the count's sleeping room. The moon had risen and might have betrayed him as he mounted it, but fortunately the stair was overhung by vines. He made his way along the gallery to the count's window. There was no glass in it, and, as it was summer time, the heavy wooden shutter that guarded it was wide open, the bars seeming quite enough protection from ordinary intruders. But they could not keep out this little boy, who drew in his breath and made his little stomach as flat as possible as he cautiously wriggled in between them. At last he stood on tiptoe in the count's chamber.

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As he gazed about, here and there the moonlight touched some object of its quaint furnishings, and although Geoffrey, on the inn errands, had been in the room before, everything now looked strange and unfamiliar to his wide-open, excited eyes. To his dismay he had not considered how he should find the sword; but as he stood wondering and groping about in the dim light, a beam of moonlight fell at the foot of the high-posted, carved and canopied bed where the count lay asleep, and showed the scabbard with the sword in it, hanging by its chased metal hook to a projecting ornament in the heavy carving of the bed. Geoffrey tiptoed over toward it, all the while listening, with his heart in his mouth, to the count's breathing. He seemed to be sound asleep, for now and then he gave a little snore; but, as with trembling fingers Geoffrey took down the sword, its tip end struck lightly against a tall chest of drawers near by, and the count started slightly. Geoffrey crouched down hopelessly in the shadow of a chair, expecting the count to pounce upon him at any moment.

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But in a few minutes Hugo's regular breathing told that he was again deep asleep.

Geoffrey then hastened to make his way back to the window, though he found the sword in its heavy scabbard rather an awkward burden for a little boy, and it became still more awkward as he prepared to climb between the bars. He first thought he would take the sword out of its sheath; but then how could he drop it to the gallery below without making a noise? He could not climb out with it in his arms. So, on second thought, he decided to leave it in the scabbard, whose metal hook he saw might be useful; then lifting this, which took all his strength, he carefully thrust it outside between the bars, on one of which he hung the hook, thus keeping both sword and sheath from falling.

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He next turned his attention to getting himself out, and climbing up, and squeezing and squirming, legs first, at last managed once more to stand outside on the gallery floor. But it had happened that

just as he was making the last twist through the bars, his foot had accidentally touched the scabbard, hanging from the window, and it clanked against the wall. This time the sound seemed to penetrate the ears of the sleeping Count Hugo, for he started up in earnest, though not entirely awake; he drowsily arose, however, and crossed over to the window.

Geoffrey, meantime, hearing him coming, drew back into the shadow, tightly clutching the sword, and was hidden by the curtain of vines.

As the count peered through the bars, he caught sight of the cockatoo, whose perch was in one of the gable windows near by. Now, as good luck had it, the cockatoo also had been half aroused from his sleep, and giving a faint screech, began to shift uneasily in his dreams, from one leg to the other, his chain clanking against his perch as he did so. Count Hugo hearing him, at once supposed the cockatoo responsible for that other clanking sound which had aroused him; he swore a round oath, and turned from the window, muttering to himself, "A plague on that jabbering popinjay! What with their everlasting peacocks and monkeys, and heaven only knows what, a man can not get a wink of sleep in this accursed tavern!" He then went back to bed and, angrily flinging himself down, was soon snoring soundly.

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After a while, Geoffrey, outside on the gallery, began creeping cautiously along, and at last managing to get down the stairway, stood hesitating a moment at its foot; for he had not fully decided what to do with the sword, now that he had it. He wished as soon as possible to be rid of the wicked thing; for everybody was superstitious in those days, and he felt that some fearful evil threatened him so long as he had hold of the fatal weapon. He would really have very much liked to take it out and throw it in the river Dives, so it could never kill any one else; but as he remembered that to do this he would have to climb over the high wall of the courtyard, for the gate was locked and the portcullis down, and that then he would have to run the risk of meeting the town watchman, he concluded the chances for being caught were too many, and that he must hide the sword elsewhere. Moreover, he thought that to drop it in the river would be too much like stealing, anyway, which he did not wish to be guilty of; he merely wished to keep the count from finding the sword until the heralds came, when he was willing to restore it.

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So quickly making up his mind, he sped down into the garden, where he carefully hid it, scabbard and all, under a thick tangle of vines and shrubbery which grew in a secluded corner where the inn people seldom went. This done, he made his way back to his own little chamber under one of the gables, and crept into bed, although he was so excited with his night's doings that he could not go to sleep.

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The next day, as was his custom, Count Hugo lay abed till the sun was well up, for the duel was not to take place until beyond the middle of the morning. When at last he arose, and his serving men came in to wait on him as he made his toilet, they adjusted all his ruffles and laces with the greatest nicety, freshly curled his wig, tied up his queue with a crimson ribbon, and smoothed out his velvets and satins; then everything being ready, they looked about for the sword, without which Hugo never budged an inch. But when they turned to where he told them he had left it the night before, to their great consternation, it was not there! When they timidly ventured to tell the count that he must have put it somewhere else, Hugo, who was busy arranging a heavy gold chain about his lace collar, curtly replied, without turning his head: "Ye blind moles of the earth! I tell you it *is* there!"

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But when again they were obliged to contradict him, the count flew into a temper, and rushing over to the foot of the bed, put out his hand to seize the sword and give them a wrathful prick or two all round—but lo! sure enough, it was *not* there!

There then followed a tremendous uproar. They searched the room from end to end; they tore down all the old tapestries; they peered under all the chairs; they climbed up and crawled all over the high canopy of the ancient bed; they shook the mattresses; and in their zeal, even looked in the count's shaving mug and under the brass candlesticks.

Meantime, Hugo himself, in a towering passion, was striding up and down the room, cuffing his pages, accusing everybody of

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robbery, and threatening right and left to hang every man of them if the sword were not instantly found!

At last, however, neither threats nor rage proving of the least avail in bringing to light the lost sword, he descended, followed by his terrified retinue, to the inn courtyard, and calling out Monsieur Jean, he stirred up another terrible commotion. He accused everybody of everything, and finally wound up by insisting that the craven Count Boni had hired some robber to steal the sword in hopes that the duel might not be fought. He swore that he would none the less kill poor Boni, sword or no sword, and meantime ordered the man-at-arms, who had slept outside his door, to be mercilessly beaten; for Hugo declared the thief must have entered through the door, as no man could possibly have come in between the bars of the window.

At this Geoffrey, who had been up for a long while, and had witnessed all this uproar in the courtyard, felt himself in a very unhappy position; he had not expected all this. Indeed, he had given very little thought as to what might happen to himself or anybody else, when once he had hidden the sword. He knew now that fearful punishment awaited him if he were found out; but he could not bear to have the good Count Boni's honor blackened, or that the poor man-at-arms, who was entirely innocent of blame, should suffer, because of what he, Geoffrey, had done.

So biting his lips hard to keep up his courage and tightly clenching his hands behind him, Geoffrey, who was a brave, manly little fellow, straightway strode out and, standing in front of the raging Count Hugo, said:

"Sir, neither Count Boni nor yonder man-at-arms had aught to do with the loss of your evil sword. I took it away myself!"

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At this Count Hugo stared at the little boy for a moment in speechless surprise. Then, roaring out a terrible oath in a voice like thunder, he pounced like a wildcat upon poor Geoffrey, and shook

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him till his teeth chattered.

"Thou—thou—miserable varlet!" roared and sputtered the count. "Thou base-born knave! So thy monkey fingers have dared to meddle with my precious sword! Faugh! Where hast thou put it? Tell me instantly,—*parbleu!*—or I will crack every bone in thy worthless body!"

And here he fell so viciously to shaking and cuffing him again, that poor Geoffrey could hardly open his mouth to answer; but at length he managed to gasp out resolutely:

"I will not tell thee till to-morrow. Then I will restore it to thee! I do not wish to keep the heathenish thing!"

At this the rage of the count knew no bounds, and he doubtless would have killed the poor little boy then and there, had not Monsieur Jean and others among the terrified spectators rushed between them and besought Hugo to be merciful, and give the boy at least till the morrow to fulfil his word. [112]

Hereupon, the count, who even in his wrath saw reason in what they said, savagely flung Geoffrey over to one of his men-at-arms, commanding him to chastise him, chain him, and keep close watch over him till the morrow. For the count reflected that if he should hang the boy then, as he fully intended to do by and by, he would cut off the only possible means of finding out where his sword was hidden. For while the lad was stubborn as a rock, Hugo had to admit that he seemed honest, and so perhaps would keep his promise to restore his prized weapon.

But the more the count thought of Geoffrey's act, the more it puzzled him to account for it. As he recalled the disturbance of his sleep the night before, he began to understand that Geoffrey was the real cockatoo of the affair.

"Faugh!" he said to himself, "to think 'twas the clanking of my own good sword that I mistook for the rattling of that chattering popinjay's chain!" But he could not account for the boy's curious promise to restore the weapon on the morrow. If he meant to return it, why did he take it at all? And why did he confess and get himself into trouble, when no one thought of accusing him? The first part of this question Count Hugo could not answer, because he knew nothing of the coming of the heralds and Geoffrey's wish to put off the duel; while the last part was equally puzzling to him, because he had no sense of honor, and could not see why one should suffer if an innocent man would do just as well. [113]

At any rate, he soon tired trying to understand the matter. Having placed the boy in safe keeping till the morrow, the next thing was to have his "second"—(for so the friends were called who arranged the details of duels for those who were to do the fighting)—see Count Boni's second, who had arrived some time before, and have the duel fixed for the following morning, when Count Hugo vowed he would fight to the death with somebody's sword,—whether his own or another's. [114]

These matters settled, he remembered that it was fully noon, and he had not yet breakfasted; so he haughtily withdrew to the inn parlor, and commanded Monsieur Jean to have him served instantly.

Meanwhile poor Geoffrey went off with the man-at-arms, who was secretly sorry for the little boy, and so did not chastise him so cruelly as the count would have wished; although he was obliged to give him a few bloody cuts with the lash across his face and hands, for the sake of appearances, in case Hugo should happen to inspect him.

Poor little boy! Ah! how eagerly he longed for the arrival of the heralds, as the jongleur had predicted. But then the dreadful thought would come, what if something should delay their journey! Or worst of all, what if the jongleur had not spoken the truth, and there were no heralds anyway! These doubts and fears tormented Geoffrey more and more as the hours wore on, and still no sign of the longed-for king's messengers. [115]

He began to wish dismally that he had set farther off the time for restoring the sword; though he felt sure that unless prevented by the king's edict, Count Hugo would fight on the morrow anyhow, despite the loss of that particular weapon. It then suddenly occurred to him, that even if the heralds came and stopped the duel as he wished, how was he himself to escape from the clutches of Count Hugo? This thought sent a cold chill through him; but when he thought of his dear Count Boni and the grief of poor little Isabeau, he was not a whit sorry for what he had done, and with childish

hopefulness looked forward to some good chance to free him.

Surely, surely, he said to himself, the king's heralds were persons in authority, and would not see him killed by the cruel Hugo, even if he had taken and hidden the heathenish old sword. Did he not mean to give it back, and had he not done it because of the very law they were coming to proclaim? Surely they would help him in some way!

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And so the afternoon wore wearily on. Count Hugo came once or twice to see that the man-at-arms had properly beaten him, and even meditated putting him to some torture to make him disclose at once the whereabouts of the sword. But he scarcely dared, as he feared an uprising of the people of the inn, who, he saw, were very fond of Geoffrey; so he contented himself with cruelly striking the lad once or twice, and determining to deal summarily with him when he should take him away from Dives.

For at that time powerful noblemen did very much as they pleased. The good King Louis had been away fighting in the Holy Land for so long that affairs in France had for the most part taken care of themselves; and though since his return the king was striving hard to correct many abuses, there were many things yet to be looked after. So Count Hugo thought he should have no trouble in carrying Geoffrey away as his private prisoner because of the taking of his sword.

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After the count's last visit, when he had informed Geoffrey of some of the punishments he meant to visit upon him when he got him off in his own castle, the poor boy began really to despair! It was growing late, and the sun was almost to its setting, and still not a sound to tell of any unusual arrival in Dives. The little boy lay back, and shut his eyes tight, trying to forget his miseries, and the dreadful things ahead of him; but try as he might, now and then a big tear would force itself through his closed lids, and trickle down his poor little blood-stained cheeks.

And so another hour wore on, Geoffrey growing all the while more despairing and miserable in his gloomy prospects. But at last, just as he had given up all hope of the heralds, and concluded that the plight he had got himself into had been all useless after all,—he suddenly started up, and clutching the sleeve of the man-at-arms, exclaimed, "Hark! what is that?"

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"Hush, hush, little one! 'tis nothing," said the man, who was a stupid fellow, half dozing, and merely thought the lad crazed by his fright.

"Nay!" cried Geoffrey, "but listen!"

Here the guard somewhat pricked up his ears.

"By my faith!" he answered, "I believe 'tis a blare of trumpets! Some noble must be coming to Dives!"

But Geoffrey, with eyes shining, held his breath, and listened to the sounds, which seemed to be coming nearer. First there was a great fanfare of trumpets; then a blare of horns; and then he could hear the clatter as the inn folk hastened across the paved courtyard to the gateway to see what was going on in the street without. In a little while some of them seemed to return, and Geoffrey, who was burning to know, but could not stir for his chains, besought the man-at-arms to ask some one the cause of the commotion; so going over to the window of the room, he called out to a passer-by.

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"Ho, comrade! what is the meaning of yonder uproar?"

"'Tis the king's heralds," answered the voice from without; "he hath sent them to proclaim a new law forbidding duels!"

Then, before long, the heralds, having made the tour of the Dives streets, came riding toward the inn, escorted by a train of Dives people. Geoffrey heard their horses' hoofs as they pricked in through the gateway, and also had the great joy of hearing them make the proclamation itself; for having heard that at that very moment a nobleman was lodging in the inn, come there for the purpose of a now unlawful duel, they halted in the middle of the courtyard, and rising in their stirrups, blew their trumpets, and again elaborately announced the royal edict,—this time for the express benefit of their two countships, Hugo and Boni.

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Hearing this, Geoffrey was wild with delight; it was all working out just as he had counted on! That is, all but one fact, which he all at once ruefully remembered; he himself was at that moment still a prisoner of the cruel Count Hugo. He had not counted on that at all!

O, he thought, if he could only get out and throw himself on the mercy of the heralds! They were his only hope; for Count Boni as yet



knew not why he had taken the sword, and was perhaps angry with him and would not come at once to help him. So he piteously begged and besought the man-at-arms to take off his chains and let him go only so far as the courtyard. But the man, though he felt sorry for the boy, had too hearty a terror of the consequences to himself if he let him out against Hugo's orders; so he turned a deaf ear to all Geoffrey's entreaties, and gruffly told him he could do nothing for him.

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At this the poor little boy fell to sobbing, and sobbed and sobbed most of the night; for the dark had now fallen, and the little fellow was quite hopeless for the morrow, when he knew Count Hugo meant to take him away.

Meantime, that nobleman had passed into another terrible rage when he heard the edict of the heralds. He was furious! Furious at the king, the heralds, at Geoffrey and the world in general; because he saw himself thwarted in his plans to kill Boni,—as he felt confident he could do, with his unholy skill with the sword,—and to seize Boni's rich estate. All this put him in a frightful temper; although he was wise enough to know that he dare not defy the king. So he scolded and swore at everybody in sight, and then sulkily withdrew to his own apartments, after giving orders to have his coach made ready to leave early in the morning; for he wished to get off with Geoffrey at least, before any one could prevent *that!* And on the boy he meant to wreak full vengeance.

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So the next morning Hugo, contrary to his custom, was astir early; he had breakfasted in his room, and then hastening down to the courtyard, got into his yellow coach and sent instant orders for the man-at-arms to bring Geoffrey and mount the coach also; for he wished to keep an eye on his victim and also to demand fulfilment of his promise to restore the sword. But just as the man-at-arms was on his way to the count, with his miserable little prisoner, he was intercepted by the two heralds, who had been astir earlier even than Hugo.

Indeed, they were up because they had had a word or two put into their ears the night before by the jongleur, who had sought them out and had a bit of a talk with them. Now the jongleur was a shrewd fellow, and recalling his conversation under the plane-tree with Geoffrey, had put two and two together, and had pretty well understood the boy's reasons for carrying off the sword; and admiring him, he had determined to do the best he could to save him, if explaining things to the heralds could effect this. And it seemed it could; for now the heralds, laying hold of the boy, first asked him if he had restored the stolen sword.

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"Nay, sirs," he answered, "but I will right gladly do as I promised, if ye will let me go and get it!"

So one of the heralds went with him down into the garden, and stood over Geoffrey as he uncovered the weapon and gathered it up still safe in its scabbard. Then conducting him back to the courtyard, and to the door of the count's coach, the two king's messengers stood, one on each side, as the boy, making an obeisance, presented the sword to the glowering count.

The heralds then solemnly announced to all,—for everyone in the inn had gathered about by this time,—that they bore witness that the lad had duly restored the stolen property to its rightful owner; and that punishment for his taking it must be meted out by his rightful suzerain, the noble Count Boni, to whose estate the boy's family belonged. They demanded this right for Geoffrey, in the name of the king.

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Now Count Hugo knew well enough that every peasant had a right to be tried for a crime by the nobleman of his own home; but he had trusted to carry things off with a high hand, thinking no one at the inn would dare oppose him; as was undoubtedly the case. But with the king's heralds it was different; they did not fear him, and so he was obliged to give up the boy.

This last thwarting of his plans, however, was almost too much for Hugo! White with rage, he thundered to his driver to whip up the horses, and off he clattered, disdainfully turning his back on the Guillaume-le-Conquérant inn and all that it contained; and his swarm of retainers followed him, all quaking in their boots from fear of their master's violent temper.

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After the count's departure, Geoffrey, still in charge of the heralds, was taken into the great kitchen of the inn, where everybody gathered about, delighted at the little boy's escape from

Hugo's clutches. The cook gave him some nice little cakes fresh from the oven; the peacocks trailed past the open door proudly spreading their beautiful tails; and the pink and white cockatoo overhead screamed his "Tee deedle!" and seemed as pleased as anybody.

After a while the heralds gave Geoffrey over into the charge of Count Boni's second, who had meantime arrived to say that the count was outside the walls of Dives, at the appointed place, and ready to meet Hugo in the proposed duel. The second was greatly surprised when he heard how matters had turned out; for he had spent the day before with Count Boni at the Château Beauvais, and neither he nor his master had yet heard of the proclamation or the subsequent departure of Count Hugo. However, he took the little boy with him back to Count Boni, to whom he delivered the message the heralds had sent: that he, Boni, was to decide on what punishment Geoffrey was to receive for the taking of Hugo's sword; though it really seemed that the child had had punishment enough already, at the hands of the cruel count himself!

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When Count Boni was told all these things, at first he was greatly displeased; for he was young and high-spirited, and very angry with Hugo, whom he wished to fight regardless of the danger he ran from such an unscrupulous antagonist, and he did not like it that a little peasant boy had interfered.

Though when he understood how much the boy had risked and suffered for love of himself and little Isabeau, he could not find it in his heart to wish Geoffrey punished. And indeed, in after years he came heartily to thank the warm-hearted, devoted little lad, whose impulsive act had no doubt kept him from losing both life and property to a wicked and dishonorable man.

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Meantime Count Boni felt himself in a very delicate position. As Geoffrey's overlord, it was his duty to punish him for taking the sword, even though it had been restored to its rightful owner; but as the sword had been taken because the little boy wished to keep Count Boni himself from the chance of being killed, how could he inflict severe punishment upon him? Indeed, this question was so difficult that the count concluded he must take time to think it over, and meantime he held Geoffrey prisoner at the château. This did not prevent the boy from having the kindest treatment and the freedom of the grounds, where he enjoyed many a merry romp with little Isabeau, who was happy as a bird, and thought Geoffrey the nicest and most wonderful boy in all the world because he had succeeded in preventing the duel. Nor was the least cloud cast over their glee when one day they heard that the wicked Hugo had died in a fit of apoplexy, brought on by one of his terrible rages. In fact, if the truth must be told, they went off by themselves and had a shamelessly gay extra romp in celebration of the news.

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Thus several weeks had passed, when one day there arrived at the château a messenger from the king, demanding the custody of a peasant boy by the name of Geoffrey.

Poor Geoffrey was again badly frightened, thinking that this time surely he would receive punishment! But his fears were turned to delight when Count Boni told him that the king had sent, not to imprison him, but to have him live in the royal household. The messenger explained to Boni that when the heralds returned to Paris, they told King Louis the story of the little boy, and that he was greatly pleased with the lad's bravery and devotion, and wished to have him brought to the palace.



So Geoffrey became a page of King Louis, and was very, very happy. He was happy, too, because he could now send back to those he loved at home much more for their comfort than he could as a little serving boy at the Guillaume-le-Conquérant inn. And then, sometimes, when one of his messengers had an errand to Dives, the good king would let Geoffrey go along, and he would then make a little visit to his family, and would see his dear Count Boni and little Isabeau, who never ceased to take the greatest pride and interest in him.

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By and by, King Louis discovered how sweet a voice he possessed, and that it had been well-trained for church music. This pleased the king much, as he was very devout in his worship, and did a great deal during his reign to improve the music in the cathedrals of France. So Geoffrey was at once placed under masters, and he sang for a number of years in the king's own chapel, becoming one of the most famous little choristers of the realm. Later on, as he grew to manhood, he passed from being a page, to a squire; and after that, he was appointed man-at-arms in the bodyguard of the king, who grew to love and trust him greatly.

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Some years later still, when King Louis again set forth for the East, on the crusade from which he was never to return, Geoffrey was among the most faithful of the followers who took ship with him. And when the poor king lay dying, before the walls of the far-away city of Tunis, it was Geoffrey whose tenderness and devotion helped to comfort the last days of the stricken monarch.

When all was over, and the little band of crusaders once more returned to their homes in France, none among them was more loved and respected than the Viscount Geoffrey; for shortly before his death the good King Louis had, with his own hand, bestowed knighthood upon the little peasant boy, declaring that he had won the distinction, not only because of his great bravery and his honorable life, but also because of the exceeding sweetness and gentleness of his character.

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# FELIX

## WHO SOUGHT HIS LOST SHEEP AT CHRISTMASTIDE BY A WAY THAT LED TO HIS HEART'S DESIRE AND MADE HIM A FAMOUS CARVER OF OLD PROVENCE

A very long while ago, perhaps as many as two hundred years, the little Provençal village of Sur Varne was all bustle and stir, for it was the week before Christmas; and in all the world, no one has known better how to keep the joyous holiday than have the happy-hearted people of Provence.

Everybody was busy, hurrying to and fro, gathering garlands of myrtle and laurel, bringing home Yule logs with pretty old songs and ceremonies, and in various ways making ready for the all-important festival. [133]

Not a house in Sur Varne but in some manner told the coming of the blessed birthday, and especially were there great preparations in the cottage of the shepherd, Père Michaud. This cottage, covered with white stucco, and thatched with long marsh-grass, stood at the edge of the village; olive and mulberry trees clustered about it, and a wild jasmine vine clambered over the doorway, while on this particular morning all around the low projecting eaves hung a row of tiny wheat-sheaves, swinging in the crisp December air, and twinkling in the sunlight like a golden fringe. For the Père Michaud had been up betimes, making ready the Christmas feast for the birds, which no Provençal peasant ever forgets at this gracious season; and the birds knew it, for already dozens of saucy robins and linnets and fieldfares were gathering in the Père's mulberry-trees, their mouths fairly watering with anticipation.

Within the cottage the good dame, the Misè Michaud, with wide sleeves rolled up and kirtle tucked back, was hard at work making all manner of holiday sweetmeats; while in the huge oven beside the blazing hearth the great Christmas cakes were baking, the famous *pompou* and almond pâtés, dear to the hearts of the children of old Provence. [134]

Now and then, as the cottage door swung open on the dame's various errands, one might hear a faint "Baa, baa!" from the sheepfold, where little Félix Michaud was very busy also.

Through the crevices of its weather-beaten boards came the sound of vigorous scrubbing of wool, and sometimes an impatient "Ninette! Ninette!—thou silly sheep! Wilt thou never stand still?" Or else, in a softer tone, an eager "Beppo, my little Beppo, dost thou know? Dost thou know?" To all of which there would come no answer save the lamb's weak little "Baa, baa!"

For Ninette, Beppo's mother, was a silly old sheep, and Beppo was a very little lamb; and so they could not possibly be expected to know what a great honor had suddenly befallen them. They did not dream that, the night before, Père Michaud had told Félix that his Beppo (for Beppo was Félix's very own) had been chosen by the shepherds for the "offered lamb" of the Christmas Eve procession when the holy midnight mass would be celebrated in all its festival splendor in the great church of the village. [135]

Of the importance of this procession in the eyes of the peasant folk it is difficult to say enough. To be the offered lamb, or indeed the offered lamb's mother, for both always went together, was the greatest honor and glory that could possibly happen to a Provençal sheep, and so little Félix was fairly bursting with pride and delight. And so it was, too, that he was now busying himself washing their wool, which he determined should shine like spun silver on the great night.

He tugged away, scrubbing and brushing and combing the thick fleeces, now and then stopping to stroke Beppo's nose, or to box Ninette's ears when she became too impatient, and at last, after much labor, considered their toilets done for the day; then, giving each a handful of fresh hay to nibble, he left the fold and trudged into the cottage. [136]

"Well, little one," said the Misè, "hast thou finished thy work?"

"Yes, mother," answered Félix; "and I shall scrub them so each day till the Holy Night! Even now Ninette is white as milk, and

Beppo shines like an angel! Ah, but I shall be proud when he rides up to the altar in his little cart! And, mother, dost thou not really think him far handsomer than was Jean's lamb, that stupid Nano, in the procession last year?"

"There, there," said the Misè, "never thou mind about Jean's lamb, but run along now and finish thy crèche."



Now, in Provence, at the time when Félix lived, no one had ever heard of such a thing as a Christmas tree; but in its stead every cottage had a "crèche"; that is, in one corner of the great living-room, the room of the fireplace, the peasant children and their fathers and mothers built upon a table a mimic village of Bethlehem, with houses and people and animals, and, above all, with the manger, where the Christ Child lay. Every one took the greatest pains to make the crèche as perfect as possible, and some even went so far as to fasten tiny angels to the rafters, so that they hovered over the toy houses like a flock of white butterflies; and sometimes a gold star, hung on a golden thread, quivered over the little manger, in memory of the wonderful star of the Magi.

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In the Michaud cottage the crèche was already well under way. In the corner across from the fireplace the Père had built up a mound, and this Félix had covered with bits of rock and tufts of grass, and little green boughs for trees, to represent the rocky hillside of Judea; then, half-way up, he began to place the tiny houses. These he had cut out of wood and adorned with wonderful carving, in which he was very skilful. And then, such figures as he had made, such quaint little men and women, such marvelous animals, camels and oxen and sheep and horses, were never before seen in Sur Varne. But the figure on which he had lavished his utmost skill was that of the little Christ Child, which was not to be placed in the manger until the Holy Night itself.

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Félix kept this figure in his blouse pocket, carefully wrapped up in a bit of wool, and he spent all his spare moments striving to give it some fresh beauty; for I will tell you a secret: poor little Félix had a great passion for carving, and the one thing for which he longed above all others was to be allowed to apprentice himself in the workshop of Père Videau, who was the master carver of the village, and whose beautiful work on the portals of the great church was the admiration of Félix's heart. He longed, too, for better tools than the rude little knife he had, and for days and years in which to learn to use them.

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But the Père Michaud had scant patience with these notions of the little son's. Once, when Félix had ventured to speak to him about it, he had insisted rather sharply that he was to stick to his sheep-tending, so that when the Père himself grew old he could take charge of the flocks and keep the family in bread; for the Père had small faith in the art of the carver as being able to supply the big brown loaves that the Misè baked every week in the great stone oven. So Félix was obliged to go on minding the flocks; but whenever he had a moment of his own, he employed it in carving a bit of wood or chipping at a fragment of soft stone.

But while I have stopped to tell you all this, he had almost finished the crèche; the little houses were all in place, and the animals grouped about the holy stable, or else seeming to crop the

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tufts of moss on the mimic rocky hillside. Over the manger with its tiny wisp of hay, twinkled a wonderful star that Félix had made from some golden beads that the Misè had treasured for years as part of her peasant bridal finery.

Altogether, the crèche was really very prettily arranged, and after giving several final touches, Félix stood back and surveyed it with much satisfaction.

"Well, well!" said the Père Michaud, who had just entered the cottage, "'tis a fine bit of work thou hast there, my son! Truly 'tis a brave crèche! But," he added, "I trow thou hast not forgotten the live sheep in the fold whilst thou hast been busy with these little wooden images here?"

"Nay, father," answered Félix, "that I have not"—but here the Misè called them both to the midday meal, which she had spread smoking hot on the shining deal table.

When this was finished Félix arose, and, as the Père wished, once more went out to the fold to see how the sheep, especially his little Beppo, were faring. [141]

As he pushed open the swinging door, Ninette, who was lazily dozing with her toes doubled up under her fleece, blinked her eyes and looked sleepily around; but Beppo was nowhere to be seen.

"Ninette!" demanded Félix, fiercely, "what hast thou done with my Beppo?"

At this Ninette peered about in a dazed sort of way, and gave an alarmed little "Baa!" For she had not before missed Beppo, who, while she was asleep, had managed to push open the door of the fold and scamper off, no one knew just where.

Félix gazed around in dismay when he realized that his lamb, the chosen one, who had brought such pride and honor to him, was gone!

"Beppo!" he shouted at the top of his lungs, "Beppo! Beppo-o!"

But no trace could he see of the little bundle of fleece he had scrubbed and combed so carefully that morning. [142]

He stood irresolute a moment; then, thinking that if Beppo really were running off, not a second was to be lost, he set out at a brisk pace across the sheep-meadow. He had no idea in what direction the truant lamb would be likely to stray, but on he went, calling every little while in a shrill voice, "Beppo!" Now and then he fancied that he saw in the distance a glimpse of white; but once it proved to be the Misè Fouchard's linen hung to dry on a currant-bush, and again it was a great white stone—but no Beppo; and all the while Félix kept on, quite forgetting that Beppo's weak, woolly legs could not possibly have carried him so great a distance.

By and by he had left the village meadows far behind, and was skirting the great marsh. Sometimes he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked far across this low wet land to see if perhaps Beppo had strayed into its uncertain foothold; but nothing could he see but the waving rushes and the tall bitterns wading about on long, yellow legs. [143]

And still he pressed heedlessly on farther and farther, till, after a while, he found himself thrusting through a thick coppice of willow boughs.

"Oh," thought Félix, "what if poor Beppo has strayed into this woodland!" Tired as he was, he urged himself on, searching among the trees; and it was not until he had wandered on and on, deeper and deeper into the wood, that he realized that the dusk had fallen, and that he must be a very, very long way from Sur Varne.

Félix then began to grow uneasy. He stood still and looked anxiously about him; the dark forest trees closed around him on all sides, and he was quite unable to remember from which direction he had entered the wood.

Now, Félix was really a very brave little fellow, but it must be owned his heart misgave him, and he fairly quaked as he peered through the gathering darkness; for in those days the forests of Provence were known to harbor many dangerous animals, especially wild boars and wolves. He pricked up his ears, and now and then thought he heard in the distance the stealthy tread of some four-footed forest prowler, and once he was sure he caught the deep howl of a wolf. [144]

That ended his hesitation. He looked quickly around, and grasping the low boughs of a slender sapling, managed to swing himself up into a tall chestnut tree that grew close by; and there he

clung, clutching the thick branches with might and main, feeling very cold and hungry and miserable, his heart all the while sinking clear down into his little peasant shoes.

And indeed he had cause for fear, for, not a great while after he had thus hidden himself, a gaunt wolf really did pass close by, sniffing and peering, till poor Félix gave up all hope of escaping with his life; but, luckily, the wolf did not see him, and at last slowly crept on through the underwood.

[145]

How long the little boy stayed in the perilous shelter of the chestnut-tree he never knew, but it seemed untold ages to him. After a while the moon rose, and shed a faint light through the close-lapping branches; then, by and by, Félix's ears, strained to listen for every lightest sound, caught the echo of distant trampling, as of horses' hoofs, and presently two horsemen came in sight, pricking their way cautiously along a narrow bridle-path.

He did not know whom they might prove to be, but wisely thinking that anything would be better than staying in a tree all night at the mercy of hungry wolves, he waited till the first rider came quite close, and then he plucked up courage to call out faintly:

"Oh, sir, stop, I pray thee!"

At this, the rider, who was none other than the noble Count Bernard of Bois Varne, quickly drew rein and, turning, called to his companion:

[146]

"Ho, Brian! Heardest thou aught?"

"Nay, my Lord," answered Brian, who was some paces behind, "naught save the trampling of our own horses' hoofs."

The count looked all around, and seeing nothing, thought himself mistaken in the sound, and began to pace on. Then Félix in terror gave another shout, this time louder, and at the same moment a little twig he was pressing with his elbow broke away and dropped, striking against the count's stirrup; for the bridle-path wound directly under the tree where Félix was perched.

The count instantly checked his horse again, and, peering up into the boughs overhead, he caught sight of Félix, his yellow hair wet with dew and shining in the moonlight, and his dark eyes wide with fear.



"Heigh-ho!" exclaimed the count, in blank amazement. "Upon my word, now! what art thou—boy or goblin?"

[147]

At this Félix gave a little sob, for he was very tired and very cold. He hugged the tree tightly, and steadying himself against the

boughs, at last managed to falter out:

"Please thee, sir, I am Félix Michaud, and my lamb Beppo, who was to ride in the Christmas procession, ran off to-day, and—and—I have been hunting him, I think, ever since—since yesterday!" Here poor Félix grew a trifle bewildered; it seemed to him so very long ago since he had set out in search of Beppo. "And I live in Sur Varne."

At this the count gave a long whistle.

"At Sur Varne!" he exclaimed. "If thou speakest truly, my little man, thou hast indeed a sturdy pair of legs to carry thee thus far." And he eyed curiously Félix's dusty little feet and leathern leggings, dangling limply from the bough above him.

"Dost thou know how far distant is Sur Varne from this forest?" [148]

"Nay, sir," answered Félix; "but I trow 'tis a great way."

"There thou art right," said the count; "'tis a good two leagues, if it is a pace. But how now? Thou canst not bide here to become the prey of hungry wolves, my little night-owl of the yellow hair!"

And thereupon Count Bernard dexterously raised himself in his stirrups, and, reaching upward, caught Félix in his arms and swung him down plump on the saddle-bow in front of him; then, showing him how to steady himself by holding the pommel, he turned to Brian, his squire, who while all this was going on had stood by in silent astonishment, and giving the order to move, the little cavalcade hastened on at a rapid pace in order to get clear of the forest as quickly as possible.

Meantime the Count Bernard, who was really a very kind and noble lord, and who lived in a beautiful castle on the farther verge of the forest, quite reassured Félix by talking to him kindly, and telling him of the six days' journey from which he and his squire, Brian, were just returning, and how they had been delayed on the way until nightfall. [149]

"And, by my faith!" said Count Bernard, "'twas a lucky hour for thee that snapped my horse's saddle-girth! else we should have passed this wood by midday—and then, little popinjay, what wouldst thou have done had we not chanced along to pluck thee from out thy chilly nest? Hey? Wolves had been but poor comrades for such as thee!"

At this Félix began to shiver, and the count hastened to add:

"Nay, my little man, I did but jest with thee! Thou shalt sleep this night in the strong castle of Bois Varne, with not even a mouse to fret thy yellow head; and, what is more, thou shalt see the fairest little maid that ever thou hast set eyes on!"

And then he told him of his little daughter, the Lady Elinor, and how she would play with Félix and show him the castle, and how on the morrow they would see about sending him home to Sur Varne. [150]

And all the while the count was talking they were trotting briskly onward, till by and by they emerged from the forest and saw towering near at hand the castle of Bois Varne. The tall turrets shone and shimmered in the moonlight, and over the gateway of the drawbridge hung a lighted cresset—that is, a beautiful wrought-iron basket, in which blazed a ruddy torch of oil to light them on their way.

At sight of this the count and Brian spurred on their horses, and were soon clattering across the bridge and into the great paved courtyard. The count flung his bridle to a little page who hastened out to meet him, and then, springing from his saddle, lightly lifted Félix and swung him to the ground. He then took the boy by the hand and led him into the great hall of the castle. [151]

To Félix this looked marvelously beautiful. Christmas garlands of myrtle hung on the walls, and a great pile of freshly cut laurel boughs lay on a bench, ready for the morrow's arranging. But that which took his eyes most of all was the lovely carving everywhere to be seen. The benches and tables were covered with it; the wainscot of the spacious room was richly adorned; and over and about the wide fireplace great carved dragons of stone curled their long tails and spread their wings through a maze of intricate traceries. Félix was enchanted, and gazed around till his eyes almost ached.

Presently in came running a little girl, laughing with delight. Bounding up into Count Bernard's arms, she hugged and kissed him in true Provençal fashion. Then, catching sight of Félix:

"Ah, *mon père*," she exclaimed, "and where foundest thou thy pretty new page?" [152]



"Nay, sweetheart," answered the count, looking down at Félix's yellow hair, "'tis no page, but a little goldfinch we found perched in a chestnut tree as we rode through the forest."

Then, smiling at the Lady Elinor's bewilderment, he told her the little boy's story, and she at once slipped down and greeted him kindly. Then, clapping her hands with pleasure at finding a new playmate, she declared he must come to see the Christmas crèche which she was just finishing.

"Not so fast, *ma chère!*" interposed the count, "we must sup first, for we are famished as the wolves we left behind us in the forest." And thereupon he called in the steward of the castle, who soon set out a hearty supper on one of the long tables.

Elinor sat close by, eagerly chattering as they ate, and the moment Félix had swallowed the last morsel, she seized him by the hand and hastened across the hall, where her crèche was built upon a carved bench. The poor little Lady Elinor had no mother, and her father, the count, had been gone for several days; and although in the castle were many serving men and women and retainers, yet none of these presumed to dictate to the little mistress; and so she had put her crèche together in a very odd fashion.

"There!" said she, "what thinkest thou of it, Félix? Of a truth, I fancy somewhat is wanting, yet I know not how to better it!"

"Yes," said Félix, bashfully, "it may be I can help thee."

And so he set to work rearranging the little houses and figures, till he succeeded in giving a life-like air to the crèche, and Lady Elinor danced with delight.

While placing the little manger he happened to remember the figure of the Christ Child still in his blouse pocket; this he timidly took out and showed the little girl, who was charmed, and still more so when he drew forth a small wooden sheep and a dog, which were also in the same pocket, and which he begged her to keep.

The Lady Elinor was so carried away with joy that she flew to the side of the count, and, grasping both his hands, dragged him across the room to show him the crèche and the wonderful figures carved by Félix. Félix himself was covered with confusion when he saw the count coming, and would gladly have run from the hall, but that was impossible; so he stood still, his eyes averted and his face crimson.

"See, *mon père!*" said Elinor, "see this, and this!" And she held up the carvings for the count's inspection.

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Count Bernard, who had good-naturedly crossed the room to please his daughter, now opened his eyes wide with surprise. He took the little figures she handed him and examined them closely, for he was a good judge of artistic work of this kind. Then he looked at Félix, and at length he said:

"Well, little forest bird, who taught thee the carver's craft?"

"No one, sir," faltered Félix; "indeed, I wish, above all things, to learn of the Père Videau, the master carver; but my father says I must be a shepherd, as he is."

Here a tear rolled down Félix's cheek, for he was half frightened and terribly tired.

"Well, well," said the count, "never mind! Thou art weary, little one; we will talk of this more on the morrow. 'Tis high time now that both of you were sound asleep. Hey, there! Jean! Jacques! Come hither and take care of this little lad, and see to it that he hath a soft bed and a feather pillow!"

The next morning the children ate a merry breakfast together, and after it Count Bernard took Félix aside and asked him many questions of his life and his home. Then, by and by, knowing how anxious the boy's parents would be, he ordered his trusty squire, Brian, to saddle a horse and conduct Félix back to Sur Varne.

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Meantime the little Lady Elinor begged hard that he stay longer in the castle for her playfellow, and was quite heartbroken when she saw the horse standing ready in the courtyard. Indeed, she would not be satisfied until her father, the count, who could not bear to see her unhappy, had promised to take her over some day to see Félix in Sur Varne. Then she smiled and made a pretty farewell courtesy, and suddenly snatching from her dark hair a crimson ribbon of Lyons taffeta, she tied it about Félix's sleeve, declaring:

"There! thou must keep this token, and be my little knight!" for the Lady Elinor had many lofty notions in her small curly head.

Félix could only stammer out an embarrassed good by, for in the presence of this lively little maid he found himself quaking more than when he feared the terrible wolves of the forest. In another moment Brian lifted him to the saddle, and, springing up behind, took the bridle-rein, and off they went.

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When, after several hours' riding, they drew near Sur Varne, Félix showed Brian the way to the Michaud cottage, and you can fancy how overjoyed were the Père and Misè to see the travelers; for they had been nearly beside themselves with grief, and had searched all night for their little son.

Of course almost the first question Félix asked was about Beppo, and he felt a great load taken off his mind when he learned that the little truant, who really had not strayed very far from the village, had been found and brought home by one of the shepherds, and was even then penned up safe and sound in the sheepfold.

After a good night's sleep Félix was quite rested from his journey. He was busy the next day in helping to garland the Yule log, in giving Ninette and Beppo an extra scrubbing and brushing, and in all the final happy preparations for the great holiday.

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And so Christmas Eve came. It was a lovely starlit night, and on all sides one could hear the beautiful Christmas songs of old Provence, that all the peasants and the children sing as they troop along the roads on their way to the great church of the village; for thither every one flocks as the expected hour draws on.

Within the church all was a blaze of light; hundreds of tall wax tapers shone and twinkled and shed their golden glow over the altar, and a wonderful crèche with its manger and almost life-size figures stood on another special altar of its own.

Then presently the stately service began, and went on with song and incense, and the sweet chanting of children's voices, till suddenly from the upper tower of the church a joyous peal of bells rang in the midnight! All at once, through the dense throng of worshipers nearest the door a pathway opened, and in came four peasants playing on pipes and flutes and flageolets a quaint old air made up nearly three hundred years before by good King René for just such a ceremony as was to follow.

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After the pipers walked ten shepherds, two by two, each wearing a long brown cloak, and carrying a staff and lighted candle; that is, all save the first two, and these bore, one a basket of fruit, melons and grapes and pears of sunny Provence, while the other held in his hands a pair of pretty white pigeons with rose-colored eyes and soft,

fluttering wings.

And then, behind the shepherds came—what do you suppose?—Ninette! Ninette, her fleece shining like snow, a garland of laurel and myrtle about her neck, and twigs of holly nodding behind her ears; while bound about her woolly shoulders a little harness of scarlet leather shone against the white with dazzling effect; and fastened to the harness, and trundling along at Ninette's heels, came the gayest of little wooden carts. It was painted in the brightest colors. Its wheels were wrapped with garlands, and in it, curled up in a fat fleecy ball, lay Beppo! Tied about his neck in a huge bow was a crimson ribbon of Lyons taffeta, with a sprig of holly tucked into its loops.

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Beppo lay quite still, looking about him with a bewildered, half-dazed expression, and just behind his cart came ten more shepherds with staves and candles, while following them was a great throng of peasant folk and children, among them Félix, all carrying lighted tapers, and radiant with delight; for this was the Procession of the Offered Lamb, and to walk in its train was considered by all the greatest honor and privilege.

And especially did the shepherd folk love the beautiful old custom which for centuries the people of Provence had cherished in memory of the time, long ago, when the real Christ Child lay in the manger of Bethlehem, and the shepherds of Judea sought him out to worship him, and to offer him their fruits and lambs as gifts.

[161]

And so, on, up the long aisle, the procession slowly moved; the pipers playing, and Ninette marching solemnly along, only now and then pausing to thrust her nose between the Père Michaud and his companion, who walked directly in front of her. Ninette pattered on as if she had trod the floors of churches all her life; and as for Beppo, only once did he stir, and then he gave a faint "Baa!" and tried to uncurl himself and stand up; but just then the queer little cart gave a joggle which quite upset his shaky lamb legs, and down he sank, and kept quiet throughout the rest of the time.

When the procession reached the altar the musicians stopped playing, and the first two shepherds, kneeling, presented the pigeons and the basket of fruit; and then the little cart was wheeled up so as to bring Beppo directly in front of all, and the whole company knelt as the priest blessed the offerings.

After this beautiful ceremony which ended the service, the players again struck up King René's tune, and the procession, shepherds, Ninette, Beppo, peasants, and all, once more moved on, this time down the outer aisle and toward the great open portal.

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It took some time for the last of its followers to reach the doorway, for the throng was very great; but at length Félix, who had marched with the children in the last group, came to the threshold and stepped out into the starry night.

He stood for a moment smiling and gazing aimlessly ahead, overwhelmed with the glory of all that had passed within the church. Presently he felt some one pluck his sleeve, and turning round, he met the dancing eyes of the little Lady Elinor.

She gave a little peal of laughter at his surprise, and exclaimed: "Oh, I coaxed *mon père*, the count, to fetch me hither for this blessed night. Thou knowest he promised! I rode my white palfrey all the way by the side of his big brown horse. And I have seen the procession, and Beppo with my red ribbon round his neck." Here she gave another little gurgle of delight.

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"And oh, Félix, my father hath seen thine, and 'tis all settled! Thou art to be a famous carver with the Père Videau, as thou wishest,"—for the Lady Elinor had unbounded faith in Félix's powers, "and, Félix," she added, "I trow 'twas the little Christ Child for thy crèche that did it!"

Then, with a merry smile, she darted off to her father, the Count Bernard, who was waiting for her down the church path.

For a little while after she had gone Félix did not move, but stood as one in a dream. Elinor's sweet words, ringing in his ears, mingled with the glad songs the peasants were again singing on their homeward way, till altogether he did not quite know whether he was awake or asleep, but only felt an indistinct notion that some wonderful fairy, who had the face of a little maid he knew, had whispered in his ear something that was to make him happy forever.

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Presently a loud bleat close at his side startled him, and looking down, he saw that Ninette, decked in her gay garlands, and still

dragging the be-ribboned Beppo in the little cart, had broken away from the Père Michaud and come close up to himself.

Then, with a sudden movement, he stooped over, and, seizing Beppo in both arms, hugged and squeezed him till poor Beppo squeaked with surprise, and opened his red mouth and gasped for breath. But Félix only hugged him the harder, murmuring under his breath, "Bless thy little heart, Beppo! Bless thy little heart!" For in a vague way he realized that the truant lamb had somehow brought him his heart's desire, and that was quite enough Christmas happiness for one year.

And the little Lady Elinor was right, too. Years after, when Félix grew to be a man, he did, in very truth, become a "famous carver," as she had declared.

[165]

Far surpassing his first master, the Père Videau, he traveled and worked in many cities; yet never, through all his long life, did he forget that Christmas Eve in the little village of Sur Varne.

Those who knew him best said that among his dearest treasures he always kept a beautifully carved little box, and in it a bit of faded crimson ribbon from the looms of Lyons. While, as for Beppo—well, if ever some happy day you chance to visit the lovely land of Provence, perhaps you will see a certain grand old cathedral in the ancient city of Arles; and, if you do, look sharp at the figure of a lamb chiseled in white stone over the great portal. Look well, I say, for Félix, when he carved it, would have told you that he was thinking all the while of Beppo.

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