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Author: Carmen Sylva

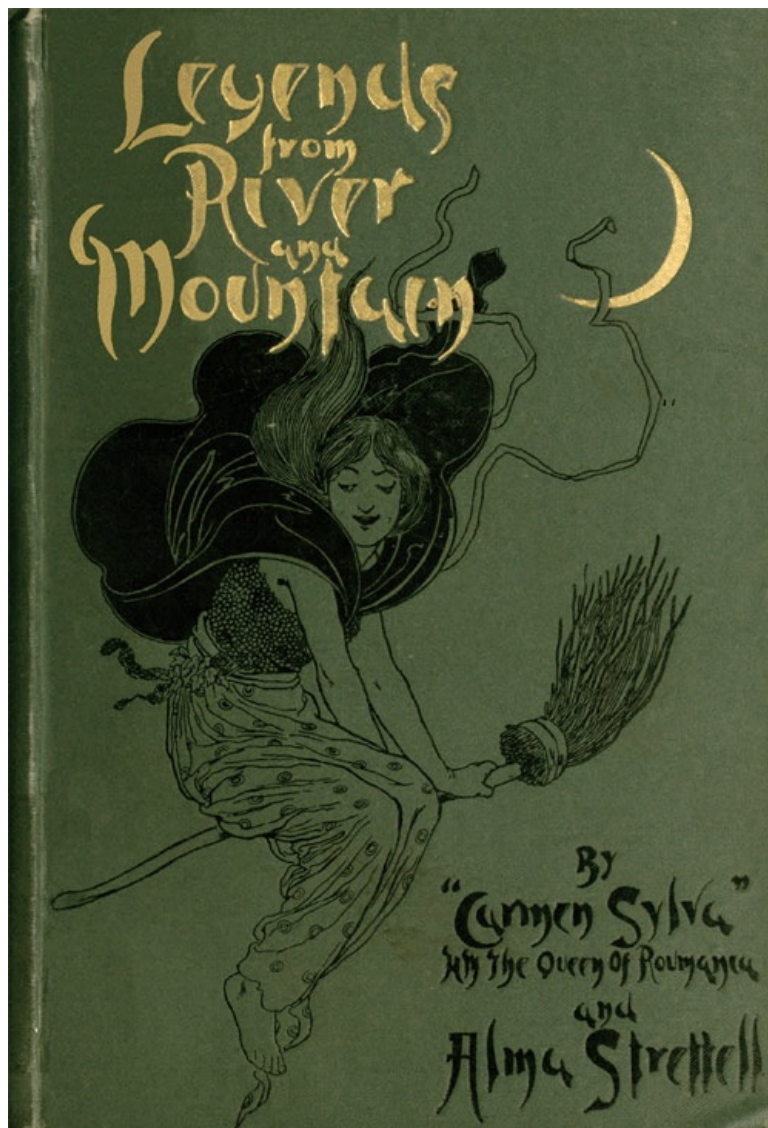
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LEGENDS FROM RIVER AND MOUNTAIN

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FROM "THE CAVE OF JALOMITZA."—*p. 146.*

**But thereupon the horse was changed into a hawk, that shot down from a giddy height,
and bore her away in his talons.**

Legends from * * * * *
River & Mountain
By Carmen Sylva (H.M. the
Queen of Roumania) and Alma
Strettell. With Illustrations
by T. H. Robinson

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1896

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INTRODUCTION

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The first ten of these stories are taken from the German of Carmen Sylva, who has kindly given the translator her special permission to add them to the following collection of legends. The originals are to be found in her charming volumes of Roumanian tales: "Pelesch Märchen" and "Durch die Jahrhunderte."

Many of them are associated with the mountains which surround her home among the pine-woods of Sinaia; others belong to the districts traversed by the Pelesch river, the merry stream that dashes through the ravine at the foot of her garden, "whispering all sorts of wonders and

secrets to those who have ears to hear.”

The remaining tales in the volume are collected from different parts of Germany. “The Little Glass-man,” a legend of the Black Forest, is taken from “Hauff’s Märchen”; the other stories are all compiled from, or founded upon, legends to be met with in various German collections, such as Ziehnert’s, Pröhle’s, &c.^[1] Most of them, however, are there set forth in so condensed a form, and with such scanty detail, that they could hardly prove of interest as stories, and therefore, they have in sundry cases been somewhat amplified and developed; or, where there was a resemblance between several legends belonging to different districts, indicating that they had a common source, their varying incidents have been worked into one tale.

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It will be seen that the latter part, at least, of this volume makes no claim to be considered as an addition to the serious literature of Folk-lore. Its endeavour is rather to furnish the younger readers of the present generation with a fresh supply of stories—half legend, half fairy-tale—of a kind with which the children of an earlier day were familiar, but which are now less often to be met with; stories which came to them also from foreign lands, and were invested with a charm which it has been vainly sought, as the compiler fears, to impart to the present series.

September 1895.

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[And ere one of them could stretch out a hand she had flown like a bird over the edge of the cliff](#)

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[So he manned a sail-boat with stout rowers, took provisions with him for several days, and set out across the sea](#)

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[Presently a little boy ran up to him and cried in pleading tones, “Take me away with thee”](#)

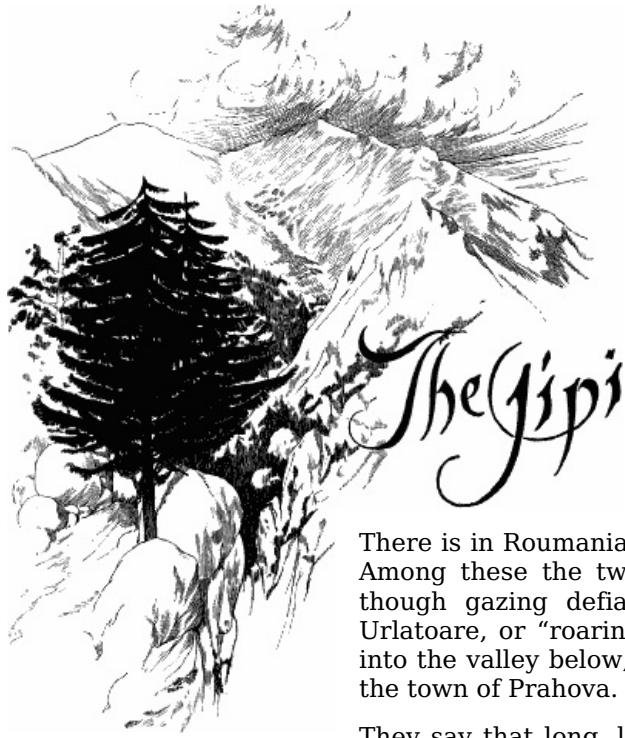
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I THE JIPI

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There is in Roumania a group of mountains named the Bucegi-group. Among these the two peaks of Jipi tower aloft, close together, as though gazing defiantly at one another, and between them the Urlatoare, or "roaring stream," dashes down, a cloud-like waterfall, into the valley below, and storms onward over every barrier towards the town of Prahova.

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They say that long, long ago the Jipi were twin-brothers, who loved each other so well that one could not live without the other, or eat a mouthful of bread the other did not share; nay, more—that when one was asked a question, the other answered it, and that when one did himself some hurt, the other wept and would not be comforted. They were as fair as morning and evening, as slender and straight as lances, as swift as arrows, as strong as young bears. The mother who had borne them looked upon them with pride and joy, and would say, as she stroked their curly heads, "Andrei and Mirea, my beautiful sons, may your fame become so great that even the stones shall discourse of it."

They were of noble blood, and dwelt in a castle upon a lofty crag, where they lorded it as though the whole world belonged to them. They often jestingly declared that they should have to wed one wife only between them, since they were sure never to find two quite alike, and that the best plan would be for them never to wed at all. But of this their mother would not hear, for she longed to cradle her sons' sons upon her knee and sing them lullabies.

She would often sing the ancient lays of their country to her boys, of an evening, while she sat spinning and the noble lads hung fondly about her. Andrei would kneel at her feet, while Mirea leant upon the arm of her chair, and drew in the sweet scent of the heavy, dark braids that shone lustrous through her delicate white veil.

"Our mother is still quite a young woman," said Andrei.

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"Yes, indeed," cried Mirea; "she has not yet a single grey hair."

"Nor a wrinkle," rejoined Andrei.

"We shall find no wife worth our mother," continued Mirea, kissing the veil upon her head.

"Thou dost cast them all into the shade," laughed Andrei, and kissed the fingers that were spinning such wondrous fine threads.

"Our father was a happy man," cried the one. "And we are lucky children," rejoined the other. Then the mother would smile at the tender dialogue, and tell them tales of their grandmother, and of the rough times she lived in—of her stern father and yet sterner husband.

The meals that the three partook of together were as merry as though the house had been full of company; and, indeed, when guests were really present they grew graver, as beseemed the dignity of their house. They were the most kindly of hosts, and spent many a night upon the bare ground, that their soft couch might be given up to some stranger guest. All who entered there felt at ease in that happy home, wherein love made its dwelling.

One day the two brothers were out hunting a bear that had been making sore havoc in the district. They climbed up the steepest of their cliffs to find him, and got at last upon his track, as a loud growling and a shower of dislodged stones betokened. At the very moment, however, that Mirea was about to cast his spear, another flew out of the underbrush hard by and smote the beast in the vitals. A peal of silvery laughter followed the stroke. Then the bear, growling with rage, rose upon his hinder feet and made for the patch of undergrowth. Andrei perceived the danger in which the bold huntsman stood, and while Mirea called out indignantly, "Let him end the chase he has begun!" his brother exclaimed, "Canst thou not hear?—it is a boy's voice!" and casting himself before the bear, which towered high above him, he plunged his knife up to the hilt in its shoulder. The brute clawed the air for a moment and then fell dead. "Oh, what a pity!" cried a clear voice, and from the bushes there stepped forth a wondrously fair maiden, clad in short garments and sandals, and having a white fur cap set upon her wild and abundant brown locks. Her eyes shone beneath dark, highly arched brows; they were green eyes, yet with a glint

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of gold in them. From her shoulders hung a mantle of snow-white, silky goatskin; like Andrei, she held in her hand a broad hunting-knife, with which she had unflinchingly awaited the onslaught of the bear. "What a pity," she cried again, "now it is not I that have slain him!" and her eyes filled with tears. Andrei stood quite shame-faced, gazing at the bear, as though he would gladly, to please the lovely maiden, have restored him to life again. To conceal her ill-humour, she thoughtlessly thrust at the brute with her foot—when, behold! he turned in the death-throe and clawed at her once again. But on the instant she was caught back by Mirea, who set her on her feet with the reproving words, "Foolish child!" She gazed upwards in astonishment, for the voice was that of the young man before her—and the face, too, was bewildering in its likeness to his. Open-mouthed, like a child indeed, she looked from one to the other till all three broke out into a storm of laughter.

"You are double!" cried the girl, "like two hazel-nuts in one shell."

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"And two nuts out of one shell we are," replied Andrei. "But who art thou, little wood-fairy? Perchance some witch in disguise, who will work our undoing."

"Who can say?" answered the maiden. "Perhaps I am a witch—grandfather often says so; and, indeed, I have only been with him a week yet, and he has had no more of his old pain since I came."

"We would straightway treat thee as an evil witch, then," said Mirea, "and carry thee a prisoner to our castle, for having hunted upon our hills without leave."

"We have a cruel mother, too, at our castle," added Andrei.

"Good," cried the maiden. "Her I must see. I am your prisoner!"

She called her attendant huntsman, gave him messages to her grandfather, and bade him bring horses to fetch her home; then she followed the brothers with a light step by the giddiest and steepest paths to the castle.

The lads' mother, Dame Roxana, stood looking from the castle windows, and wondering what strange shepherd-boy her sons were bringing home with them. The dead bear was carried behind them, slung upon green boughs. As they drew near the castle Dame Roxana exclaimed in alarm, "It is a girl they have with them. Where can they have found her?"

The next moment the sound of youthful voices and footsteps re-echoed through courtyard and hall. "Mother," cried Mirea, "here we bring thee a prisoner, a hunter who has spoilt our chase! What shall be his punishment?"

Dame Roxana gazed at the young girl in great anxiety. She would fain have sent her away again as quickly as possible; but the vision was so entrancing a one that she could not restrain a kindly smile, and stretched out her hand, which the maiden respectfully kissed. "I think," said Dame Roxana, "that the worst punishment would be to make this merry child spend a few hours in spinning with an old woman like me!"

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"Nay, nay," the girl replied; "I can spin as lightly as any fairy. The spear has not made my hand heavy. And as for old folks—why, I spend all my time alone with grandfather, who sits in his chair all day, and falls asleep whenever I would tell him aught."

She was about to lay aside her mantle as she spoke, but Andrei stepped forward and took it from her, while his mother herself lifted the fur cap from her brow and stroked back the damp curly hair. With abundant locks falling about her like a lion's mane, she seemed fairer than ever, and mother and sons gazed at her in delight.

"What is thy name, dear child?" asked Dame Roxana.

"Urlanda. Is it not an ugly name? They would have called me Rolanda, but it turned into Urlanda, because I was always so wild and untutored. My grandfather dwells on the other side of the mountain. Oh! I have come far to-day."

"Then thou wilt be all the gladder of the meal that awaits us."

They led her into the dining-hall, sumptuously decked with Eastern carpets and hangings and massive silver-ware. Here the talk flowed merrily on. Wondrous tales were told of the chase and of adventures with savage bears; but Rolanda would never suffer herself to be outdone, and would cap each tale with one more amazing yet, told in tones as earnest as though she were swearing an oath upon it.

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The merriment was heightened by her constant mistaking of one brother for the other, and when Andrei gave himself out as having saved her life, Mirea would eagerly affirm that it was he who had warded off the bear's last embrace.

"It's a good thing," she would cry, "that I have to thank you both for my life, for else, indeed, I should never be able to recognise my preserver."

When the meal was over she begged for distaff and spindle, "for she wanted to show that her spinning was no hunter's tale." This was spoken with a sly glance at the brothers. And, in truth, the threads she spun were as fine and even as a spider's web, to the great amazement of Dame Roxana.

"I can embroider beautifully too," said the maiden. "My mother, who could do wonders at it, taught me that, for she hoped to tame me with such fair work. But it was all in vain, for I had always finished before she expected it, and was out and away again to the stables or the chase." She sighed a little. "But now the stud is sold; and, indeed, who could ride among these wretched mountains, where there is no room? Ah, there are the horses!" and she sprang from her seat. "I must go, or I shall not be home by nightfall; and surely grandfather must know how to chide if he be minded to, for he has such bushy eyebrows!" In a moment she had kissed the hand of Dame Roxana, greeted the brothers with a wave of her furry cap as she cast it upon her curly locks, and was away out of the hall and into her saddle like a whirlwind. But the brothers, too, had their horses ready, and were not to be hindered from bearing their young guest company to the outskirts of their lands. So, greeting Dame Roxana with laughing glances, they rode away, and she looked after them with grave eyes, though a smile was on her lips. Her heart was heavy, she knew not why, and she would fain have called her sons back to her.

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It was with difficulty that Rolanda could be restrained from galloping up hill and down dale; only when her pity for the horses was stirred did she draw rein, saying with a sigh, "You call these walking chairs horses!"

As night was now falling, she begged the brothers to seek shelter beneath her grandfather's roof. The old man was sitting by the hearth when they entered, stroking the white beard that fell down far over his breast.

"And where has this wild creature been now?" he kindly asked.

"In a dreadful prison, because of having trespassed on another's hunting-ground! And here are my persecutors, whom I have brought with me to prove whether I speak truly."

The old man's gaze was full of kindness as it rested upon the two youths, standing ready to do him homage. The evening meal was soon ready; nor was it less cheerful than that which they had shared at midday at Dame Roxana's table. At early dawn Andrei and Mirea rode hence again. They were startled, as they passed under the castle windows, at finding themselves pelted by a shower of blossoms. But as they glanced upwards a window was hastily closed, and they saw no one.

This was the first of many mutual visits, of many riding and hunting parties, and pleasant hours passed in merry chatter within doors. But Rolanda had her sadder moments also, when she was more entrancing than ever; then she would speak of her dead parents, and of how lonely she was in the wide world; for her grandfather could not live much longer, and then she would not know whither to turn.

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"Oh, cruel words!" Andrei would exclaim. "Are we, then, not thy brothers? and is there no home for thee here?"

"Does our mother not love thee?" Mirea would add.

Then would Dame Roxana's heart quiver with pain once more; and yet the untutored child had become very dear to her.

Not long after this a clatter of hurrying horse's hoofs sounded up the hillside, and then upon the stones of the courtyard; it was Rolanda, riding bare-headed and with fluttering locks. As pale as death she burst in upon Dame Roxana. "For God's sake, let me take shelter with you! Grandfather is dead! I closed his eyes myself; I made him ready for the grave, and laid him there to rest, and felt no fear the while. But now all the kinsfolk have come flocking in, quarrelling over the inheritance, and giving me hard and cruel words because some of it is to be mine. And one bald-headed fellow would straightway have taken me to wife. Ah me! then I was affrighted. Such a wretch! But I told him I was called Urolanda, and was so bad that none would care to marry me. Nor will I have any husband. I will stay here with you until I am turned out."

It was a hard matter for Dame Roxana to understand this flow of incoherent words, and harder still for her to soothe the agitated girl. She folded her to her heart and stroked the disordered curls; then she led her to the little white bed-chamber, where she had often dwelt before, and told her this should be her home as long as there was a roof over the house.

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Rolanda threw herself into her arms, kissed her hands, and promised to become as gentle and calm as a deep, calm lake.

Dame Roxana smiled. "Methinks," she replied, "that the calm and gentleness will come all in good time, when once thou art a wife."

"But I would never become a wife. I would always remain a maiden and free—free as a bird."

Dame Roxana sighed quite low, and listened for the voices of her sons, who had just come home and were asking for Rolanda, whose tumultuous arrival they had witnessed from afar.

A wondrous change took place in the behaviour of the brothers after Rolanda came to sojourn with them.

They had greeted her as their "little sister," but thereupon the young girl had suddenly grown shy and constrained. They lived out of doors more than ever now, only they no longer went together, but by separate ways; and Rolanda stayed much at home with the mother, and grew dreamy and absent, often shedding tears in secret. When she thought herself unnoticed, her

quick glance would travel backwards and forwards between the brothers, as though she would fain discover something that yet remained dark to her. She often still confused the two together, yet now she no longer laughed at this, but gazed anxiously over at the mother. Dame Roxana watched with a heavy heart the dark cloud that seemed gathering over her house, and wept far oftener and more secretly than Rolanda, since the day that each of her sons had confessed to her, alone at the twilight hour, his great, undying, unconquerable love, and had asked—

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“Dost think my brother loves her too, he is so changed? And to which of us will she give her heart?”

Dame Roxana offered many a taper in the little mountain chapel at Lespes, and hoped that this painfully made pilgrimage might incline Heaven’s mercy towards them, and ward off a great disaster from her home.

Rolanda had been in a state of indescribable agitation ever since the time that Andrei and Mirea had, each unknown to the other, confessed their love to her. In vain the poor child questioned her heart; she loved them both too well—far too well—to make either wretched; nor could she separate the one from the other in her heart, any more than she could with her eyes. She kept silence towards Dame Roxana, for she could not bear to give her pain; but day by day she saw how the brothers no longer cherished each other, and even how sharp words sometimes passed between them, and that had never chanced in all their lives before.

At last Dame Roxana called the three to her side and spoke.

“I have watched the bitter struggle of your hearts too long. One of you must needs make a hard sacrifice, that the other may be happy.”

“Yes,” answered Mirea gloomily, “one of us must quit this world.”

“For God’s sake!” cried Rolanda, “you would not fight over me?”

“Nay,” said Andrei, with a sad smile, “that were impossible. But one can go hence alone.”

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Then said Dame Roxana with uplifted hands, “O godless children! have I, then, borne you and brought you up so feeble that neither of you has the strength to bear his first sorrow? Rolanda, till to-morrow shalt thou have time for thought; by to-morrow we shall all have won strength and courage.”

So they parted.

Andrei took a path that led through the forest to Lespes, and there he knelt in the little rock-hewn chapel and prayed: “O my God! Thou knowest my heart and my strength. Grant that I may be preserved from any sin towards myself, my mother, my brother, or the woman that I love. But if she give herself not to me, then turn me to stone, that I may feel pain no more.” But, by another path, Mirea had come, too, to the little chapel, and had prayed the same prayer. They cast a sorrowful look at one another, and went home, each by himself; for each thought that he alone had offered up the sacrifice.

Dame Roxana appeared next morning as white as the veil which covered the first silver threads in her hair. The two brothers wore the look of men going to their death. Rolanda alone came among them with the glow of joy on her face. She was as though transfigured by an unearthly beauty, that seemed to increase her very height. With gentle dignity she spoke: “Come out yonder with me, my only dear ones; let the decision be given under God’s open sky.”



And ere one of them could stretch out a hand she had flown like a bird over the edge of the cliff.

She glided out before them, hardly seeming to tread on earth; her hands were transparent as wax, and her eyes full of tears as she raised them to heaven. On the edge of a steep and giddy precipice she paused, and knelt before Dame Roxana.

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“Give me thy blessing, mother,” she said.

Dame Roxana laid a trembling hand upon the fair, curly head.

“And now,” continued Rolanda in a clear voice, “now hearken to me. I love you both so well, so passing well—far more than myself or my own life—that I cannot give myself to either of you. But whichever brings me back from the abyss, his wife will I be.” And ere one of them could stretch out a hand she had flown like a bird over the edge of the cliff, into the immeasurable depths below. But—oh wonder!—as she fell, she was changed into a foaming waterfall, whose spray floated in the air like a bridal veil. The two brothers would have cast themselves down after her, but they could not, for their feet turned to rock, their arms to rock, their hearts to stone, and so they towered aloft toward heaven. But the unhappy mother spread out her arms, crying, “And I alone must live! Hast Thou no pity, Heaven?” Then with arms outstretched she fell to earth, embracing her children. And, behold! where she lay she was changed into thick, soft moss, that grew and spread farther and farther, till the rocks were half shrouded in it. So they remain, and will remain for ever—the wild white bride, Urlatoare, the self-sacrificing sons, the Jipi, and their loving, tender mother.

II THE SERPENT-ISLE

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The great Latin poet Ovid was banished by the Emperor of Rome, no one knew why, to a desolate spot near the mouth of the Danube, on the shores of the Black Sea. That land has had many masters, and last of all the Roumanians, under King Charles, took it from the Turks. Where Ovid once wandered by that lonely shore there is now a grand hotel, where fashionable ladies and officers sit and listen to the music of the band; a large town, too, lies hard by, but in the poet's days only a small collection of miserable huts stood there, which men called the city of Tomi. On one side there was nothing to be seen, as far as the eye could reach, but sand and marshes, where at intervals a solitary tree stretched out its barren boughs over some evil-smelling mere; while on the other the endless sea, black and cheerless, rolled its monotonous waves towards the shore. Snowstorms, unknown to an inhabitant of Rome, swept over the land in winter; and in summer the sun

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beat down with scorching heat, setting the brain on fire and parching the tongue. Wells were scarce here, and Ovid learnt to prize a draught of pure water more than he had ever prized the choicest wines in his Roman cellars. The inhabitants of the country were few—dark-skinned men, whose language was strange to him. The only Romans were men whom he would in former days have thought unworthy of his slightest glance or word—thieves, galley-slaves, or fraudulent officials. Surely he could never have borne such a life, and must have died of misery, save for one only consolation. Every man must have some such, be it only a dog, a flower, or a spider. Ovid had a snake, a tiny, bewitching snake, that always lay curled about his neck or his arm, and in whose eyes he read the most wondrous tales. To his mind she was very likely the victim of some spell—a banished princess in a serpent's shape—for did he not write the "Metamorphoses"?—and he wove fancies about her by the hour together—of how fair she was in reality, and how unfortunate, his shining little Colubra, as he called her. And as his thoughts wandered thus, and he sat gazing out upon the sea, his eyes would close and he would sink into peaceful sleep. One day, as he thus slept, he dreamed a strange dream; his little snake had suddenly become possessed of human speech, and was whispering softly in his ear, "Come, come with me to the island at the mouth of the Danube—that which they call the Serpent-Isle. There thou shalt witness transformations indeed." He awoke with a start of surprise; but his little snake was lying quite quietly about his neck, as though she had never spoken a word. Again he fell asleep, and again Colubra whispered, "Come to the Serpent-Isle. Come; trust thy little friend." The poet awoke once more and gazed at the little creature, that still clung motionless to his throat, and met his eyes with a strange look of comprehension. He slept for the third time, and for the third time Colubra whispered, "Come with me; thou wilt not repent it." But this time he awoke before she had finished speaking, and she gave him so expressive a glance that Ovid thought to himself, "Why should I not go to the Serpent-Isle? It cannot be a more desolate spot than this is; and if the serpents devour me, then there is an end of my pain for ever."

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So he manned a sail-boat with stout rowers, took provisions with him for several days, and set out across the sea.

So he manned a sail-boat with stout rowers, took provisions with him for several days, and set out across the sea. He reached the island, not without trouble, for the Black Sea has its evil moods, far worse than those of the ocean itself. The heart-sick poet was in danger of being punished for his desire to be quit of life, for it came near taking him at his word. But the boatmen were less weary of life than he, and fought bravely with the stormy elements, grumbling all the while at the enterprise.

“So much pain and danger for the sake of a desert island full of poisonous reptiles,” they would mutter, casting dark glances upon the poet. Several times was he minded to put back, for fear of a mutiny among the crew, but each time a slight movement from the little creature about his throat admonished him to pause. Once or twice he was even aware of an impatient stroke from the slender tail, and the tiny head would be raised aloft, ever gazing in the same direction. “There is the island,” muttered the sailors at last. “Where?” asked Ovid, for he could see nothing. “That strip of land there, at the river’s mouth, that is the Isle of Serpents.” As he saw the bank of sand covered with stunted bushes, the poet’s heart sank, more on account of the men’s discontent than because of the uninviting aspect of the place. To his mind the whole country was equally desolate, and whether it were somewhat more or less so was of little moment. But the little snake about his throat began fairly to dance for joy, and the lonely man felt glad of the pleasure he could give to the only creature he loved. As he stepped on shore he felt for her about his neck. What was his amazement at finding nothing there! His little Colubra was gone! Sore at heart, he thought to himself, “So that was why thou wert so fain to reach the island—only to forsake me! Thou art not a human being, yet thy deeds are even as theirs.” And, lost in bitter thought, he waded onward through the deep sand, having promised the sailors to go and seek water for them. But the wine to be found on board was far more acceptable to the men, and soon they lay wrapped in a drunken sleep. Ovid went sorrowfully on his way. “Now have I lost my all,” he sighed; and since no one saw him, he was not ashamed of the tears that filled his eyes.

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Was it the gleam of those tears or the light of the sun that blinded him? Was a midsummer madness upon him? He passed his hand over his brow again and again and closed his eyes; but each time he reopened them his bewilderment increased. For there rose before him a magic garden, with shady trees, undulating lawns, and plashing fountains. A carpet of forget-me-nots and poppies spread out on every side, and the tender petals of the flowers seemed transfused with sunlight. Marble steps led down to the sea, and smooth paths wound in and out among hedges of rose and myrtle. Wondrous birds perched among the planes and chestnut-trees, and poured out a song that no nightingale could rival. Beneath the poet’s feet, violets and mignonette gave forth well-nigh too unrestrained a perfume; and sprays of lilac and jessamine caressed his brow. The lonely exile fancied himself transported to one of the fairest gardens of Rome, and his heart beat high with joy, till it seemed ready to burst in his bosom. But what was his delight when he suddenly became aware of a crowd of beautiful maidens, gliding about among the trees and over the smooth turf chasing and embracing one another in the wildest glee, swinging upon the

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thick, tangled boughs of the hedge-roses, and tripping down the marble stairs to the sea, to bathe, and splash each other with the clear water. He saw, too, Roman matrons clad in long robes and snowy veils, whose faces seemed familiar, and men wearing the toga and mantle, who paced to and fro, as though in eager discussion over the topics of the day, just as of old in the Roman Forum. But before he could draw near them, a lovely maiden hastened up to him with a gesture of familiar greeting and took his hand, saying, "I warrant thou dost not know me in this shape; yet I am thy little Colubra! Come with me and I will show thee all." And she drew him away, through the undulating crowd of people, who were all speaking Latin and Greek, so that he could understand their every word. He seemed to recognise them too, and would fain have accosted many a one by name, for they appeared to him to be courtiers of the Emperor, whom he had been wont to see every day. But his little guide clung to his hand with slender, caressing fingers and led him on. He heard around him the names of Greek sculptors or philosophers and Roman statesmen; and though these names might once have been indifferent to him, they now made his heart leap and brought the moisture to his eyes, only because it was so sweet to hear the familiar sounds once more. Several persons approached him with an expression of delighted surprise, but Colubra motioned them all aside with an impatient stamp of her little foot, and if they did not heed, her delicate eyebrows would contract and her dark eyes flash—those eyes which were the only reminder of her serpent nature. Once, however, it is true that she thrust the tip of her rosy tongue between her lips—a little tongue as sharp as though it could prick.

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There were very few children to be seen in the magic garden, and those few, the poet noticed, crept sadly about, holding one another by the hand, and gazing with wide-open eyes at this gay, merry world, which seemed quite strange to them. No one spoke to them or took any notice of them, for here each seemed to think of nothing but his own pleasure. Ovid would have given them a kind word, but Colubra drew him past them also, and led him to an arbour hidden among the thick bushes, hard by a bubbling spring. There she fed him with the most luscious fruits, and making a cup out of a broad leaf, she fetched a draught of water for him. Then, swinging herself up on one bough and clasping her white arms round another, she began in triumphant tones: "Now, what dost think of thy little friend?"

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"I think thou art lulling me with a faëry dream."

"Nay, nay, thou art not dreaming! Thou art on the Serpent-Isle, whither all men are banished who have lied during their lifetime. Once in every thousand years the island grows green, and we can take our own shapes again, and wander in this magic garden. But no living man may look upon us save a poet, and he must be a sorrow-stricken creature; nor must he speak with any one, for should he utter the smallest lie he would be changed into a serpent for a thousand years. And it will no longer be fair here to-morrow."

"But I can surely speak without lying?"

"Yea, with thy little Colubra, or on the mainland yonder, in Tomi, where thou dost need to ask for naught but bread, water, and wood, and where it avails thee nothing to be gracious or witty, since none would understand thee; but amid this company thou wouldst be tempted to speak as they do, and then I would not stand warranty for thee!"

"But I see statesmen here, high officials, artists and philosophers, matrons who are held in esteem, and even little children."

With a pitying smile she replied, "All these spoke untruths while they lived; and because even in the under-world they and their false tongues are dreaded, they have been sent here on to this island, where they can do no harm, or at least only hiss, and strangle one another. It is saddest of all for the children, because they are such strangers here, and belong to no one, neither are they remembered by any earthly friends. Even this festive day is sad for them, since it makes them feel lonelier than ever. This evening the old boatman, Charon, will sail to the shore of the island, and those who have spoken nothing but the truth during the last thousand years he will suffer to enter his boat, and to journey with him to the under-world. But thou must not await that moment, for then everything will be changed. I, truly, am privileged, for I may stay with thee, and thou art safe on the island, because thou art doing penance enough in thy lifetime."

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"But thou—what hast thou done?" asked the poet.

"I?" The maiden blushed, and springing from the bough, answered carelessly, "I suppose I lied like the rest." And she drew him hastily away to join a group of dancing maidens. Yet, with a look round at him, she laid her finger on her lip.

It was high time, for an ancient dame approached Ovid with a friendly grimace and began—"Why, see! our great poet! Is he too, like us, banished from the earth and the under-world alike? Poor Ovid, art thou thyself metamorphosed? What a trick they have played us clever people, have they not? Were we to blame for being wiser than the rest? And thy sweet companion! I have known and loved her this long, long while."

"Thou liest!" cried Colubra, beside herself.

In the twinkling of an eye the old dame was changed into a huge snake, which darted hissing upon the young girl, coiled round her, and would surely have throttled her, had not Ovid used all his strength to wrestle with the noxious creature, and tearing it off, cast it far away from them. The maiden kissed his hands in a passion of gratitude, and the dancers crowned him with roses and myrtle. Presently a little boy ran up to him and cried in pleading tones—

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"Take me away with thee; oh! take me away, and I will be as truthful as the sunbeams and as transparent as the clearest brook. Only take me with thee. I have seen that thou art a hero, and I—I was once a hero too; I was so strong that all my playmates feared to feel my fists!" While he yet spoke a little sharp, forked tongue shot out between his rosy lips, and before the poet's very eyes he was changed into a tiny slow-worm, that wound itself about his feet.



Presently a little boy ran up to him and cried in pleading tones, "Take me away with thee."

"And canst thou not speak truth for one hour, thou miserable little worm?" cried Colubra angrily. Yet Ovid looked compassionately upon the tiny snake, and did not move for a long time, for fear of hurting it.

But his friend was in haste to draw him from the spot: "Dost thou not see the sun is setting? Methinks I already hear the keel of Charon's boat rushing through the smooth water. Thou must away from here. The reality here is ugly, terribly ugly. Thou shalt only keep the memory of the beautiful dream."

Still Ovid lingered. He plucked blossoms and threw them to the laughing girls; he stood gazing out over the sea, that was now bathed in a flood of purple and golden light. But presently, like the very night itself, a ship with dusky sails moved silently towards the shore, spreading darkness around it as it came. The ship was large, but only one boatman stood therein, an old man with snowy beard and sunken eyes. His bony hands held a huge pole, with which he steered the ship, till he brought its keel grating upon the shore. Now he raised his pole aloft, so that the trickling water-drops shone like pure gold in the last rays of sunshine.

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"Come," whispered Colubra, growing pale. But Ovid stood as though spell-bound. Charon raised his pole again and smote it against the trees with a sound like thunder. Then, behold, all the forms that moved upon the island pressed toward the ship and held out imploring hands. But Charon asked in deep, dread tones: "Who hath spoken the truth these thousand years?"

"I!—I!" came the answer from every side; but all who spoke the word were instantly changed into serpents.

"I," cried a wondrously beautiful woman, forcing her way through the mass of writhing reptiles, her white veil shining as it floated in the twilight air—"I have kept silence for a thousand years, that I might rejoin my seven children in the Elysian fields. I will go to my children!" And with this cry she sped over the sand into the ship.

"I," said Colubra quite low.

"Thou?" asked Ovid sadly. "Then must I lose thee?"

Colubra looked at the poet and then at the ship.

"If I could but remain a maiden, I would love thee only, and belong to no other."

"O Colubra, thou liest! Keep silence!"

But he had scarcely spoken the words ere she was changed into the same little snake as of old.

Now the keel grated on the sand once again and Charon pushed off from the shore. And lo! the trees came crashing down, the flowers turned to dust, and the grass withered; while far, far away Charon's white beard and the woman's waving white veil shone out in the moonlight. But upon the sandy shore and among the stunted, thorny bushes only the smooth, gleaming serpent-forms crawled and writhed. Then horror fell upon Ovid, and he hastened towards his own boat. With the cry of "Serpents!" he awakened the sleeping men, who rubbed their eyes, muttering discontentedly, "For this we came hither, then—to see serpents!" "Away now, away!" cried Ovid, who, for the horror that was upon him, had well-nigh forgotten his little friend. But as they were pushing off he remembered her, and called aloud: "Colubra! my faithful little Colubra!" Then a faint, very faint sound of laughter smote his ear, and something wound itself caressingly about his neck, and two eyes gazed steadily up into his in the clear moonlight. The sailors thought their master had taken leave of his wits, for he spoke no more, save to murmur from time to time, "A thousand years!—and for me!" while he stroked something which shone round his throat, and which they took to be a jewel.

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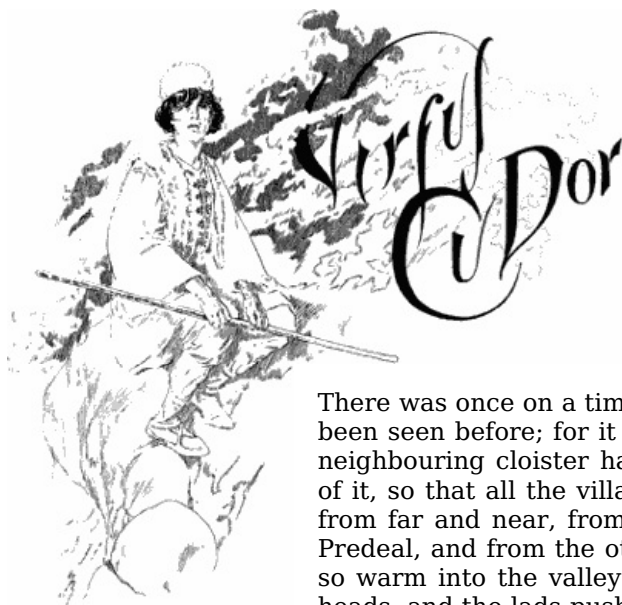
But, laughing softly once more, Colubra hissed into his ear, "Be not over vain, my soft-hearted poet. Not for thee alone did I give way to lying. For I found my lost lover again, yonder among the serpents, and a serpent he must remain. Yea—and I will remain even as my beloved is, until we can belong to one another."

Since that day the Serpent-Isle has been green and lovely once again, and only once, but no one was there to see it. Ah, if one could but be a poet, and alive in the year 2000!

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There was once on a time a *hora*^[2] at Sinaia, the like of which had never been seen before; for it was upon a great holiday, and the monks in the neighbouring cloister had distributed food to every one, heaping bowls of it, so that all the villagers had eaten their fill. The folk had gathered from far and near, from Isvor and Poana Zapului, from Comarnic and Predeal, and from the other side of the mountains. The sun shone down so warm into the valley that the maidens took the kerchiefs from their heads, and the lads pushed their flower-bedecked hats from their brows, so hot had the dancing made them. The mothers stood round about upon the green, suckling their children; their shimmering veils showed afar off, as white and soft as spring blossoms.

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What a stamping and shouting there were amid the merry dancers! The maidens seemed to hover in the air, as though their dainty feet, peeping out from the narrow petticoat, never touched the ground. Their shifts were gaily and richly embroidered, and glittered with gold, like the coins that hung on their necklets. The dance moved on, in circles both great and small; ceaselessly it moved, to the ceaseless music of the lute-players, like the pulsation of a vein, or an undulating wave. A little to one side, a handsome shepherd stood leaning upon his staff and watched the *hora* with his dark eyes, dark as blackberries. His form was slender, like a young pine-tree; his hair fell in black locks upon his shoulders from under his cap of white lambskin. His shirt was grey, fastened about the hips with a broad leather girdle, and he wore sandals upon his feet. Only for a moment had his eyes glanced uncertainly around; now they had discovered what they sought, and their sparkling gaze was fixed upon a maiden, who did not seem to notice him at all. The maiden was fair—fair as the most beautiful flower; nay, lovelier far than the gentian or the Alpine rose, more delicate than the edelweiss. In each of her eyes shone two points of light, one in the black pupil and the other in the brown circle surrounding it. Her teeth flashed white every time the coral lips parted; her hair was as black as the abyss from whose depths a gleam of water shoots up, and the wreath of flowers upon her head did not fade; it was as though she gave it freshness and life. Such a slender body she had, one might have thought a man could break it with a turn of his hand; and yet the people told tales of her wondrous strength. Yes, Irina was

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fair, very fair, and Jonel, the young shepherd, gazed upon her ceaselessly. At last he too drew near the circle and grasped her hand. The maidens looked at one another and laughed, and Irina grew crimson. Now of a sudden the lute-players stopped upon a shrill, high note, the lads each turned their partners round under their arms and once about, and then Jonel drew Irina's hand downwards with a firm grasp. There was deep significance in this, but Irina only shrugged her shoulders and laughed.



A little to one side, a handsome shepherd stood leaning upon his staff.

"Irina," he whispered, "dost thou see the golden leaves on yonder beech? It is time—I must go down with my sheep into the valley, down into the Baragan, perhaps as far as the Dobrudgea, and I shall see thee no more till spring-time. Give me a good word, that my heart may have no cause to tremble when I think of thee looking upon the other lads!"

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"What wouldst have me say? Thou dost not love me truly, and I shall soon be forgotten."

"I will die ere I forget thee, Irina."

"These be but words—these I do not believe."

"What must I do, then, that thou mayst believe me?"

Irina's eyes sparkled as she gave him a sidelong glance and answered, "That which thou canst never do."

"I can do anything," said Jonel slowly, as though he scarcely knew that he spoke.

"Nay, thou canst not bide without thy sheep; thou wouldst sooner do without me than them."

"Without my sheep," repeated Jonel, and sighed.

"Dost see," laughed Irina, "the only thing which I require of thee, that thou shouldst stay on yonder mountain-top without thy sheep, that thou canst not do! Words, nought but words!"

"And what if I do it?" said Jonel. He grew pale and clenched his teeth as he spoke.

The youths and maidens had gathered about the pair and were listening. "Do it not!" "Do it!" cried one and another.

Then an old shepherd with silver locks and overhanging brows laid his hand on Jonel's shoulder.

"Let the maidens be," he said roughly; "they will but break thy heart and then laugh thee to scorn. Dost thou not know that the shepherd who forsakes his sheep must die?" He shook his clenched fist at Irina: "And thou dost think, because thou art fair, that thou canst dare all, and that nothing shall quell thy mischievous spirit? But the evil thou dost work, to thine own self dost thou work it!"

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Irina did but laugh again. "He need not go," said she, "nor do I need him either." And turning, she ran off to drink from the spring that rises beside the cloister.

Jonel would listen to no one, but with pale cheeks and set mouth took his way toward the mountain. He passed Irina by, and only made a gesture of farewell to her with his hand.

"Do it not!" she called after him, and laughed with the other maidens. And the Pelesch stream, as it rushed by, re-echoed the words, "Do it not! do it not!" But Jonel did not hear it, and went on climbing higher and higher in the noontide sun, over the smooth uplands, beneath the giant pines—whose trunks six men can scarcely span—and through the shady beech-woods, up to the shepherd's hut round which his flock was lying, and whence his dogs ran forth to meet him, barking for joy. He passed his hand caressingly over their rough coats, and then called his "Mioritza," or the ewe that led his flock. "Brr, brr, Oitza,"^[3] he called; "brr, come hither." She

came trotting up with her little lamb, and suffered him to thrust the carnation that he had stolen from Irina into her fleece. Then he begged the other shepherds to take his flock with them, saying that he would follow later, but must first accomplish a vow that he had taken. They all looked at him in wonder. "And if I return no more," he ended, "ye shall say that Yearning hath bidden me to the marriage-feast."

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He took his Alp-horn in his hand, and climbed on and on to the very summit of the mountain, whence he could look away across the Danube to the Balkans. There he stood still, and putting his horn to his lips, sent forth a wailing note whose echoes spread far around. But at the call his faithful dog rushed in pursuit, and was soon springing round him, whining for joy; then, seizing his master's shirt between his teeth, he tried to drag him away toward the valley, so that Jonel scarce knew how to resist, and was obliged at last, with tears in his eyes, to speak roughly to the poor beast and drive him away with stones. And now he had turned away his last friend, and was alone in those desolate mountain wilds. Two eagles circled in the air beneath him; save for this, all was motionless and silent.

He stretched himself upon the turf and sighed so deeply that his breast seemed nigh to bursting. At last he fell asleep, from sheer heart-ache and longing. When he awoke the clouds were rolling above his head and gathering nearer and nearer; first they moved rapidly, then a sudden calm seemed to fall upon them, and finally they closed about him in a mist so dense that he could not see one step before his face. All at once they appeared to take distinct form, and to be gliding round him in the likeness of wondrously beautiful women, clad in shimmering, snow-white garments, and holding one another by the hand. He rubbed his eyes, for he thought he still dreamed; but presently he heard that they were singing, a song so soft and low that it sounded as from afar off; and now they stretched lily-white arms towards him, while from every side came the cry, "Thou goodly youth, be mine, be mine! Come with me!"

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From every side came the cry, "Thou goodly youth, be mine! Come with me!"

But he shook his head.

"Do not despise us," cried one; "we will give thee such happiness as shall make thee forget the valley for ever!" She parted the mist with her hand, and there appeared before him a mountain meadow, carpeted with flowers as he had never seen one before, and upon the meadow stood a shepherd's hut built of rose-leaves, and beside it was a spring, whose pearly drops gushed out over the fresh green moss.

"Come, we will dwell there together!" called the fair one in silvery tones. "Nay, come to me!" cried another, and before his very eyes she built out of the mist a house that shone like a rainbow when the sunbeams fell upon it. Inside it was as downy as though floor and walls alike were of the softest wool; from the roof fell rainbow drops, and no sooner did they touch the earth than grass and flowers sprang up there. "We will dwell here," cried the lovely maiden. "See, I will adorn thee, even as I am adorned;" and she cast wreaths and chains of the glittering drops about his head and his neck. But he shook them off again. "One only may deck me," he said, with a

darkening brow; "only my bride."

"Then I will be thy bride!" exclaimed a third maiden. "See, here is my dower!" And rolling the mist into balls, she made sheep of it, ever more and more sheep, till the whole mountain—nay, all the mountains and the sky itself were full of them. They were dazzling white, with silver and gold bells about their necks, and everywhere fresh green sprang up beneath their feet. For a moment the face of the lonely shepherd cleared, but anon he waved the tempting picture aside. "I have but one flock," he said, "my own, and I desire no other."

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Then the mist grew thicker and darker again; he was soon surrounded by black clouds once more, and from their midst the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled dreadful and near. And in the thunder a voice spoke: "Rash son of Earth, thou that hast dared despise us, to destruction art thou doomed!" Then a fresh peal of thunder seemed to rend the very mountain, and as it rolled on toward the valley, snowflakes began to fall around Jonel, first lightly, then thicker and thicker, till all the mountain-top was covered, and his cloak, his hair and his eyebrows were frosted over. And, 'mid the soft patter of the descending snow, the sweet voices rang out again in rich harmony, the sound of shepherds' pipes and Alpine horns mingled with their song, and a palace built by unseen hands rose before him—a palace of snow so dazzling in its radiance that now and again he had to shield his eyes from it. And lo! when he looked up, the moon and the stars had assembled in the palace, and illuminated it so that the walls shone quite transparent. The moon sat enthroned on high upon a downy couch and watched the stars, that were holding one another by the hand and dancing a *hora*. The blacker the heavens became, the more stars flocked into the palace, and whenever the moon beckoned, another little star left the sky and hurried in. There were quite tiny stars, like children, that rolled about with one another, and laughed and played at the feet of the moon. Others marched in majestically, wearing a long train—a train as long as the whole Bucegi, that swept over all the mountain-tops and was borne by a host of little stars, all in shining dresses and decked with wreaths and crowns of wondrous brightness. The gates of the palace opened wider of their own accord as these mighty stars appeared. And one of these commanded the moon to come down from her seat and do obeisance. Then that star beckoned to Jonel and said, "Come, child of man, be thou my consort; with me thou shalt range over the universe, my little stars shall be thy servants, and thou thyself shalt bathe, a shining star, in a flood of radiance!"

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Jonel, without knowing it, had drawn close to the gateway, and was listening to these entrancing tones, while the other stars all sang together in soft accompaniment. Then the moon raised her head and looked at him, and she was so like Irina that Jonel clutched at his heart and cried out, "Nay, were the whole world at my feet, I would but offer it to Irina!"

Then there arose a rustling, roaring sound, that ended in a fearful crash—the stars swept by towards heaven, in an endless, mighty train—the palace fell, burying Jonel in its ruins—and the moon gazed down pale and sad upon the desolate snow-drifts.

But the dwarfs, who had heard the fearful crash overhead, now climbed painfully forth from the recesses of the mountain to see whether their roof were in danger. And so they discovered the vast heap of precious stones of which the palace had been built, and began in great glee to collect this costly treasure, and to drag it down into the fastnesses of the mountain, where they heaped it up in their mighty vaults. Thus they came upon poor Jonel, and since there was still some life left in him, and he was so fair to look upon—far more so, certainly, than any of themselves—they dragged him down too, with much trouble, and laid him upon a couch of their softest moss. They drew water from both hot and cold springs, washed and bathed him, and then carried him to the great underground lake that feeds all earthly springs. After they had plunged him once into those waters he awoke healed of all pain, and looked about him in astonishment.

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"Where am I?" he exclaimed at last. And well might he be amazed. For above him vaults of shimmering rock rose to giddy heights and were lost in darkness; and at his feet a lake stretched forth, so far, so far, that it seemed as though it must fill up the whole earth within, and it too was lost in dark distance. All around thousands of gnomes were standing, running, or climbing; they wore long beards, and carried lights, some in their girdles, some upon their heads. Countless hosts of them were busy carrying jewels to the lake, washing them in its water—whereby their radiance was greatly enhanced—and storing and arranging them in chambers or upon heaps. Many of the gnomes came in upon rafts, bringing treasure of hitherto unknown stones with them; others loaded up rafts for a far voyage and pushed off from shore.

There was such a stir and din of lights and voices in the great vault that Jonel was fairly bewildered. Yet all seemed to understand their business quite clearly, save those who surrounded him, and they did not appear to know what they should do with him. But a sudden longing seized him to journey away into the unknown, dark distance, and he hurried towards a raft that was just about to put off. Then there arose from the waves a beautiful woman; she was as like to Irina as though she had been her sister, and she stretched out her arms towards Jonel. With a great cry of "Irina!" he would have flung himself down to her, but that twenty strong arms held him back, and twenty others as strong began to rain blows upon him. He made resistance, for the beautiful woman still beckoned to him from the water; but his captors would not let go their hold, and even began to stone him in their anger.

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Then on a sudden there appeared before him a dwarf who wore a crown upon his head, and who, commanding the others to desist, said, "Thou art mistaken, Jonel; thy bride is not here; she waits for thee in the valley. This is my appointed bride, and for her I have tarried many a long year." At this an angry look, that yet only enhanced her charm, crossed the fair woman's face, and with a

threatening gesture she dived beneath the waves.

The little king sighed, and Jonel sighed, and all the dwarfs, being good, faithful subjects, sighed too; yet they still held their stones in readiness, lest perchance Jonel should be condemned to die. But the king gazed pityingly at the goodly shepherd-lad, and bade his people wash him once more in the waters of the healing spring, since he was bleeding from many wounds. With youth and beauty thus renewed, he was escorted, by the king's orders, to the mountain-top where they had found him, and as the little monarch bade him farewell he added, "Thou art surely to blame, Jonel; thou hast forgotten thy duty for the sake of a fair woman. Thy faithfulness to her is beautiful and great, but thine unfaithfulness to thy duty is greater; and though I may understand the feeling that overmastered thee, I cannot avert the punishment that awaits thee."

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With a heavy heart did Jonel take his stand once more upon the lonely peak, around which the storm was still raging.

Its violence increased with every moment, as though it would fain have cast down the solitary mortal from the height whereon he stood, to dash him into a thousand pieces. Jonel took firm hold of a projection in the rock, and glanced wildly about him, expecting to see new enemies, new dangers and temptations, rise up on every side. He felt as though the storm were crushing him to the earth, as though it were tearing and dragging at his heart, as though he were dying of his agony and grief. He clung yet more closely to the rock, that seemed to reel beneath the pressure.

And amid the raging and the din round about him he caught sounds, now as of many voices, and again as of one voice alone, calling, enticing, threatening; then there was a blare of trumpets, that seemed to cleave his very brain; and suddenly his love for Irina changed into bitter, burning hate, since it was she who with laughing lips had sent him to his death. Yea, he would wait out his time here, unshaken to the end; but in spring he would go down and take leave of her with scorn, for ever! No woman should possess his heart; that should be for his flock alone, the flock he had shamefully forsaken.

Then there rang forth from the rock a deep and mighty voice: "Nay, lad! thou art mine, in my power, irrevocably and for ever!" and in a moment the rock changed into a giant woman's form, that embraced Jonel with stony arms and kissed him with lips of stone. In horror he strove to free himself from her, and could not. "Who art thou?" he cried. "Have all the powers of hell conspired together against me? Who art thou—unless thou be Velva?"

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But the woman had turned to rock again, and through the storm these words echoed: "I am the Spirit of Yearning, and thou art mine—mine the last lips thou shalt ever kiss."

Then a great silence fell upon the place, and the sun broke forth from behind the clouds. It shone upon a pale man, who stood leaning upon his Alpine horn and gazing into the valley, and far away to the Danube. He neither sighed nor moved, and the beating of his heart did not stir his arms, which were folded upon his breast.

Save for the languid motion of his eyelids no one could have told that he still lived. Anon the surrounding world began to awake to life. Ice and snow melted and ran down in streams to the valley, while young green crept forth upon the spots the snow had covered. But Jonel never moved. The forest shook off its withered leaves and the new buds began to swell. But Jonel never seemed to heed them. Up the mountain slopes came the voices of twittering birds, and the sound of the woodland streams rushing on under the warm rain. But Jonel did not hear. It seemed as though all things living had drawn near to awaken him, yet in vain; he only gazed forth toward the Danube, as though he were turned to stone. Then all at once his face awoke to life, his eyes shone, a faint colour came upon his cheek, and with open arms and outstretched neck, he stood listening as the sound of barking dogs and tinkling bells drew nearer. Now he could plainly see the white fleeces of his flock, and he put his horn to his lips to sound a welcome. But even as he did so he clutched at his heart, and wailing forth the words "I die!" he sank upon the earth.

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In vain did his dogs lick him lovingly on hands and face, in vain did his *mioritza* stand bleating beside him and his fellow-shepherds call him by name; he lay still, with a happy smile upon his wan face, and gave answer to none. The Alpine horn, whose voice his breath had so lately stirred, lay broken beside him, and nought around him bore witness to the battles the young warrior had fought. They buried him where he lay, and named the mountain *Virful cu Dor*—"the Peak of Yearning." Often have I been up there and seen his grave, and the sheep love to browse upon it still.

IV FURNICA

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Viorica

There was once a beautiful maiden, Viorica by name; she had hair like gold, and eyes like the blue sky, and cheeks like carnations, and lips like cherries, and her body was as lithe as the rushes that sway by the riverside. All men rejoiced when they beheld this fair maiden, yet not so much on account of her beauty as because of her wondrous diligence. When she went to the spring with her pitcher on her head she carried her distaff in her girdle and spun the while. She could weave too, and embroider like a fairy. Her shifts were the finest in the whole village, wrought with black and red stitches, and with wide seams of broidery on the shoulders. She had adorned her petticoat, and even her Sunday hose, with flowers wrought in the same way. In short, it seemed as

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though the little hands could never rest; in field and meadow she did as much work as in the house; and all the lads turned their eyes upon the fair Viorica, who should one day be such a notable housewife. But she never turned her eyes toward them; she would hear no talk of marriage; there was plenty of time for that, she said, and she had to care for her old mother. Thereupon the mother would bend her brows, and say that, for her part, she thought a stalwart son-in-law would be but a prop the more. But this troubled the little daughter, who would ask whether she were of no more use at all, that the mother should be so set upon having a man into the house.

"The men do but make a deal more work for us," said she; "for we must spin and stitch and weave for them as well as ourselves, and then we never find time to get the field-labor done."

Then the mother would sigh, and think of her dead son, for whom she had made so many fine linen shirts, and washed them so dazzlingly white that all the village maidens gazed their eyes out, looking after him. It had never been too much trouble for her—but then, what will not a mother do, indeed, and never be weary!

The hour came when Viorica had to own that her mother had been right to wish for a son-in-law, even as though something had warned her that she was not much longer for this world. She began to fail, and all her daughter's love was powerless to hold her upon earth. The fair maiden had to close the beloved eyes; and now she was all alone in the little house. For the first time, her hands lay idle in her lap. For whom, indeed, should she work now? There was no one left to her.

One day, as she sat upon her threshold and gazed sadly forth, she saw something long and black moving across the ground towards her; and, behold! it was an endless procession of ants. No one could have told whence the creeping host had travelled, it reached so far into the distance. But now it halted, forming into a mighty circle round about Viorica, and one or two of the ants stepped forth and spoke thus:

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"Well do we know thee, Viorica, and oft have we admired thy industry, which we may liken to our own; and that is a thing we seldom notice among mortal men. We know, too, that thou art now alone in the world, and so we pray thee to go hence with us and be our Queen. We will build thee a palace, finer and larger than the largest house thou hast ever seen. Only one thing thou must promise—that thou wilt never return to dwell among men, but stay with us faithfully all thy life long."

"I will stay with you gladly," replied Viorica, "for I have nothing more to hold me here except my mother's grave; but that I must still visit, and bring flowers, wine, and cake to it, and pray there for her soul."

"Thou shalt visit thy mother's grave; only thou must speak with no man on the way, else wilt thou be unfaithful to us, and our revenge shall be terrible."

So Viorica went forth with the ants, a far, far way, until they reached the spot that seemed most fitting for the building of her palace. Then Viorica saw how far the ants surpassed her in skill. How could she have raised up such a building in so short a time? There were galleries, one above another, leading into spacious halls, and farther yet, into the innermost recesses where the pupæ, or infant ants, dwelt, that were carried out whenever the sun shone, and brought quickly under shelter again as often as there was a threatening of rain. The chambers were daintily decked with the petals of flowers, fastened on to the walls with pine needles; and Viorica learnt to spin cobwebs, out of which canopies and coverlets were fashioned. Higher and higher grew the building, but the apartment that was prepared for Viorica was more beautiful than any vision of her dreams. Many galleries led to it, so that she could hold communication with all her subjects with the greatest rapidity. The floors of these galleries were laid over with poppy-leaves, so that the feet of the Queen should rest on nothing but purple. The doors were of rose-leaves, and the hinges were spiders' threads, so that they could open and shut noiselessly. The floor of the room was covered with a thick velvety carpet of edelweiss, into which Viorica's rosy feet sank softly down; for she needed to wear no shoes here, they would have been far too clumsy, and

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would have trodden the flower-carpets to pieces. The walls were hung with a tapestry cunningly woven of carnations, lilies of the valley, and forget-me-nots, and these flowers were constantly renewed, so that their freshness and perfume were always entrancing. The ceiling had a tent-like covering of lily-leaves stretched across it. The bed had taken the diligent little ants many weeks to prepare; it was all made of pollen, the softest they could find, and a cobweb of Viorica's spinning was spread over it. When she lay there asleep she was so lovely that the stars would have fallen from heaven, could they have seen her. But the ants had built her room in the most secret recesses of the palace, and guarded their beloved Queen jealously and well; even they themselves scarcely dared to look upon her in her sleep.

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Life in the ant-hill could scarce have been made happier or fairer than it was. One and all, they took a pride in doing the most they could, and trying to surpass each other in pleasing their industrious Queen. They were as quick as lightning in carrying out her every command; for she never gave too many orders at once, and never unreasonable ones; but her gentle voice sounded ever as though it were but giving some friendly advice or opinion, and her eyes expressed her thanks in a sunny glance. The ants often declared that they had the sunshine dwelling within their house, and exulted over their good fortune. They had made a special terrace for Viorica, where she could enjoy air and sunlight when her room grew too confined; and from thence she could observe the progress of the building, which was already as high as many a mountain. One day she sat in her room embroidering a dress, upon which she had sewn butterflies' wings with the threads from a silkworm that the ants had brought in for her. None but her dainty fingers could have accomplished such a task. All on a sudden there was a tumult round about her mountain; the sound of voices rang forth, and in a moment all her little kingdom was thrown into alarm, and her subjects came breathlessly crowding about their Queen and crying, "They are overthrowing our house; evil men are trampling it down. Two, nay, three galleries have fallen in, and the next is threatened. What shall we do?"

"Is that all?" asked Viorica calmly. "I will bid them stay their course, and in a few days the galleries will be built up again." She hurried through the labyrinth of galleries, and appeared suddenly upon her terrace. Looking down, she beheld a splendid youth, who had just dismounted from his horse, and was engaged with some of his followers in turning up the ant-hill with sword and lance. But when she appeared they all stopped short, and the noble youth stood shielding his dazzled eyes with his hand as he gazed upon the radiant figure in its shining draperies. Viorica's golden hair fell in waves to her very feet, a delicate colour flooded her cheeks, and her eyes shone like stars. She dropped them, indeed, a moment before the young man's glance; but soon she raised them again, and from her rosy mouth her voice came ringing forth—

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"Who are ye that have laid such rude hands upon my kingdom?"

"Forgive, fairest lady!" cried the youth, "and as surely as I am a knight and a king's son, I will henceforth be thy most zealous defender! How could I guess that a fairy—nay, a goddess—reigned over this kingdom?"

"I thank thee," answered Viorica. "I need no other service save that of my faithful subjects; and all I ask is, that no foot of mortal man shall intrude upon my kingdom."

With these words she disappeared as though the mountain had swallowed her up, and those outside could not see how hosts of ants were kissing her feet and escorting her back in triumph to her chamber, where she took up her work once more as calmly as though nothing had happened. And outside, there, before the mountain, the king's son stood as though in a dream, and for hours could not be prevailed upon to remount his horse. He still kept hoping that the beautiful Queen would appear again—even though it were with angry word and glance, he would at least see her once more! But he only saw ants and yet more ants, in an endless stream, busying themselves with all diligence in repairing the mischief that his youthful thoughtlessness had occasioned. He could have crushed them under foot in his anger and impatience, for they seemed not to understand, or perhaps not even to hear, his questions, and ran quite boldly in front of him, in their new-found sense of security. At last he dejectedly mounted his steed, and so, plotting and planning how he might win the loveliest maid his eyes had ever beheld, he rode on through the forest till nightfall, to the great discontent of his followers, who consigned both ant-hill and maiden to the devil, as they thought of the supper-table and the bumpers of wine that had long been awaiting them.

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Viorica had gone to rest later than any of her subjects. It was her wont to visit the nurseries herself, to see to the infants and feel if their little beds were soft enough; so she glided about, lifting one flower-curtain after another, with a fire-fly clinging to her finger-tips, and looked tenderly after the little brood. Now she went back into her room, and dismissed all the fire-flies, who had been lighting her about her work for many hours. She only kept one little glow-worm beside her while she undressed. She was used to fall at once into the deepest and quietest sleep, but to-night she tossed restlessly to and fro, twisting her hair about her fingers, sitting up and then lying down again, and all the time feeling so hot—oh, so hot! Never before had she been sensible of a lack of air in her kingdom, but now she would gladly have hurried forth, only that she feared to be heard and to corrupt others by her bad example. Had she not already, though under much pressure from the others, been obliged to pass many a harsh sentence, to banish some ants from her jurisdiction, because they had indulged in forbidden wanderings—nay, even to condemn some to capital punishment, and, with a bleeding heart, to see them ruthlessly stung to death?

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The next morning she was up earlier than any of the rest, and gave them a surprise by showing

them one of the galleries that she had built up all alone.

Doubtless she herself did not know that whilst doing so she had cast several glances towards the forest, and had even stood listening for a few moments.

She was scarcely back in her chamber again before some of the ants hurried to her in terror, crying, "The bad man who came yesterday has returned, and is riding round our hill!"

"Let him be," replied Viorica, the Queen, quite calmly; "he will do us no more harm." But the heart of Viorica, the lovely maiden, beat so fast that she could scarce draw breath.

A wondrous unrest had come over her; she roamed about far more than was her wont; she was always thinking that the baby-ants were not enough in the sunshine, and carrying them out herself, only to bring them in again as quickly; and she often gave contradictory orders. The ants could not tell what had befallen her, and took twice the pains to do all their tasks quickly and well. They surprised her with a splendid new vaulted hall, too; but she gazed at it with an abstracted air and praised it but scantily. The sound of horses' hoofs was now constantly heard, both late and early, round about the mountain; but for many days Viorica never showed herself. A desperate yearning for the companionship of human beings, which she had never yet felt, now seized upon her. She thought of her native village, of the Hora, of her little house, of her mother, and of her mother's grave, which she had never again visited.

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After a few days she announced to her subjects that she thought of making a pilgrimage to her mother's grave, and at this the ants inquired, in alarm, whether she were no longer happy with them, since she had begun to think of her home again.

"Nay," replied Viorica, "I would go for a few hours only, and be back among you before nightfall."

She refused all escort, but one or two of the ants followed her, unobserved, afar off. Everything looked greatly changed to her, and she thought she must have been away a long time. She began to reckon how long it could have taken the ants to build the great mountain wherein they dwelt, and said to herself that it must have been years. Her mother's grave was no longer to be found, the spot was so overgrown with grass and weeds, and Viorica wandered about the churchyard weeping, since here too she was nought but a stranger. Evening drew on, and still Viorica was seeking for the grave she could not find. Then close beside her she heard the voice of the King's son. She would have fled, but he held her fast and spoke to her of his mighty love, with such gentle and moving words that she stood still with bowed head, listening to him. It was so sweet to hear a human voice once more, and to hear it speak of love and friendship. Not until the night had grown quite dark did she remember that she was no forlorn orphan, but a Queen forgetful of her duties, and that the ants had forbidden her to hold any further converse with mankind. Then she broke away and fled in haste from the King's son; but he pursued her, with caressing words, to the very foot of her mountain. Here she prayed and implored him to leave her, but he would only consent upon her promising to meet him again the following evening.

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She glided noiselessly in, feeling her way along the galleries, and looking fearfully behind her, for she fancied she heard the sound of hurriedly tripping feet and whispering voices all around. No doubt it was but the anxious beating of her heart, for as soon as she stood still all was silence. At last she reached her chamber and sank in exhaustion upon her couch, but no soothing sleep fell on her eyelids. She felt that she had broken her promise; and who would now hold her in respect, since her word was no longer sacred? She tossed uneasily to and fro; her pride revolted against any secrecy, and yet she knew the ants only too well—their implacable hate, their cruel punishments. Many times she raised herself on her elbow to listen, and always she seemed to hear the hurried tripping of thousands of little feet, as though the whole mountain were alive.

When she felt that morning drew near, she lifted one of the rose-leaf curtains to hurry out into the open. But what was her amazement when she found the doorway completely stopped up with pine-needles! She tried another, then a third, until she had been the round of them all. In vain—they were all filled in to the very roof. Then she called aloud, and lo! the ants appeared in hosts, creeping in through countless tiny, invisible openings.

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"I must go forth into the air," said Viorica in commanding tones.

"Nay," replied the ants, "we cannot let thee forth, or we shall lose thee."

"Do ye then obey me no more?"

"Yea, in all things, save this one. Crush us under foot in punishment if thou wilt; we are ready to die for the good of our community, and to save the honour of our Queen."

Viorica bowed her head, and tears gushed from her eyes. She implored the ants to give her back her freedom, but the stern little creatures held their peace, and all at once she found herself alone in those dark halls.

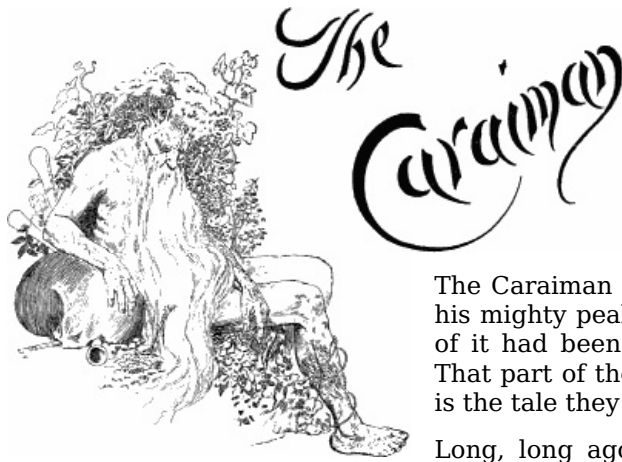
Oh, how Viorica wept and wailed and tore her beautiful hair! Then she began to try and dig an opening with her tender fingers, but all she scooped out was filled in again as quickly, so that she was fain at last to throw herself upon the ground in despair. The ants brought her the sweetest flowers, and nectar and dewdrops to quench her thirst, but all her prayers for freedom remained unanswered.

In the fear that her wailing might be heard without, the ants built their hill higher and higher, till

it was as high as the peak Virful cu Dor, and they called their mountain Furnica, or "the ant." The King's son has long since left off riding round about the mountain, but in the silence of the night one can still hear the sound of Viorica's weeping.

V THE CARAIMAN

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The Caraiman towers up, dark and threatening of aspect, with his mighty peak of rock, that looks as though a great fragment of it had been partly loosened, and were hanging in mid-air. That part of the rock is shaped like a set of bagpipes—and this is the tale they tell about it.

Long, long ago, when the sky was nearer to the earth than now, and there was more water than land, there dwelt a mighty sorcerer in the Carpathians. He was as tall as the tallest pine-tree, and he carried upon his head a whole tree with green twigs and budding branches. His beard, that was many yards long, was of moss, and so were his eyebrows. His clothing was of bark, his voice was like rolling thunder, and beneath his arm he carried a set of bagpipes, as big as a house. He could do anything he liked with his bagpipes. When he played softly, young green sprang up all round about him, as far as his eye could reach; if he blew harder, he could create living things; but when he blew fearfully loud, then such a storm arose that the mountains shook and the sea shrank back from the rocks, so that more land was left uncovered.

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Once he was attacked by some powerful enemies, but instead of having to defend himself, he merely put the bagpipes to his lips, and changed his foes into pines and beech-trees. He was never tired of playing, for it delighted his ear when the echo sent back the sound of his music to him, but still more was his eye delighted to see all grow into life around him. Then would thousands of sheep appear, on every height and from every valley, and upon the forehead of each grew a little tree, whereby the Caraiman might know which were his; and from the stones around, too, dogs sprang forth, and every one of them knew his voice. Since he had not noticed much that was good in the inhabitants of other countries, he hesitated a long while before making any human beings. Yet he came to the conclusion that children were good and loving, and he decided to people his land with children only. So he began to play the sweetest tune he had ever yet composed—and behold! children sprang up on every side, and yet more children, in endless crowds. Now you can fancy how wonderful the Caraiman's kingdom looked. Nothing but play was ever carried on there; and the little creatures toddled and rolled around in that beautiful world and were very happy. They crept under the ewes and sucked the milk from their udders; they plucked herbs and fruit and ate them; they slept on beds of moss and under overhanging rocks, and were as happy as the day was long. Their happiness crept even into their sleep, for then the Caraiman played them the loveliest airs, so that they had always beautiful dreams.

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There was never any angry word spoken in the kingdom of the Caraiman, for these children were all so sweet and joyful that they never quarrelled with one another. There was no occasion for envy or jealousy either, since each one's lot was as happy as his neighbour's. And the Caraiman took care that there should be plenty of sheep to feed the children; and with his music he always provided enough of grass and herbs, that the sheep, too, might be well nourished.

No child ever hurt itself, either; the dogs took care of that, for they carried them about and sought out the softest, mossiest spots for their playgrounds. If a child fell into the water, the dogs fetched it out; and if one were tired, a dog would take it upon his back and carry it into the cool shade to rest. In short, the children were as happy as though they had been in Paradise. They never wished for anything more, since they had never seen anything outside their little world.

There were not yet any "smart" or "ugly" clothes then; nor any fine palaces with miserable huts beside them, so that no one could look enviously at his neighbour's belongings. Sickness and death were unknown, too, in the Caraiman's country; for the creatures he made came into the world as perfect as a chick from its shell, and there was no need for any to die, since there was so much room for all. All the land which he had redeemed from the sea had to be populated, and for nothing but sheep and children there was room on it, and to spare, for many a long day.

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The children knew nothing of reading or writing; it was not necessary they should, since everything came to them of itself, and they had to take no trouble about anything. Neither did they need any further knowledge, since they were exposed to no dangers.

Yet, as they grew older, they learnt to dig out little dwellings for themselves in the ground, and to carpet them with moss, and then of a sudden they began to say, "This is mine."

But when once a child had begun to say, "This is mine," all the others wanted to say it too. Some built themselves huts like the first; but others found it much easier to nestle into those that were already made, and then, when the owners cried and complained, the unkind little conquerors laughed. Thereupon those who had been cheated of their belongings struck out with their fists, and so the first battle arose. Some ran and brought complaints to the Caraiman, who in consequence blew a mighty thunder upon his bagpipes, which frightened all the children terribly.

So they learnt for the first time to know fear; and afterwards they showed anger against the tale-bearers. In this way even strife and division entered into the Caraiman's beautiful, peaceful kingdom.

He was deeply grieved when he saw how the tiny folk in his kingdom behaved in just the same way as the grown people in other lands, and he debated how he might cure the evil. Should he blow them all away into the sea, and make a new family? But the new ones would soon be as bad as these, and then he was really too fond of his little people. Next he thought of taking away everything over which they might quarrel; but then all would become dry and barren, for it was but over a handful of earth and moss that the strife had arisen, and, in truth, only because some of the children had been industrious and others lazy. Then he bethought himself of making them presents, and gave to each sheep and dogs and a garden for his particular use. But this only made things far worse. Some planted their gardens, but others let them run wild, and then perceived that the cultivated gardens were the fairest, and that the sheep that had good pasture gave the most milk. Then the trouble became great indeed. The lazy children made a league against the others, attacked them, and took away many of their gardens. Then the industrious ones moved to a fresh spot, which soon grew fair also under their hands; or else they refused to be driven out, and long conflicts arose, in the course of which some of the children were slain. When they saw death for the first time they were greatly frightened and grieved, and swore to keep peace with one another. But all in vain—they could not stay quiet for long; so, as they were now loth to kill one another, they began to take away each other's property by stealth and with cunning. And this was far sadder to see; the Caraiman, indeed, grew so heavy of heart over it that he wept rivers of tears. They flowed down through the valley and into the sea; yet the wicked children never considered that these were the tears their kind father was weeping over them, and went on bickering and quarrelling. Thereupon the Caraiman wept ever more and more, and his tears turned to torrents and cataracts that devastated the land, and ended by changing it into one large lake, wherein countless living creatures came to their death. Then he ceased weeping, and blew a mighty wind, which left the land dry again; but now all the green growth had vanished, houses and gardens lay buried under heaps of stones, and the sheep, for lack of pasture, no longer gave any milk. Then the children cut their throats open with sharp stones, to see if the milk would not flow out in a fresh place; but instead of milk, blood gushed out, and when they had drunk that they became fierce, and were always craving for more of it. So they slew many other sheep, stealing those of their brethren, and drank blood and ate meat. Then the Caraiman said, "There must be larger animals made, or there will soon be none left!" and blew again upon his bagpipes. And behold! wild bulls came into the world, and winged horses with long scaly tails, and elephants, and serpents. The children now began to fight with all these creatures, and thereby grew very tall and strong themselves. Many of the animals allowed themselves to be tamed and made useful; but others pursued the children and killed them, and as they no longer dwelt in such peace and safety, many grievous and dangerous sicknesses appeared among them. Soon they became in all respects like the men of other lands, and the Caraiman grew more and more soured and gloomy, since all that which he had intended to use for good, had but turned to evil. His creatures, too, neither loved nor trusted him, and instead of perceiving that they themselves had wrought the harm, thought that the Caraiman had sent sorrow upon them out of wanton cruelty and sport. They would no longer listen to the bagpipes, whose sweet strains had of old been wont to delight their ears. The old giant, indeed, did not often care to play on his pipes now. He had grown weary for very sorrow, and would sleep for hours together under the shade of his eyebrows, which had grown down into his beard. But sometimes he would start up out of sleep, put the pipes to his mouth, and blow a very trumpet-blast out into the wicked world. Hence there at last arose such a raging storm that the trees ground, creaking and groaning, against one another, and caused a fire to burst out, so that soon the whole forest was in flames. Then he reached up with the tree that grew upon his head, till he touched the clouds, and shook down rain, to quench the fire. But all this while the human beings below had but one thought—how to put the bagpipes to silence for ever and ever. So they set out with lances and spears, and slings and stones, to give battle to the giant; but at the sight of them he burst into such laughter that an earthquake took place, which swallowed them all up, with their dwellings and their cattle. Then another host set out against him with pine-torches, wherewith to set his beard on fire. He did but sneeze, however, and all the torches were extinguished and their bearers fell backwards to the earth. A third host would have bound him while he slept, but he stretched his limbs, and the bonds burst, and all the men about him were crushed to atoms. Then they would have set upon him all the mighty wild beasts he had created. But he swept the air together and made thereof an endless fall of snow, that covered them over and over, and buried them deep, and turned to ice above them; so that after thousands of years, when their like was no more to be seen on earth, those beasts still lay, with fur and flesh unchanged, embedded in the ice.

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But at the sight of them he burst into such laughter—

Then they bethought themselves of getting hold of the bagpipes by stealth, and carrying them off while the giant was asleep. But he laid his head upon them, and it was so heavy that men and beasts together could not drag the pipes from under it. So at last they crept up quite softly and bored a tiny hole in the bagpipes—and lo! there arose such a storm that one could not tell earth or sea or sky apart, and scarcely anything survived of all that the Caraiman had created. But the giant awoke no more; he is still slumbering, and under his arm are the bagpipes, which sometimes begin to sound, when the storm-wind catches in them, as it hurries down the Prahova valley. If only some one could but mend the bagpipes, then the world would belong to the children once more.

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VI THE STAGS' VALLEY

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The Stags' Valley

Between the mountains Caraiman and Omul lies a wide valley shaped like a crescent. It is called *Valea Cerbului*—the Stags' Valley—though for a long time past no stags have been seen there. But the valley contains something else which time cannot do away. All along the foot of the mountain, and leaning up against it, stand a number of gigantic stone figures, with unmistakable hands and faces, not unlike statues of the ancient Egyptian gods. A strange legend is told about these figures.

In days gone by there dwelt among these mountains a race of men, proud and of mighty strength, who were feared in all the region round about, for whatever they undertook was sure of success. From the hour of their birth they lived out under the open sky, slept upon the snow, and bathed in the icy mountain-streams. They were so tall that they could climb the highest mountains in a few steps; and if they did but give a tree one single stroke, it remained crooked for all time to come. They drank the milk of winged hinds and rode upon winged stags, whose wings, however,

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only increased their speed in covering the ground, for they could not rise into the air with burdens upon their backs.

An aged, very aged King ruled over these men; he was so wise that they consulted him about everything, and obeyed him like children. It was a glorious sight when the old man, with waving white locks and beard, swept by upon his winged stag, all his men following after, like a storm-cloud, beneath whose thunder the Carpathians shook again.

There was something, however, which filled them all with deepest concern. King Briar had no son, but only one daughter—a glorious maiden, as tall as a fir-tree, as bold as a boy, and so strong that she could lead the wild winged stags three and four on one halter, without giving way a step when they reared and tore at the bridle.

The men held a great council, and came to lay their anxious thoughts before the King. "May the Great Spirit send thee yet a long, long life," said they, "but when he shall call thee down to the golden caverns below, whom are we to choose in thy stead, since thou hast no son? We would gladly choose thy daughter, and gladly would we serve her, but how can we submit a maiden to the hard test our kings have to undergo?"

The King stroked his white beard and answered: "Who knows but my child would endure the ordeal as heroically as though she were a lad? Ye can see that in all other matters she is brave and strong, and if she should choose a good and a wise mate, ye would be as happy then as ye are now. I will ask her if she will make the trial."

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King Briar clapped his hands. Then the Carpathians trembled from end to end; and presently, amid a trampling of hoofs and rustling of wings, a sound like the rushing of the storm-wind drew near.

The King's daughter stood upright upon a stag's back, clasping the golden chains that held his bit in one hand, while with the other she swung a whip, as long as a huge snake, that flashed in the air like a streak of fiery lightning. Her form seemed to reach up to the sky, and her hair fluttered about her like a thick cloud, hiding the sun at intervals. But, instead of the sun, the stars in her face shone forth, and the teeth that her laughing mouth disclosed, as she sang and shouted for glee.

The King glanced at his men with a smile, as though he would have said, "Is she enough of a lad for ye?"

At that moment she sprang to the ground, and throwing the chains to some of the bystanders, she cried, "There, take them; but there is not one of you can drive them all at once." Then kneeling before the King, she asked in gentle tones, "Didst thou call me, my father?"

"Vijelia,^[4] my child, arise and look upon these men; they have come to ask who shall be king after me. Whom thinkest thou?"

The maiden gazed earnestly at one and another, and when she had scanned every face, she turned again and examined each a second, yea, and a third time. Her face the while grew ever more anxious and grave, and more gloomy the frown that drew her heavy brows together, till the flashing eyes, in which a tear glistened, were darkened as by the shades of night.

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Then she spoke in a deep and hollow voice: "None, my father; for not one is thine equal in my eyes. But thou, in thy wisdom, hast surely chosen long since, and chosen the best."

"He whom I choose must submit to the test of which I still bear the scars on my body. Dost thou know the test, my child?"

"Yea, surely do I know it! It is a pity that I am not a lad. The test would not make me quail!"

"And what if I should treat thee as a lad?"

"Me!" A crimson flush overspread the cheeks and forehead and throat of the noble maiden, and with trembling lips she spoke:—

"I have not deserved so great an honour, and know not whether I have understanding enough; but the test I will gladly endure, if my father will make the first throw with his own hand. He shall himself consecrate me as his successor, but he must yet live for long years after, and grant me my freedom as of yore."

This speech was greeted with a tempest of applause, that thundered and re-echoed till the eagles felt the air quiver around them, and the trees swayed as though beneath the northern storm-wind. The King's daughter bent her head with a smile of acknowledgment, and thrust back the golden locks from her glowing face. The day upon which the test was to begin was now fixed, and the place for it chosen.

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The maiden gazed earnestly at one and another.

First of all, Vijelia had to stand through a whole day, without meat or drink, in the burning sun. If she showed any weakness or weariness, or ate and drank too greedily when evening came, she could not be king.

The second day she was to collect a mighty heap of stones from a certain river in the depths of the valley, and would have to perform her journey countless times before she could get together the requisite number of stones, which, on the third day, were to be cast at her. If her endurance failed beneath the stoning, she could not be king.

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The oldest man of the tribe explained all this to her, and she listened to him with a cheerful face.

The day came—a burning hot July day—and at sunrise Vijelia, clad in a snowy woollen robe, took her stand upon a neighbouring hill-top. For the first few hours she sang, as she stood there, in a full and ringing voice; but as noon drew on, her lips and throat grew so dry, she was fain to keep silence. The sun had already passed over the highest of the mountain-peaks before she even changed her weight from one foot to the other. Suddenly she heard the sound of hoofs ascending towards her, and lo! her stags appeared, and, flying around her, fanned her with a cool breeze from their wings; then her favourite hind drew near, offering her full udders for her mistress to drink from. But Vijelia, with stern voice, bade them all depart, and with drooping heads the faithful creatures slunk away to their pasture.

The hours crept slowly on, and the sun burnt so hot that the tips of Vijelia's golden locks were singed by it. But she did not stir.

When the sun was setting the men came and offered her a drink of water, but she only moistened her lips with it, and called, "Mititica!" Then the winged hind came flying up, and she took a little milk from her, refusing all other nourishment.

King Briar gazed with anxious eyes at his beautiful daughter, but she gave him a merry laugh, and said the first day had passed quickly and easily indeed. When the darkness fell she went down to the river, and plunged as many as ten times into its cool depths. Then she climbed the bank, and sitting upon a mossy stone, began to shake out the coils of her hair. The moon rose over the mountain-top and looked down upon the maiden sitting there in her heavenly beauty, and tenderly did she shed her beams upon her, so that the drops that were wrung from the golden coils glittered like silver. The moon did not know that that perfect body was to endure a cruel hail of stones, or she would have veiled her face for very sadness.

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When the second day dawned, there stood Vijelia in her short garment, as fresh and cheerful as though no fatigue could ever touch her. When the men came to fetch her down for this day's work, she was ranging over the hill upon her stag Graur, casting herself down upon his back, and playing with his wings, like a child in the cradle. But now she sprang down and dismissed the creature with a light touch of the hand; then, taking a broad, flat fragment of rock upon her shoulder, she carried it down into the valley, laid it beside the river's edge, and wading into the water, began to seek for stones, which she piled upon it as high as it would hold.

"Help me up with it on to my shoulder," said she. But none of the men could lift the weight. Then she bent down, and, laughing, threw it on to her left shoulder. Moreover, she made the men pick up the stones that had slipped off the while, and throw them on to the heap with the rest. Then she set off so fast up the hill that no one could follow her, put down her load, and ran back to the valley again without waiting to rest.

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King Briar sat watching his daughter from the heights above, and stroked his white beard in silence.

Long before the day had begun to decline, Vijelia had already collected the prescribed number of stones. She crossed her arms and stood and looked at the heap, without the smallest sign of flinching. King Briar's heart sank as he watched his child standing there, and he slept but little that night. Yet she slept, quietly and soundly, beneath a giant pine, through the branches of which the moonbeams stole to look at the beautiful sleeper, lying with her head on her arms, her lips slightly parted, in the sweetest, most childlike slumber.

When the dawn aroused her, she sought out a linen garment that she had spun and woven herself, so that she could rely upon its strength.

And thus she appeared before her people, so fair that the heart of many a one burnt within him at the thought of misusing her.

The heap of stones disappeared in a few minutes, for each man had armed himself with one. Now they formed a great circle round the maiden, who quietly gathered her hair up and fastened it in a knot.

"So that ye may not think my mantle shields me," she explained, with a smile.

The first stone sped from the hand of King Briar himself, who looked his daughter firmly and earnestly in the face as he cast it. She kissed the place on her arm where he had smitten her, and threw him a kiss with both hands. Then she stood as still as a statue beneath the hail of stones, though her anguish grew with every moment. Only once a sigh escaped her, and she crossed her hands for a moment over her breast—and the hands were so white! But she let her arms drop again directly, and only turned her head aside, looking towards the sun, that was slowly, very slowly, sinking nearer to the mountain-top, and bathed the maiden's face in a golden glow.

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On a sudden the rain of stones ceased, and all the men knelt, with lowered swords and lances, at her feet, while in solemn voices they swore faith to her—eternal faith, and never to be broken.

But she raised her hand and spoke:—

"And I swear to you to work, to fight, and to endure, with and for you, to my life's end!" Then she turned to the King and whispered low to him: "Give me thy hand, father; I am weary."

The old man cast his mantle round her, and clasping his arm about her, led her homewards. She leaned her head on his shoulder, but as she went she felt something snuffing about her ear, and there was Graur, her faithful stag.

"Ha, do thou carry me!" she cried, and kissing the beast's warm, downy nose, she sprang on his back and was out of sight in the twinkling of an eye. Graur bore her down to the river, in which she bathed for a long time, stretching and cooling her bruised limbs. She drank greedily, too, of the ice-cold water, and then came dashing homewards as merrily as though she had endured nothing.

For a while life went on again as of old, and Vijelia was once more the same untamed creature that she had ever been—wild as the storm-wind, and refusing to hear aught that concerned the affairs of government. But King Briar aged visibly, and his people besieged him with requests that he would choose a mate for his daughter, so that he might soon hope to hold a fair grandson upon his knee.

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"Whom wilt thou have for thy husband, my child?" he one day asked his daughter. "Do none of our people please thee?"

"Nay," answered Vijelia, "I cannot wed any of those who stoned me; I should always remember it, and could not give myself to him in true love. The man whom I shall love must come down from the air above, into which none belonging to us can rise up—none save our winged stags."

She had scarcely ceased speaking, when there appeared as it were a mighty cloud, descending from the heavens, and from the midst of the cloud the sound of a harp rang forth unearthly sweet. Slowly the cloud sank earthwards, and now it disclosed to view a radiant youth, his head covered with waving curls, who held in his hand a harp, that towered aloft as high as the forest trees, and was strung with golden strings, that glittered, like a rainbow, with a thousand changing hues. Now he would smite the chords with a powerful hand, and again he would only blow softly upon them, and then they sent forth such sounds as melted the very heart in one's breast.

Vijelia stood motionless, gazing up at him, and still she gazed on, as he sprang boldly to the ground, and with a thrust of his hand sent back the cloud that had brought him thither, away into the blue distance above. And now he came straight toward the maiden, and stretching out his hands to her, spoke thus:—

"I come from out the air; I am *Viscol*.^[5] Wilt thou be mine, for I am thine equal?"

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"Yea," answered the maiden, as though in a dream. "I will be thine, for all time."

But King Briar frowned, saying:

"And dost thou, indeed, love him already, my child? Have a care; for thou wilt not find happiness at his side, and he is not fitted for our people; he will ever be ranging far away over the skies and leaving thee alone, till thy men will refuse to serve thee. Child, child, it will come to a bad end, and thou wilt not be happy!"

"Happy or not, it is all alike to me, father. I cannot live without him; and I would rather be miserable with him than happy with another!"

With a deep sigh, the old King consented to her wish; but he cut short the promises and protestations of the youth with an impatient gesture of the hand.

"I will judge thee by thine actions," he said curtly.

At first all went merrily enough; now *Vijelia* would ride through the heavens upon a cloud, and again, her husband would go forth with the flying stags. But the King often heard his men complain that there was much unrest in the land, and that the stranger had better never have come.

Presently, however, *Vijelia* began to stay much at home with her father, while her husband went rushing over the world. She spoke very little, and looked far sadder than she had done upon the day of her stoning. When she was asked where her husband was, she would hang her head and answer, "I know not;" or again, if inquiry were made when he was coming back, or when he would carry her forth with him upon the clouds, still the answer was, "I know not."

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And when he did return he was rough and violent, and the more humbly and quietly his young wife behaved, the more hardly he treated her.

Often did old King Briar's beard tremble and his head droop toward the earth, whereon, indeed, he soon laid him down, saying:

"I shall never see my fair grandson now! May the Great Spirit grant thee, in him, the happiness thou hast not found for thyself!"

When he was dead, his men mourned night and day with lowered spears around his grave, for nine times nine weeks. And *Vijelia* did not cease from sighs and groans, until, in the midst of her great sorrow, a wondrous fair but exceeding tender little son was laid in her arms. Her tears rained down upon his tiny face as she gave him the name of *Zephyr*. Alas! how was he ever to rule this mighty people, and how withstand his father's harsh usage?

She held him in her arms night and day, and never left him for an hour. He lay upon her lap when she sat and pronounced sentence, or tried to smooth over quarrels with all justice and wisdom.

When *Viscol* returned his anger knew no bounds. She had to defend the fragile child like a lioness, for he would fain have dashed him to pieces against a rock. He threw the whole land into an uproar; he gave unjust judgments, and was a scourge indeed, until he dashed forth again upon his wanderings. His harp, which he had forgotten, was, however, a source of consolation and joy both to mother and child. She learnt to play dirges upon it, to which all the people listened; but it was sweeter yet when *Zephyr* breathed across the strings—then the whole air seemed to be swelling with song, and the heart in every bosom melted for delight.

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Zephyr grew dazzlingly beautiful, all the more so since his mother thought much of training and hardening him against the time of the "King-choosing," which she dreaded exceedingly for her tender boy. She would trust him now to *Gaur*, now to *Mititica*, who had to carry him for hours, and use him to their quickest pace. But in the midst of these rides *Mititica* would often kneel down and suffer him to suck a draught of her milk. *Vijelia*, too, would run races with the boy, and teach him to bend the bow and to bear heavy burdens; and, that he might become used to pain, she would smite him with rods and pelt him with stones, and if he did not laugh over it, but began to weep, she would call him coward, and after bathing him in the coldest streams, would strike him the next day yet harder, till he learnt to clench his teeth and laugh.

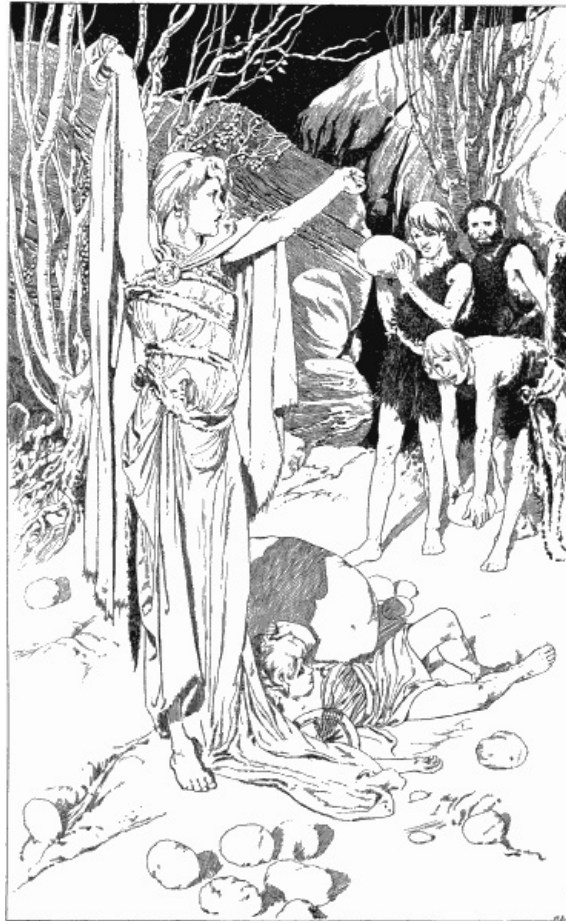
The people had such a hatred of *Viscol* that they would suffer him to enter the land no more, and shot at him as soon as he drew near upon his cloud. Some of them loved the boy for his noble mother's sake, but some bore a grudge against him, because he was so delicate and tender. But when he played upon his harp all were enchanted, and, indeed, when he stood beside the harp, his silky golden curls falling upon his shoulders, he looked like a being from another world. He could not, it is true, drive five stags at once, or bear such burdens as his mother could; but he was far stronger than she had ever dared to hope, when he reached his sixteenth year, and the men judged it was time to try him and see if he were strong enough to be king. If it should chance otherwise, they were ready to force upon *Vijelia* another husband, chosen from amongst them, whose son might be expected to prove a stalwart king.

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Zephyr bore the heat of the sun the whole day without flinching, and no one knew that all through the ensuing night he tossed to and fro in fever, while his mother watched beside him and bathed his temples. The next day he gathered the stones together, and his mother went beside him all the while, and secretly lent a helping hand. When evening came and the darkness covered

them, he sank fainting into her arms. And now dawned the day, of which the unhappy mother stood in such dread. Every stone that struck her boy's fair body smote her in the heart. Once she saw him reel, but her clear voice, ringing out in cheery encouragement, brought back the colour to his cheeks and the smile to his white lips. There were only a few more stones yet to come, when one, cast by a spiteful hand, sped forth, sharp and pointed, and struck the lad upon the temple. A wild cry burst from his mother, who flew to catch her fainting child in her arms, and kneeling down, pressed his blood-stained locks to her heart. He opened his eyes once more. "My harp—bring me the harp!" he whispered, and clasping it in his arms, he breathed out his pure soul into those chords, till the heavenly sound echoed on and on, vibrating ever further upon the air. But the poor mother rose up with fixed and terrible gaze, and lifting her arms to the clouds, she cried, "May ye then turn to stone, O ye men of stone! The Great Spirit will hear a mother's voice, that cries aloud for vengeance! Stone shall ye become, who have broken faith with me! Stone shall ye become, who have cast out the purest spirit among you!"

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But the poor mother rose up with fixed and terrible gaze, and lifting her arms to the clouds, she cried, "May ye then turn to stone!"

And behold! before her eyes the people, as they stood in a circle, were turned to stone. But she sighed so deeply that the sighs burst her bosom, and went forth in wails of sorrow to tell the world of a mother's woe, and to shake the foundations of the world, that had wrought such evil!

And the winged stags rose up into the air and disappeared for ever.

VII THE WITCH'S STRONGHOLD

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Going up the Prahova valley one cannot see "Cetatea Babei," the Witch's Castle, because it is



hidden by the Bucegi Mountain. It is a jagged peak, and looks as though it were covered with ruins. A field of eternal snow lies between it and the Jipi. In far-off times, when wolves guarded the flocks, and eagles and doves made their nests together, a proud castle stood there, and within the castle busy doings went on. From morning till night it rang with pattering, clanging, bustling sounds, and hundreds of hasty footsteps scurried to and fro therein. But at night-time a light shone forth from the tower, and the humming of a mighty wheel was heard, and above the hum of the wheel a wondrous, soft song seemed to hover, keeping time with it. Then people would glance fearfully up toward the castle and whisper: "She is spinning again!" And she who sat spinning there was the mistress of the castle, a very evil witch, to whom the mountain-dwarfs brought all the gold that they found in the depths of the earth, that she might spin threads of gold for all the brides to wear upon their

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heads on their wedding-day.^[6] The gold was unloaded in heaps in her castle, and she weighed it and chose it out—and woe to the dwarf who did not bring the required weight; he was thrust between the stem and bark of a huge tree, and squeezed until he gave up the very uttermost grain of gold; or he would be caught by the beard only in the tree, and there he might struggle and writhe as he pleased, and cry for mercy—the old witch turned a deaf ear to it all. The name of *Baba Coaja* ("Mother Bark") had been given her, perhaps because of this cruel custom of hers, perhaps because she was as hard as a stale crust of bread, and as wrinkled as the stem of an old oak. She alone understood the spinning of the golden threads, and she went on preparing them for hundreds of years in advance.

Baba Coaja had a wondrously beautiful daughter, named *Alba* ("The White One"), for she was as white as the snow that covered the mountain-tops. Her skin was like velvet, and like velvet, too, were her brown eyes, and her hair was like the gold-threads that her mother spun.

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She was always kept shut up, for Baba Coaja had plenty of work for her to do; and, besides, no one was to be allowed to see her, still less to woo her. She had to wind all the golden thread on reels, and store it up in underground cellars, ready for all those hundreds and hundreds of years to come. This work was very burdensome to the sweet maiden, because her mother would sing and mutter all sorts of evil spells and sayings as she spun, so that a portion of sorrow and heartache was already prepared for each bride, so soon as the golden threads should have rested upon her head; and Alba thought sadly of all the trouble that was being thus determined beforehand. Indeed, she once sat down herself to the great wheel, while her mother was away, and spun a length of thread into which she worked nothing but good wishes. But when Baba Coaja came home she was very wroth, and beat her daughter unmercifully, saying, as she threw the thread upon a heap with the rest: "Thou shalt never wed until thou canst tell thine own spinning apart again!"

In her heart the old witch was glad to have a pretext for keeping her daughter to herself, for it had been prophesied that Alba would be very unhappy, and would die young. The only being that she loved in the world was her beautiful child, yet, however much trouble she took to please her with fine clothes and all sorts of pretty trifles, she could not bring a shade of colour to her cheek or a smile to her eyes, for the only thing the maiden yearned after was freedom, and that was never hers. How she longed to go wandering for once beneath the trees that clothed the foot of the mountain whereon she dwelt. Up there nothing grew, save a little short grass; and the winter lasted far longer than the summer. When the wind howled round the castle, raging as though he would tear it to pieces, then her heart would grow heavy indeed; she would sit for hours before the hearth, staring into the fire, watching the sparks fly, and thinking of nothing at all. Or again, she would listen to her mother's uncanny singing, while the humming of the wheel and the howling of the storm mingled in one dreary accompaniment. And then she would wonder why she spun so much sorrow for the brides into the gold-threads—why men were not suffered to be happy and gay, out there in the beautiful sunshine, for that always looked bright and merry. But she could never make out the reason why, and would fall asleep at last from sheer thinking. The great reels of gold in the cellars all had one and the same face, yet she would play with them, and pretend they were people, and make up their histories, and try and fancy what would befall the brides that were to wear those golden threads; but as she knew nothing of the world, all her stories were very unlikely ones.

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"Mother," she asked one day, resting her chin upon her hand, "are the people in the world just as we are, thou and I—or have they other forms, and other thoughts?"

"What are the people in the world to thee? They are all very bad, and would only do thee harm if they got hold of thee."

"But a while ago a beautiful creature came up our mountain, and there sat one upon him, one who was fairer far to see than any of the little dwarfs; he had black locks, and no beard, and a purple mantle. Was not that a man?"

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The old witch was terror-stricken at this speech, and answered: "If he does but ride up here again, I will break his neck for him, and those in the valley shall never see him again!"

"Oh, mother! do not thus—he was so fair!"

"If thou dost think but once again of him, I tell thee I will lock thee in the cellar, and make thee weigh gold out night and day. As it is, thou art grown so idle in these latter times, and dost nought but sit there and ask useless questions! Hast thou not all

thy heart can desire?"

"Nay, mother; I too would fain have a beautiful creature, such as yonder man had, and sit upon it. Up here there are but sheep, and one cannot sit upon them."

"Now thou wouldst have a horse indeed, wouldst thou, foolish child! Dost not see that it were dangerous to life to ride here? The grass is slippery and the abyss deep. One false step, and thou wert lying shattered to pieces down below."

Alba thought over this for a long while, and wondered why it was dangerous for horses to go where sheep could tread in safety; but to this question also she got no reply, for she did not dare to ask it. Only, the dwarfs appeared much uglier to her than before, and the gold became so distasteful to her that she could not bear to look at it. She constantly thought of the beautiful horse, and of the youth who was to have his neck broken if he showed himself there again. Why did her mother want to break his neck? This time, too, she found no answer, however much she puzzled over the matter.

Some time after, the handsome youth rode up to the mountain again; he was tormented by curiosity to discover who lived in that mighty castle, whose walls were hewn out of the living rock. He was a king's son, and his name was Porfirie. He was not used to being unable to do things, and any obstacle was welcome to his impetuous nature. When they spoke to him of marriage, he was wont to reply that he should win his bride from the clutches of a dragon, or pluck her down from a cliff, but never have her tamely wooed for him by a deputy, and end up with a commonplace wedding!

Just at that moment Alba was busy bedecking herself, by way of passing the time, after having worked at reeling off gold all the morning. She had bathed her hands and face, and combed her long hair with her ivory comb, and about her brow she had bound a double row of pearls, in which she had fastened an alpine rose sideways. Her robe was white, with a golden girdle, and over it flowed a green velvet mantle, held on either shoulder with chains of pearls. Around her snow-white throat she laid a string of emeralds, as large as pigeons' eggs, a present from the mountain-dwarfs; and then she looked at herself in the glass, in which, however, she could not see how her golden hair gleamed upon the green velvet mantle. Indeed, she could not have seen aright at all, or the glass was bad, for now she smote her face, crying: "How ugly I am!—oh, how ugly! That is why my mother hides me from all men, and gives me fine dresses, and jewels like a queen's—that it may be forgotten how ugly I am!"

Just then the sound of horses' hoofs echoed among the rocks, and with horror-stricken gaze she beheld the handsome stranger, who was to lose his life if he appeared again before the castle. He must be warned at any cost. She sprang like a wild goat down the mountain-side, with fluttering mantle and waving hair, in which the sunbeams seemed to catch as she went. The young King saw her speeding towards him over the rocks, her feet scarcely seeming to touch the stones upon the way, and reined in his horse in wonder-struck admiration. He asked himself what princess, or mountain-fairy, this might be, flying down to him thus. And now she waved both her arms, crying breathlessly: "Back, back! Do not come up hither—it were thy death!"

"And though it should be my death," he exclaimed, "I would die gladly, seeing I have beheld the fairest maid that ever trod this earth!"

Alba stood still before him, a faint blush overspread her cheeks, and looking at him with wide-open eyes, she said: "Am I fair?"

"Yea, verily, wondrous fair! So bewitching art thou, with thy golden hair and thy golden eyes, that I love thee from this hour!"

"And I love thee, too," replied the guileless maiden, unaware of the fact that it is not customary among men to say what one thinks. "But do not say my hair is golden, for gold is so ugly!"

"Ugly!" The King's son laughed. "I have never heard that of it before. Hast thou, then, seen so much gold that it has grown to seem ugly to thee?"

"Ah, yes! I see nought save gold—instead of green trees, gold—instead of flowers, gold—instead of men, gold—heaps of it, like that." And she spread out her arms and turned herself about. "Oh, how much rather would I sit upon yon beautiful creature! I have never seen a horse before—may I touch it?"

"Yes, indeed, and stroke it too, and climb up beside me. Thou shalt ride as long as thou hast a mind to."

Then he bade her rest her foot on his and give him both her hands, and so he drew her up before him on the saddle, clasped his arm about her, and gave his horse the spur. He fancied she would



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"But a while ago a beautiful creature came up our mountain."

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be frightened, but no such thought occurred to the gentle, innocent creature, for she knew nought of danger. As soon as the ground was soft beneath them he loosened the reins, and away they sped, through the woodland shade, and over the flowery meadows. [Pg 111]

Alba shouted and clapped her hands for glee, crying: "Faster, faster yet!" So they drew near to the city, through which they had to ride before reaching the hill upon which the royal castle stood. Then suddenly fear came upon the maiden.

"Are all these human beings?" she asked, as they rode at a foot's-pace through the streets. "And does not the wind blow down these tiny houses?"

"Nay," laughed Porfirie. "The wind does not blow here as hard as it does up yonder."

"See, my people," he cried to the folk as he passed, "here I bring you your Queen. She is a fairy-blossom, and I plucked her from yonder cliff!"

"But I am no Queen," said Alba in affright.

"I am a King, and since thou art to be my wife, thou wilt become Queen also."

"Thy wife? But I was to have no husband, my mother said."

"She only said that because she knew that none was to have thee, save I alone."

"Art thou not at all bad, then?"

"No, I am not bad."

"Then art thou not a human being?"

"Nay, but I am."

"Yet my mother said that all human creatures were bad, and that I must have nought to do with them."

"Who is thy mother, then?"

"That I do not know. She spins gold."

"Spins gold? And for what?"

"For bridal veils—but I will have no gold at my wedding!" added Alba hastily, and she clutched at her head as though she would defend it from that dangerous contact. [Pg 112]

"But thou canst not do otherwise," said Porfirie, "or every one would wonder. Here we are at my home; we are even now riding into the courtyard, and thou must speak pleasantly to my mother."

"Is she old and ugly?"

"Nay, she is fair and proud."

"What does 'proud' mean?" asked Alba.

Porfirie looked into her eyes—they were as clear and unsullied as the sun itself. He pressed the maiden to his heart; then throwing the reins to the attendants who came forward, he sprang from his horse, lifted Alba gently to the ground, and offered his hand to lead her up the broad stone steps.

They entered a lofty hall, and there sat a tall, noble lady, surrounded by many maidens, and she was spinning beautiful gold-coloured silk. All rose from their work, and gazed in delighted amaze on the beautiful pair standing beneath the portal, that was just then flooded by the glory of the setting sun.

"Here, mother," cried Porfirie, "is thy dear daughter, my sweet bride, whom I found up yonder, quite near the sky; and I am not yet sure whether she be not indeed one of the heavenly inhabitants, that will presently spread wings and flee away from us!"

"Oh, thou beauteous lady!" cried Alba, and fell at the feet of the Queen, who raised her up and kissed her with great kindness.

"And thou art spinning too," she went on, "only far, far more beautifully than my mother; for what thou dost spin is as soft and fine as snowflakes, or the petals of flowers." [Pg 113]

"What does thy mother spin, then?"

"Oh, always that hard, ugly gold!"

"Gold!" echoed the bystanders; and many laughed, and did not believe the maiden's words.

"Canst thou, too, spin gold?"

"I can, but I may not."

"Why not?"

She was opening her lips to tell what her mother did over her spinning, but all at once she felt strangely ill at ease, and realised how angrily every one would look at her if the maidens knew

that all kinds of sorrow was spun for them into their bridal veils. And here they were all looking so happy and so kind, these bad people, against whom her mother had warned her! They seemed far better, indeed, than that mother herself, of whom the mountain-dwarfs were always so horribly afraid.

She was relieved of her perplexity by hearing one of the maidens whisper: "Her dress is velvet—real white velvet!"

"And the jewels—from whom did she get her jewels?" said another, rather louder.

"From my friends," answered Alba. "Would you like them? I have many more such playthings at home." And taking the emeralds from her neck, she gave each of the girls one.

She would have done the same with her strings of pearls, had not the Queen prevented her.

"Are thy friends so rich, then?" inquired the latter.

"I do not know. What is 'rich'? They bring it all up out of the earth in sacks; and when they do not bring enough, they are punished." [Pg 114]

Then the Queen's face darkened; she drew her son aside and said: "This maiden is none other than the daughter of the abominable witch, Baba Coaja. Take her back as quickly as possible to the spot where thou didst find her. She will only bring trouble upon our house."

"Ask anything of me but that, mother," replied the young King, turning pale. "I love this sweet and innocent maid with my every thought, with my every breath, with all the blood in my veins, and though she were Baba Coaja her very self, I could not give her up!"

The Queen sighed. But she gave orders that an apartment should be made ready next to her own for the maiden; and the wedding was fixed for the following day.

The Queen desired to adorn her new daughter for it with her own hands, but she had a bitter struggle with her, because the maiden would on no account suffer any gold-threads to be laid upon her head. She fled from one end of the castle to the other like a hunted doe, she cast herself upon the ground, and hid beneath the coverings of the divans; she begged and prayed with streaming eyes that she might be spared. "Let the Queen put some of the beautiful silken threads of her own spinning upon her hair, only not the horrible gold!"

But as she knelt wailing and praying before her, the Queen gave a sign, and two of the attendant maidens bound her hands, while a third fastened on the golden veil. They all expected to see an outbreak of rage and despair; but Alba grew quite quiet. As pale as death, she bowed her head beneath its burden. "Thou art harder than my mother," she said, "for she would not give me a husband, lest I should be unhappy, but thou dost thyself call down sorrow upon me!" [Pg 115]

No one understood these words. Alba could not be prevailed upon to explain them, whereby the general mistrust of her was yet further increased. She looked so sad that the people no longer even recognised in her the beaming maiden of yesterday; and all her young husband's words of love could not chase the clouds from her brow.

At court there was presently no talk of anything but the countless treasures of the young Queen, and many people urged the King to go up the mountain and examine them for himself. He cared nothing for the treasures; he only thought of how he could bring back the smile to his young wife's face, and fancied that perhaps, if he fetched her the ornaments she was fond of, she would grow merry again. For she smiled pityingly at the little stones other people called jewels, and could not at all understand that such trifles should be costly. But as soon as she learnt that Porfirie intended to ride up to her castle again, she was terror-stricken, and implored and conjured him not to do so. "It will surely be thy death," said she.

He, however, would not be convinced, and the more she depicted the dangers that awaited him there, the more did these very dangers attract him; so that one morning he set off secretly, while she still lay in a deep slumber.

With only a few followers, he dashed up towards Baba Coaja's castle. But she spied his coming from afar, and cried out to him as he drew nearer: "A curse upon thee—thou who didst ravish my child, only to bring her to sorrow! See here, then—satisfy the greed that has driven thee back hither, miserable wretch! I never desired to have aught to do with thee—why didst thou seek me out?" [Pg 116]

With these words she began to scatter down jewels in endless quantities upon the horsemen; but as they fell, the precious stones were changed into ice and snow, and whirled through the air in such clouds that the unhappy men were unable to shield themselves, and were, moreover, so dazzled that they could no longer see their way. The greater number of them fell over the precipices; but the young King, who, thirsting for vengeance, tried to reach the castle that he might strangle the terrible witch, was so completely caught in the avalanche that ere a moment was past he could no longer move a limb, and before he had time to utter a word he was buried deep beneath the snow.

As he disappeared, Baba Coaja said, with a malicious laugh: "Now she will come, to him, not to me—yet it will be to me, not to him, that she comes. I shall have my child again, for she may not remain in the wicked world, and among men, whom I hate."

And indeed it was not long before Alba, weary with her long journey afoot, her white velvet dress dusty and travel-stained, came hastening up the mountain.

"Where, where is he?" she asked, with blanched lips.

"So!" said the old witch, "thou hast run away from me with a strange man, and now comest back, and dost not ask after me, but after him? He is not here."

"Yes, yes, he is! I traced him, up to the edge of yonder snow!"



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With these words she began to scatter down jewels in endless quantities upon the horsemen.

"He came no further, indeed!" laughed the old witch. "He is smothered beneath thy jewels!"

With a terrible cry, Alba cast herself down upon the patch of snow and began to shovel it away with her hands. But in vain! The covering that lay upon her beloved was too heavy, it was frozen too fast. With one cry—"Oh, mother, mother! what hast thou done to me!"—Alba fell dead beside the ice and snow.

Then Baba Coaja hurled forth so terrible a curse, that the very mountain reeled, and the castle fell with a crash, burying her and her gold beneath its ruins. But on the spot where the beautiful Alba had drawn her last breath, there sprang up a white flower, in a white velvet dress, which has ever since been called "Alba Regina," or *Edelweiss*. This flower only blooms close to the eternal snow which covered her beloved, and is as white and pure as she was herself.

Perhaps the snow will turn to jewels again some day, if an innocent maiden should pass over it.

The piece of gold-thread that Alba spun is still being sought for, and every bride hopes that it is she who has found it. That is why not one of them ever fears the golden threads that are so dangerous, but still believes that happiness will be her portion.

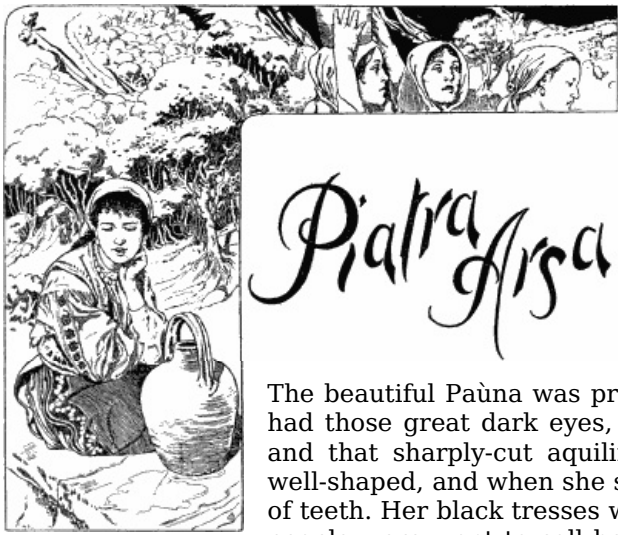
VIII PIATRA ARSA ("THE BURNT ROCK")

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Piatra Arsa

The beautiful Paùna was proud, very proud. It was not for nothing that she had those great dark eyes, with black brows rising to a point above them, and that sharply-cut aquiline nose. Her mouth was somewhat large, but well-shaped, and when she spoke or laughed she showed two gleaming rows of teeth. Her black tresses were coiled like a crown above her brow, and the people were wont to call her, in jest, *Pui de Imparat*, or "Emperor's child," when she went by with her long stride and her broad shoulders, holding her head as straight as though she were carrying something upon it. But she was not too proud to turn that head when Tannas went by, or to give ear to him when he talked to her during the Hora. Only, if any one teased her about him, an angry flush would rise to her cheek, and she was quick to punish the daring offender with a sharp retort.

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Tannas was an object of envy to all the other village lads, specially as the betrothal was looked upon as a certainty. Then, on a sudden, war broke out in the land, and Tannas had to join the army and march down to the Danube. Paùna swallowed her tears before people; but no one dared ask her whether she did not shed a few in secret.

She always contrived to be one of the first in the village to get tidings from the army; and when tales went about of the first battles that had taken place, she was obliged, as she listened, to lean against the great stone cross that stood at the entrance of the village, so weak and faint did the strong Paùna turn. At night all sleep forsook her, and she often had to let her light burn till morning, to chase away the terrible visions that arose before her in the darkness, of Tannas covered with wounds, and dead or dying. One dark night she was sitting thus, still dressed, upon the edge of her bed—and never knew that, outside, some one was gliding round the house, and peeping in at her little window. She did not know, either, how beautiful she looked, gazing before her with wide-open eyes, her hands folded upon her knee. All at once there was a knocking on the window, and she sprang up with a stifled cry, turning her head and trying to pierce the darkness with her eyes. Then she fancied she could make out the face of Tannas at the window, and presently, indeed, she heard him call her in low tones—

"Paùna, dear Paùna, I pray thee to come out to me. Do not be afraid; it is only I, Tannas."

Paùna's hand was already upon the latch—in a moment she was outside, and felt herself enfolded in a warm embrace. But she put aside the arm that clasped her, and said: "Art thou Tannas indeed, or is some one making sport of me?"

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"Here, feel thine own little ring, Paùna; and here again, the coin about my neck. I could bear it no longer, without coming to see whether thou wert true to me."

"Who gave thee leave to come away from the army?"

"Me? No one."

"No one?—and thou art here? Is the war over, then?"

"Nay, there is still war. But I came secretly, and out of love to thee, Paùna!"

"Love to me!" Paùna gave a short, bitter laugh. "Dost thou think, then, that it gives me pleasure to have a deserter for my betrothed? Go out of my sight!"

"Paùna! Is this thy love? Thou art sending me back to death and destruction!"

"Go whither thou wilt. This only I tell thee, I will never be thy wife—I could not endure to have to despise my husband."

"Thou dost love some other!"

"Nay, Tannas, thee I love, and thee alone. I have many a time watched through the livelong night for love of thee; but I never dreamed that I had a coward for my lover!" Paùna wept, burying her face in her hands.

"And I, who thought thou wouldst welcome me with joy, and hide me in thy dwelling!"

"Oh, shame!" cried the maiden—"shame! that I should have betrothed myself to thee. But this I swear, that the Bucegi Mountain shall burn ere I become thy wife!"

"And I swear," cried Tannas, "that thou shalt not see me again till I am a cripple—or dead!"

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And as they spoke thus, the two lovers faced one another with such burning glances that their eyes sparkled in the darkness.

Just then a red light shone out over the heights above, and looking up, they saw that one of the rocky peaks of the Bucegi seemed all aglow. Brighter and brighter it grew, till a red flame appeared to break out and send up a shower of stars on high. The two lovers stood as though turned to stone. Then windows began to open in the neighbouring houses, and the people to call out to one another that there was a forest fire—nay, that the mountain was burning! All the village was in an uproar—dogs began to bark and cocks to crow.

Thereupon Paùna took her lover by the shoulders, and thrusting him far from her, she cried: "Away, away from hence—hide thy face, or I shall die of shame!"

Then she flung the door to behind her, and extinguished her light. With a beating heart she watched Tannas slip away in the shadow of the houses; and presently she turned her eyes to the mountain as it glowed and slowly grew dark again, but never an answer did she give when the neighbours called her to come and look at the miracle.



And looking up, they saw that one of the rocky peaks of the Bucegi seemed all aglow.

From that time forth people began to notice that Paùna looked wonderfully pale; no smile was ever seen now upon her lips, that before had been wont so often to curl in mockery, and quick retorts no longer cut short the teasing words that folk called out to her as she passed. She did her work in silence, but was often so tired that she was obliged to sit down to rest upon the margin of the well, and bathe her forehead with the fresh water. Sometimes she would gaze sadly at her own reflection in the well, or glance timidly up towards the Bucegi Mountain. All at once it began to be bruited about that Tannas had been in the village; this person and that felt sure of having seen him by the light of the burning mountain, and it was even said that his voice had been heard with Paùna's. When the latter was questioned about it, the drops of sweat burst out upon her brow and round her lips, that trembled slightly as she replied: "Was not all still and dark in our house, the night that the mountain was on fire?"

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Paùna's mother shook her head, till her very under lip quivered, and said that all manner of strange signs were to be seen in these evil days.

At last the news came that a great and deadly battle had been fought. This time Paùna was the last to hear of it, but when she did, she hurried home and made a little bundle, tying up a gourd and some maize-bread in a cloth; and when her mother anxiously asked her whither she was going, she only said: "I shall soon come back again, mother; do not fear for me."

The battlefield lay wide and silent in the twilight; thousands of dead bodies were scattered upon it; horses writhed in the death-throes, or limped about with drooping heads. The army was encamped around huge sentry-fires, and the men no longer gave any heed to the cries and wailings that echoed from the battlefield. A stately woman's form moved alone amid the lines of bodies; it was Paùna, who had already made inquiry after Tannas throughout the whole camp.

She drew bravely near to both friend and foe, giving many a one a drink, and closely scanning the features of the dead. Night had now closed in, and the moon lit up the fearsome scene. Still the maiden moved to and fro, anon kneeling down and resting some dying man's head upon her breast, and again searching some terribly disfigured corpse for a little ring, and a coin about the throat. Only once she staggered back, and that was when she beheld some women plundering a corpse, and heard the finger-joints crack as they dragged the rings from off the hand. She hastened away, but soon returned to scan the dead man's face with anxiety.

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The whole camp was sunk in slumber, but still Paùna glided about the battlefield in the moonlight. Sometimes she would utter a low cry: "Tannasse!"—and often a groan would be heard in answer, but she always shook her head sadly, after bending to give the sufferer a drink. The dawn was beginning to break, and the moon to pale, when she suddenly saw something glitter on the ground, and drawing near, found a half-stripped, dead man lying there, on whose hand shone a little ring. And the hand had grasped something that the man wore about his neck, so firmly, that the plunderers had plainly given up trying to force the fingers open. Paùna knew her own ring again, and with a loud cry of "Tannasse!" she sank down beside the body, whose face was so covered with blood that it was scarcely recognisable. In a few moments Paùna came to herself again, and began to wash the beloved face. She saw, with fast-flowing tears, that both eyes and nose were gashed through by a terrible stroke, but she saw also that the blood gushed out again as she wiped it away. Now she was sure that her beloved was not dead, and she hastened to moisten his lips, and to bind up his wound with her kerchief. Then he began to sigh, and when he heard his name called, to feel about with his hand. Presently it touched Paùna's face, and lingered long upon it.

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"My Paùna!" he murmured almost inaudibly. "Let me die—I am blind—I am of no more use on earth!"

"Nay, nay!" cried Paùna, "thou art my beloved, and, God willing, shalt be my husband soon. Only be still now, be still!"

Many long weeks had passed since that morning—weeks during which Paùna had watched day and night by Tannas's bed and nursed him untiringly. And now, one day, two wanderers were seen coming along the road into the village—a blind man in a soldier's cloak, with the cross of honour upon his breast, and a maiden, who led him carefully along, and said to the passers-by, with a joyful smile: "This is my bridegroom. He is a hero! See the cross upon his breast!"

"And upon his face!" rejoined Tannas, with a sigh.

Never had such a crowded wedding been seen before. People streamed from far and near, to pity the beautiful Paùna at the side of the blind man. But she smiled at every one, and said: "I am proud now. I have a hero for my husband; and, thank God, I am strong and can work for both."

The mountain that had been seen on fire was from that day called *Piatra Arsa* ("the burnt rock"), for both shepherds and hunters bore witness that on that spot they had found the rock all blackened and charred.

IX RÎUL DOAMNEI ("THE RIVER OF THE PRINCESS")

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Not far from the pretty little mountain-town of Câmpa Lungo, a clear, cool stream winds along, called *Rîul Doamnei*—"the river of the Princess." This stream washes down gold along its bed, sometimes a bit half the size of one's nail; and it was a custom in times gone by that all the gold found there should belong to the Princess, the wife of the ruler of the land. And this is the reason why:—

There was once a great famine in the land of Roumania, such a famine as had never been known in the memory of man. First the locusts had come into the land, in such swarms that the sun was darkened, and wherever they settled they devastated everything, so that in a few minutes the fairest field of corn would be left bald as a threshing-floor, and the trees, stripped of every leaf, stretched out their naked boughs against the summer sky, beneath whose cloudless blue the heat grew ever greater and greater, so that even at night there was no longer a breath of coolness in the air. As soon as all things around were devoured, the cloud of locusts would arise, only to settle instantly again upon the next green patch. And so it went on unceasingly; and in those days folk were not so clever as they are now, when they cover the great stretches of land where the insects have settled, with petroleum, and set it all on fire. Nor were there then any cannon with which they could shoot into the swarm of flying locusts, as they do now, and so sometimes contrive to scatter them.

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After the locusts came the Poles from the North, the Hungarians from the West, and the Turks from the South, and fell upon the land, and by them all the houses were burnt and the cattle stolen away. At last these foes, too, quitted the country, but they left behind them fever and pestilence, both among man and beast.

Men went about with blackened lips, and grievous sores on their bodies. The cattle perished together in heaps on the barren fields, where not a single blade of grass was standing. Only the dogs and the ravens were in good case; they tore the flesh from the bones of the dead creatures, and for miles around nothing was to be seen but white bones with red flesh hanging to them, and millions of flies, that shone with gorgeous prismatic colours, settling upon them.

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The air quivered with heat, and pestilential odours spread far over the land, so that men were stricken as with a plague, and died in a few hours.

Complaints were heard no longer, for dull despair had reduced all men to silence; and when the starving people tore one another to pieces, no one even told of it.

The bells rang no more; there was no keeping Sundays or holidays, nor was there any work done, for no one had any oxen for the ploughing, or any seeds to sow.

Men crept about like ghosts, with their bones staring through the skin, their lips drawn back so that the teeth lay bare, and only a few rags upon their bodies. There was hardly any one found to bury the dead, and many remained lying, like the cattle, upon the fields.

The beautiful Princess Irina felt her heart breaking for pity. She had given away all her jewels for the poor; she had spent her last coin to buy cattle for the peasants, but they had all been slain by the plague as soon as purchased. She had fed the hungry, till she had scarcely enough left to feed her own four little children. She stood at her window wringing her hands in despair, and prayed thus:

“O good God! hast Thou, then, quite forsaken me? Wilt Thou bring our poor land to destruction? Have we sinned yet more, that we must endure such searchings-out of Thy wrath?”

Then a soft, cool breath stole in, bearing a perfume as from the most beautiful of gardens, and a silvery voice spoke:

“Help shall arise for thee out of a river. Only seek.”

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Then she went to the Prince, her husband, and to her children, and bade them farewell, promising soon to return, and saying she now knew where to seek for that which should free them all from their misery. She spoke with such cheerful assurance that it brought trust and hope to every man, for she never told them that she did not even know what she was to seek.

Then, through the burning summer heat, she began a weary pilgrimage toward the rivers. Sometimes she would still chance upon a poor, starved little horse, that would carry her a short distance, and then fall down dead, even beneath her light weight. She went up the *Olto* river, the *Gin*, the *Buzlu*, the *Sereth*, all the rivers, both great and small. They flowed but meagrely over their stony beds, and those once mighty waters scarcely whispered as they went, they that of old were wont to rush and roar.

“Merciful God!” prayed the Princess, “let but a little cloud appear when I have found the river that is to help us!” But there arose no cloud. She was wandering for a second time up the banks of the *Argesch*, and was just about to turn sadly back, when she caught sight of the mouth of a little stream that she had not noticed before. She turned her steps hesitatingly in that direction, her heart growing heavier and heavier as she saw the stream grow smaller and more insignificant.

Wearied by her hard journey over the stones, she stood still a moment and sighed: “I can find nothing, nothing at all, and perchance my children are starving and dying! Perhaps my thought was but a foolish one—a cobweb of the brain, a lying fancy!” Even as she spoke a shadow seemed to fall upon her. She thought it was only caused by the tears which for the first time were filling her large, wan eyes. She wiped them off. Nay, there was indeed a shadow lying over the treeless waste; and when she raised her eyes, lo! the sun had hidden itself behind a tiny cloud, that yet was growing slowly larger.

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Irina began to tremble for joy, that yet was mingled with dread. Had God heard her, or was it only another mistake? “Dear God,” she prayed again, “if this be the river, suffer the cloud to

become larger and the rain to fall, for rain alone would be a blessing, and a great help to us in our need." She went on a little—yes, the cloud was growing larger; she hurried forward, she ran, till she grew too weak to go farther; then a few great, heavy drops began to fall. She drank them in, with lips and eyes, with hands and hair. Now a light patter and plashing began round about her, and all at once a perfect waterspout broke forth. She struggled on in the wet loam of the river-bed as well as she could, till the stream began to swell, and dashed by in a brown, foaming flood, like a broad river. Sometimes she was forced to stand still and seek for her path, but yet she went on and on, for fear the rain should leave off. It rained all day and all night. The Princess was so wet that a stream flowed from her garments. But she wrung them out, girt them up higher, and still went on, for one whole day and night longer. Now she had reached the mountains, and often fell to the ground from exhaustion after her long journey. At last she lay down upon the river-bank and fell asleep, while the rain streamed down upon her, and the river rose higher and higher, as though it would have snatched her down and floated her away.

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She awoke trembling with cold. There stood the gleaming sun, looking as fresh in the bright morning air as if he had had a bath himself. And behold! the river was no longer brown, but clear and blue as the air, and at the bottom of the water something shone and glittered like the sunbeams themselves. Irina again girt up her garments and waded in—she must see what it was that shone with so wondrous a gleam. And lo! it was pure gold. She fell on her knees, there in the stream, and gave God thanks, aloud and earnestly. Gold! gold! Now she could help! She went carefully on through the water and gathered up the golden grains and little fragments, filling her mantle with them, till the burden was almost too heavy for her. And now she hurried home with her treasure, and poured it out before her husband. Her children were yet alive, though weak and sorely exhausted; and they scarcely knew her again, she was so emaciated and sunburnt. Yet now messengers went forth into distant lands and bought corn, maize and hay, seeds and cattle; and the river never grew weary of giving till the famine was at an end, and laughing green, and sleek cattle, covered the Roumanian meadows once more. And the thankful people called the river *Rîul Doamnei*, and no one was to touch any of the gold therein, to possess it, save the Princess of the land.

But the Princesses who came after this one, no doubt made a less good use of their riches, for the river has become more niggardly, and the gold that the peasants still find in it now and then, is saved up for exhibition in the State Museum.

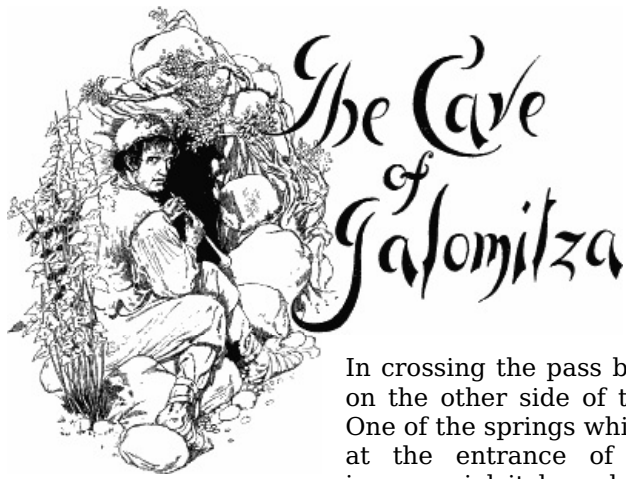


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And behold! the river was no longer brown, but clean and blue as the air.

X THE CAVE OF JALOMITZA

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In crossing the pass between the peaks of Vîrful cu Dor and Furnica, on the other side of the Bucegi, you come upon the Jalomitza river. One of the springs which feed it rises hard by, in a vast stalactite cave, at the entrance of which stands a small cloister. From time immemorial it has always been said that there is no ending to this cave, and that a man who once went in there has never been seen again to this day.

The cave was once inhabited by a terrible enchanter, of whom it was told that he carried off all the fairest maidens round about—carried them off out of the fields, from their parents' cottages, yes, even from before the marriage-altar. They all followed him, without resistance, but no one ever saw them more. Many a bold youth had sworn to go and free them, and had even marched bravely into the cave and called the enchanter by name: "Bucur! Bucur!" but not one had ever caught a glimpse either of Bucur or of the maidens.

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But in the pretty village of Rucar, at the foot of the Bucegi, there dwelt a beautiful maiden, named Jalomitza, who had been rash enough to say that she engaged never to follow the enchanter, no matter in what shape he might appear before her, or with what promises he might try to entice her.

"And though he should even drag me into his cave," she said, "I would still get forth again."

This was a very daring speech, and the old folks shook their heads at it, and shrugged their shoulders, saying: "If he were really to come, she would yet go with him gladly, just like all the others."

A short time passed, during which no one appeared, and nothing happened, to try the young girl's courage. She was a joy for all men to look upon, with her red cheeks, her fresh, cool lips, her waving auburn hair, and her great blue eyes. Her nose was delicately cut, with transparent nostrils, only the tip had just a little impudent, upward turn. Her throat rose snow-white from her richly embroidered shift, and upon her forehead, temples, and neck the pretty reddish locks curled in wild abundance, escaping from the plaits and rebelliously defying all the efforts of the comb. When Jalomitza loosened her plaits she was as though clothed from head to foot in a golden mantle, of which she could not see the half in her little mirror when she was decking herself on a Sunday for the *Hora*.

There was one in the village who was for ever running after her, to the well, in the fields, and at the dance. But she did not care to have much to do with poor Coman, and yet he was a fine lad, and rich. He owned broad meadows, with horses, cows, buffaloes, and sheep, and wore a fine, embroidered white leather jerkin, and a long white cloak lined with red, and richly adorned with gold and coloured threads. Many a maiden looked round after Coman, but Jalomitza never did. She thought only of the enchanter Bucur, and of how she would strive with him and avenge all the poor maidens who had fallen into his clutches.

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One beautiful Sunday afternoon, when the heated dancers were standing still to rest for a moment, there was heard close by the sweetest sound of flute-playing—so sweet that every heart in that gay young throng beat high with delight. All turned curiously to see who the player was, and there stood a handsome young shepherd, leaning against a tree, with his feet crossed, as quietly as though he had been there for ever—and yet no one had seen him come, and no one knew him. He played on and on, as if he were alone in the world; only once he raised his eyes and looked at Jalomitza, who had drawn quite near, and was listening to those heavenly melodies with parted lips and quivering nostrils.

After a while he looked at her again, and presently a third time.

Then Coman whispered to her from behind: "Come away, Jalomitza; yon is an impudent fellow!"

An impatient motion of the girl's shoulders and elbows was the only reply.

"Jalomitza!" whispered the jealous lover once more, "art thou not ashamed to let thyself be stared at thus?"

Again she made no answer, but turned her back upon him.

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"Jalomitza, I tell thee, yon shepherd is no other than Bucur, the enchanter!"

Just at that moment the shepherd, without leaving off his playing, nodded his head, and Jalomitza's heart turned cold and her throat dry.

"What dost thou know about it?" she rejoined defiantly, yet her voice trembled a little.

"I know it, I can feel it! I feel it because I love thee—and because I love thee I see, too, that he has taken thy fancy, and that thou wilt fall a prey to him, as all the others have."

"I! Never—I swear it!" cried Jalomitza, and turned deadly pale.

"Here is my flute; do thou play for us a while," the shepherd now called out, handing his flute to Coman.

Without knowing what he did, Coman grasped the flute and began to play, and he played more beautifully than he had ever done in his life; but he presently perceived, to his horror, that he could not leave off. He improvised new *Horas*, such as he had never heard before—*Brius*, *Kindias*, he played them all, and could see, as he did so, that the stranger was always dancing with Jalomitza. Then he began to play a *Doina*, and the air was so passing sad that tears stood in all the women's eyes, and Jalomitza implored him to stop. But he played on and on, looking round with terror in his glance, for the flute would not be silent. Evening closed in; the people, in twos and threes, began to turn homewards, and still Coman blew upon the flute, and Jalomitza stood beside him as though spell-bound. The strange shepherd had disappeared.

"Leave off, Coman," said she; "thou art breaking my heart. Thou knowest I do not love thee; but I have sworn to thee never to belong to that other. Leave off, Coman; be sensible!" [Pg 145]

But Coman played on, now merrily, as though he would have laughed, and now in so sad and melting a strain, that the nightingale made answer from the depths of the dewy valley. Nearer and nearer drew the nightingale; Jalomitza could see it in the moonlight, how it came and settled above Coman's head, and sang with the flute. Then it flew off, still uttering its sweet, entrancing note, and Jalomitza followed it the whole night through, without knowing whither she went. Coman too, with his flute, followed the wonderful bird through the dewy valley, along by the edge of the stream.



Jalomitza followed it the whole night through, without knowing whither she went.

Morning broke, and Jalomitza smote her hands upon her head in terror: "Where am I? I am far away from home, and this place is strange to me. Coman, where are we? I am affrighted! That bird was Bucur!" [Pg 146]

Coman gave no answer, but only played a merry dance. Then a horse came galloping towards them over the meadow, and circled about the maiden, offering her his back to mount, and rubbing his head against her.

"Ah me!" she cried, "I know the dread one again! If I were but a bird and could flee away!"

She had scarcely said this before she was flying away in the shape of a dove, far away into the dewy morning.

But thereupon the horse was changed into a hawk, that shot down upon her from a giddy height, and bore her away in his talons toward the mountains.

"Ah, would I were a flower down in the meadow!" thought the terrified maiden; and the next instant she was growing beside the stream, a blue forget-me-not; but then the hawk became a butterfly, and circled about the flower, settling upon it, and swinging with it to and fro.

"Oh, were I rather a trout in the stream!" thought Jalomitza; and in a moment she became a trout, but the butterfly turned into a net, caught her, and lifted her up into the air, till she was like to die.

"I would I were a lizard!" thought the poor maid as she lay dying in the net; and lo! in the twinkling of an eye she was gliding as quick as thought among the grass and flowers, and fancying she was hidden beneath every stone and leaf. But from under the nearest stone a snake

crawled forth, and held her spell-bound beneath his dreadful eyes, so that she could not move. They tarried a long while thus, and the little lizard's heart beat to bursting against her sides.

"Would I had become a nun! I should have been safe in the cloister!" she thought; and in a moment the lofty dome of a church rose above her head, she saw tapers burning, and heard the voices of many hundreds of nuns re-echoing in a mighty wave of song. Jalomitza knelt, in the guise of a nun, before the picture of one of the saints; her heart was still throbbing with fear, and she rejoiced to think that she was hidden in this sanctuary. She raised her eyes in thanksgiving to the picture above her—and behold! Bucur's eyes were gazing at her from out its face, and cast such a spell upon her that she could not quit the spot, even when the church grew empty. Night fell; the eyes began to shine and glitter, and Jalomitza's tears fell ceaselessly down on the stones where she knelt.

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"Ah me!" she cried, "even in this holy place I find no rest from thee! Would I were a cloud!" As she spoke the vaulted roof above her changed to the blue vault of heaven, and she was floating as a cloud through its boundless heights. But her persecutor turned into the wind, and hunted her from south to north, and from east to west, over the whole earth.

"I had better have been a grain of sand," said the little cloud to itself at last. Then it sank to earth, and fell, in the form of a tiny grain of golden sand, into the *Rîul Doamnei*. But Bucur became a peasant, wading with naked feet in the river to seek for gold, and he fished up the little grain of sand out of the depths. It slipped hastily through his fingers, and turned into a doe, that fled away toward the woodland thickets. But before the doe could reach the shelter of the forest, Bucur became an eagle, shot down upon her from above, and once more bore her off in his talons toward his eyrie in the Bucegi Mountain. Hardly had he loosed his grasp of her before she fell, as a dewdrop, into the cup of a gentian blossom. But he became a sunbeam, and glanced down upon her to drink her up. Then at last, in the shape of a wild goat, she dashed, without knowing whither she went, straight towards his cave. Laughing, he pursued her in the guise of a hunter, and murmured: "I have thee now." She ran into the cave, ever deeper and deeper, and on a sudden perceived that all the stones round about were beautiful maidens, from whose eyes tears dropped unceasingly down.

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"Oh, flee, flee from hence!" a hundred voices called to her. "Thou unhappy maid! If once he kisses thee, thou wilt turn to stone like us!"

At that moment an arrow flew through the whole length of the cave, and struck the little goat as she fled. In deadly anguish she cried: "Oh, would I were a stream! then I could flow away from him." Instantly she felt herself rushing out of the cave as a foaming mountain torrent; the enchanter uttered a terrible curse, turned into rock, and caught in his arms the little stream, that still kept on ever escaping him. Just then Coman reached the cave, and recognising his Jalomitza by her voice, as she uttered a heartrending cry of "Coman, Coman!" he gathered up all his remaining strength, and hurled his flute against the rock, in the outlines of which he could discern Bucur's cruel grin. And now the spell was broken. Bucur could no more change his shape again than Jalomitza hers, and so she flows on to this day, away over his stony, immovable arms. But Coman built a little church before the cave, and became a monk, dwelling there in holiness, and gazing upon his fair beloved, unto his life's end.

XI THE NIXIES' CLEFT

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The Nixies' Cleft

Not far from the little village of Diethenhain, in Saxony, there stands, on the bank of the Zschopau river, where it winds through the forest, a great rock full of narrow clefts. In the days of long ago, when fairies and spirits were still visible to the eyes of Sunday-children,^[7] there dwelt in a cleft of this rock the King of the Nixies, who held sway over all the water-folk of the Zschopau and its tributary rivers. No one could have told, looking by day at the outside of that rugged cliff, and at the narrow entrance of the Nixies' dwelling, how beautiful it was when night fell, and the moonbeams lit up the broad sweep of the river and crept in among the dusky trees upon its banks. For then the belated fisherman might see how all the face of the cliff seemed to melt away

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like a dream, and how a stately castle, built of shining crystal, arose in its place. A soft, unearthly light shone through the walls, so that one could look from end to end of the vast halls and galleries, and see how the doors and windows were cut each from a single opal, and how the whole building was hung with garlands of lotus-flowers and water-lilies. Light figures, clad in misty draperies, moved airily to and fro, and sounds of such exquisite music rang out from the place, that the very fishes rose to the surface of the river to listen, and the passing boatmen hung upon their oars as if spell-bound. But the castle was never to be seen if crowds of people set out from home on purpose to gaze at it; and always with the first ray of sunlight in the morning, it vanished like a summer cloud, the music was silenced, and the little fishes dived to the bottom of the river again.

Now, it was small wonder that there was sometimes music and dancing in the Nixie's castle, for he had three beautiful daughters, and doubtless they often invited their friends from the neighbouring streams and caves to the palace, that they might disport themselves together. Yet it seemed that this did not satisfy the beautiful Nixies, but that they still pined for the company of mortal men, as we, too, must needs ever hanker after all that lies out of our reach and is fraught with danger. So the Nix-maidens now and then had leave, when the new moon rose at a favourable time, to go to the village dances at Diethenhain, and liked them better than the splendours of their own crystal palace. And they, too, were the despair of all the village youths, and the envy of all the village beauties, for what mortal maidens could be compared to these, with their strange, unearthly loveliness? Their delicate features were as though moulded in wax; their cheeks were as white and glistening as the foam on their own river, and, despite all the heat and agitation of the dance, remained ever as pure, as pale, and as cold as ice. Only their eyes shone with a warmer light, that would sometimes deepen to the glow of passion when they met the burning glances of their partners in the dance. But kind and sweet as they might show themselves to these partners, none of them ever heard a word pass the Nixies' lips. Their flaxen tresses, fair to whiteness, were decked with trailing wreaths of water-plants, and their veils and draperies were woven of mist, that glistened, as they moved, with the faintest rainbow hues. A broad girdle of cunningly plaited rushes confined these draperies at the waist, and a necklace of many rows of crystal dewdrops sparkled on their bosoms. From this chain hung a fresh-water lily, that was as good as a watch to the fairy sisters, for as soon as they saw their lilies fading, they knew that the first ray of sunlight was at hand, and vanished like a dream from the dancers' midst. Yet sometimes they would suffer a favoured partner to bear them company for a little way through the forest, but as they neared the river-bank, their gentle yet warning glances and gestures forbade the eager lovers to pursue them farther. And though many a heart was heavy for their sake, yet none ever dared disobey their warnings or rouse their displeasure, either among the youths who loved them, or the maidens whose loves they had crossed; for it was known that it is an ill thing to anger the water-folk, and that they bid their rivers take a human life for every slight that is put upon them.

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So a hundred summers passed by; men were born, and grew old, and died in the village, but the Nixies' beauty blossomed each year anew, and the lips that had kissed the grandfather, now pressed the same warm kisses on the mouths of father and son, and the kisses never grew colder.

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But one day there came back from the wars to Diethenhain a young soldier, the finest lad and the most stalwart the village had ever seen. All the maidens strove to win his favour, but among them all he had eyes for one alone—Katrine, the miller's daughter—Katrine, the boldest, proudest girl in the country-side; and the bravest, too. Had she not saved a child from drowning that had fallen into the mill-stream, and did she not drive away the wolf that had crept from the forest and prowled around the village, one winter's day, when all the men were from home? Nay, Katrine was afraid of nothing—handsome, too, she was; but soldier Veit maintained that he cared more for a stout heart and a strong arm than for beauty, even in a woman. But perhaps Veit scarcely knew his own mind on this subject.

To be sure, nothing had yet been said of betrothal, for Veit had only been home a month; but he was always willing to carry the neighbours' sacks of corn to be ground, and would stay leaning over the mill-bridge and talking to Katrine by the hour, till her mother said she had need of one of the friendly forest-dwarfs to come and finish her neglected work for her. But her father began to look askance at Veit, and said soldiers were wont to make too light of home-work, and of many other things.

Now a great holiday fell about this time, and there was to be a fine dance in the village on that evening. Mysterious whispers began to creep about among the lads and maidens. "The moon is in its first quarter—who knows? perhaps the Nixies will be seen at the dance," they said; "it is many months since they were last among us."

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And one timid maiden cried, "Oh, I pray not! There is no pleasure in the dance for me when I know they are by, the silent, uncanny creatures!"

"Little care I for that," rejoined Katrine, who was standing near; "'tis for another cause I would wish them away. They say many a heart has been broken in the village, ay, through these hundred years and more, for the sake of the vain, misty things. Now 'tis enough! Let not one of them touch aught that concerns me!"

The maidens shrank back in terror. "Hush, hush, Katrine!" they cried; "how canst thou dare speak thus—thou who dwellest by the water-side, too? Who can tell what may befall?"

Katrine laughed scornfully, all the more so, no doubt, that Veit had just joined the group, and was

listening with a mocking air.

"To be sure," he said, "Katrine is not afraid, I'll be bound; and why should she be? I, for one, do not believe in these Nixies and their spells; there is not a Nixie of them all can lay a spell on me!"

Now it was the men's turn to murmur. "'Tis the ignorant who boast," said an old white-haired fellow, who leaned, smoking his pipe, against the tavern door. "Thou art a foolish fellow, Veit. There is many a one among us could speak of the Nixies' spells. Dost thou mind poor Heinrich, who wanders about as if he were daft and speaks to no one? Hast thou marked him sitting alone in a corner of the ale-house at night? He is a living proof that the Nixies are no dream. To be sure, he has not taken the matter aright. A kiss and a laugh—that is the way to use with them."

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"They may get the laugh from me, but never a kiss," rejoined Veit, angered at the old man's reproof; and he exchanged a glance with Katrine, who turned away with an unwonted blush upon her cheek.

The dance was at its height. Lanterns, fastened with garlands of flowers, hung from the trees that surrounded the village-green, but their light was not needed, for the rays of the young moon flooded the dancing-space with their silvery radiance. Veit leaned against a tree; he was hot from the dance, and glad to rest as he waited for his turn to lead Katrine out. All at once he felt a cool breeze fan his cheek, and yet no wind stirred the branches above him. This was as the cool, moist breath of a fountain. He turned his head, for he fancied he caught a glimpse of something glistening in the shadow behind him. Yes, indeed, there was some one standing by him, a misty form, whose white draperies shone like a ray of moonlight among the trees. And then a pair of eyes were raised to his—eyes as deep, and yet transparent, as the waters of some mountain lake, eyes that shone, beneath the masses of pale hair, as the lake shines when the stars are mirrored in it. And that gaze drank up Veit's very soul, and with it the memory of Katrine, and of all his promises and all his boasts. In vain Katrine waited for her partner, and turned at last in a rage to seek another, hoping by jealousy to win back her truant lover. In vain! All night long Veit danced with that misty form on the outskirts of the green, where the trees throw their deepest shadow. For the Nixies do not willingly mingle with the throng of mortal youths and maidens. There, too, in the shadow, Heinrich danced, the clouds all lifted from his brow; and yet another dancer drew near and clasped the third fairy sister in his arms. The hours flew by, and the enraptured dancers could hardly believe that the dawn was breaking, but there, on the necklace of each of the sisters, hung the water-lily, scarcely whiter than the fair bosom on which it rested—and the petals of the flower were drooping! Then suddenly Veit felt the gentle pressure lifted from his arm, and even as he looked round, the glistening forms were already disappearing among the dark pine-stems. He hastened after them, his comrades at his heels, but not all their entreaties could stay the Nixies' fast-fleeting steps; and when their partners reached the edge of the forest, where it meets the lush, green river-meadows, the rising mists of morning had already swallowed up those fairy beings, that seemed, indeed, born of the mists themselves.

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Heinrich sighed heavily, and wandered away by himself down another path that led to the river-side; and the third youth, a merry, reckless fellow, sauntered off with a careless laugh; but Veit made an angry gesture, and exclaimed as he turned his steps homeward: "I shall catch them yet; it is not thus she shall baulk me."

But many a time was Veit doomed to disappointment. True, the Nixies returned, and oftener than was their wont; for now, whenever the moon shone, and the lads and maidens danced on the green in their spare moments, even though it might be but of a work-day evening, the white sisters crept like the moonbeams through the trees, seeking out always the same partners. And between times Heinrich grew more and more melancholy, and Veit more forgetful of his old love for Katrine, and more reckless, withal, in his speech. The old folk in the village shook their heads ever more gravely, and whispered ancient tales of boatmen who had been drawn down into the deep water by the Nixies' rock. "Veit had better guard his tongue, and not try to blind their eyes with his foolish boasts, now that he was plainly more under the spell than any man of them all." What would they have said had they known that the white sisters, too, had warnings whispered to them by the friendly folk who came to the crystal palace? "It was ill for Nixies ever to seek out the same man among mortals, and, indeed, to love the haunts of any mortals over-much." Perhaps these speeches were prompted by jealousy as much in the crystal palace as they might have been in the village hut, but however this may be, the Nix-maidens heeded them not, and seemed, indeed, more eager than ever before to join the dances on the green.

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Now if Veit forgot, Katrine never did; and her anger against the interlopers grew hotter and more cruel as her own pain and heartache grew deeper. She sat at home and brooded over thoughts of revenge, and she spoke with all the wise elders of the village who could tell her anything of the traditions concerning the Nixies. They dreaded being surprised by the sunlight—that was plain. But why? No one had ever yet had the courage to gainsay them, or try to hold them back and find out the truth. Love, however, gives courage, and Karl, the third partner whom the fairy sisters sought out, had sworn he loved Katrine, and only went with the Nix-maidens because Katrine slighted him. True, Katrine had given her heart to Veit, but the longing for revenge, and the desire to win back her lost love at any cost, had grown so strong in her that there was nothing she would not do to gain her end. So it was Karl now who talked with Katrine on the mill-bridge, and promised, if her love was to be his reward, to carry out the plot they made together. Then the cunning Karl set about fanning the flame that was already raging in Veit's veins, and consuming the life of poor, foolish Heinrich. How often, Karl insinuated, had they not been on the point of winning the love of the wayward Nix-maidens, when the first rays of dawn had interrupted them!

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Were they always to be cheated thus? What mystery was there about these Nixies, that they would not let themselves be followed, or persuaded to outstay the rising of the sun? Nay, they had not managed wisely! At the next dance, let them lead the fairy sisters away, while the night was yet dark, to the deepest part of the forest, where no light of dawn could penetrate, and try if thus the spell might not be broken, and the love of these evasive maidens won.

He spoke to willing ears. Had not Veit said long ago that he would be master of his fairy partner at last? The plan was a good one. Why had it never been thought of before? It must be, Veit concluded, the spell that the wilful creature had laid upon him that had so dulled his mind! Heinrich, too, needed no pressing; he was clean daft for love, and hardly knew what he did any longer. So the plan was laid, and woe betide the Nixies when the time for the next dance arrived. Katrine watched for it now with anxious eyes, and her heart throbbed with bitter satisfaction when at last she saw those rainbow draperies glisten once more in the moonlight beneath the trees. But they were not long to be seen. The Nixies had suffered their fancy to ensnare them too far, and when the eager lovers spoke of a quiet space amid distant forest trees where they could dance and dally undisturbed, they consented only too easily to follow them thither. No one knew how the hours sped by in that quiet and dusky spot. Once, as they lay resting upon the grass, Karl contrived with cunning hand to unfasten the lilies from the crystal chains, and the flowers that might have warned the Nixies from their fate withered unheeded upon the moss. They were missed too late. Too late the fairy sisters grasped at their chains and sought with anxious eyes for their guardian lilies. When they espied them, they were already faded and dying. At that sight a moan, the only sound that mortal ears had ever heard from the Nixies' lips, escaped the ill-fated sisters. They fled, as the spray of the fountain flies before the wind, through the forest-glades; but even as they reached the river-meadow, a ray of sunlight greeted them upon its verge—sunlight, that gladdens the heart of man, but to them was the shaft of death. No friendly mist spread forth a sheltering veil over the meadow; and as they felt the warmth of those piercing rays, they melted as wax before the fire, as foam upon the water. In a moment the fairy sisters were gone, and in their stead three slender rivulets, whose foamy whiteness was stained with a faint streak of red, wound their way with a complaining murmur through the green meadow, towards the river and the great rock. They disappeared among its hollows, and he who doubts the tale need but seek out the river-bank by Diethenain, and he will find the three streamlets, and the spot that is still called the "Nixies' cleft."

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But the spell that the fairy sisters had laid upon two human hearts was not to be broken thus. From that time Heinrich could find no rest from his remorse and sorrow, so that they drove him at last to seek his death in the fatal river. Veit, too, flying in horror from the village, was drowned in crossing the Elbe, by the great rock at Strehla, where it is said that the Nixies yearly require the sacrifice of one human life. Only the reckless Karl and the bold Katrine seem to have gone scot-free. They married after a while, and lived on beside the mill-stream without fear of the Nixies; nor can I learn that the water-folk ever succeeded in doing them any harm.

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XII THE FLYING CASTLE

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Beside the stream of Gerlach, and at the foot of the Glockenberg, in the Hartz Mountains, there is a deep pit, and here—so the country-folk tell—there once stood a mighty castle, that was inhabited, not by knights or earls, but by a wicked woman, who was known only as the "Lady of the Castle." She was learned in all manner of evil lore, and cast spells upon many of the country-people and their belongings, so that she was feared and hated throughout the district. But her favourite pastime was to capture the village maidens as they passed along the road below, and

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shut them up in the castle, where she made them work for her, nor ever let them out again as long as they lived. All about the woods and hedges her spies and serving-men were hidden, ready to pounce on any luckless girl whose business obliged her to cross that dangerous valley.

One might suppose that the whole country-side would have risen in arms against this hateful tyrant. But her dread power of working spells and her authority as lady of all the surrounding lands made the people afraid to rebel. At last they could bear it no longer, however, and they determined to form a strong band, and march against the castle, with their priest at their head, carrying a crucifix, to be their defence against the spells and curses of the witch. When the little army reached the castle they found the great gates closed, the drawbridge up, and the walls manned by a host of grinning dwarfs, more like apes than men, who swarmed about the battlements with threatening gestures. This sight struck terror to the hearts of the rescuers, but the priest encouraged them by the assurance that, if every man did but cross himself faithfully, there could no danger befall him from any of these fiendish apparitions. However, as the castle could not be surprised, they determined to surround and keep watch about it that night, till they could bring ladders and storm it on the following day. So sentry-fires were lighted, and preparations made for a camp, but not one of the besiegers could get to sleep that night. And behold! at midnight, as they sat round their fires, watching the dark, silent fortress with anxious eyes, they saw three tongues of blue flame shoot up from the topmost tower, and suddenly there appeared upon it the Lady of the Castle, her witch's staff in her hand. Her tall form, veiled in black, stood out in dusky outline against the lurid blue light; and as she stood there, she waved her wand towards the four corners of heaven, and uttered some words in an unknown tongue. Immediately the ground trembled, the light of the stars was darkened, a fearful roar and turmoil were heard, and with a rending sound, as though the earth were opening beneath it, the great castle was torn from its foundations and carried by an invisible hand through the air, till it reached the top of a neighbouring mountain, where it settled like some monster bird. But as it went the voice of the witch was heard crying aloud: "If ye dare to disturb me again in my dwelling, I will take your houses too, and carry them through the air, as I do this my castle—but into the lake yonder will I cast them down." The terror-stricken besiegers hardly dared follow the flight of the castle with their eyes, but there it was the next morning, and for many days to come, standing upon the mountain far above them.

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Now there was no more question of rescuing the maidens by force, and no one, you may be sure, ever set foot on that mountain if he could help it. But the witch's servants still haunted the woodland paths, and bore off many a hapless girl into a captivity, which now seemed more terrible than ever, far away on yon lonely hill-top.

But as the years went on, there grew up in the village a brave and pious maiden whom her parents had dedicated from childhood to the holy St. Anthony, the patron saint of the family. For it was good, they thought, to be under the protection of a saint, when there was so much evil dwelling near at hand, and so much danger to be feared. The maiden was named Antonia, and got her living as a shepherdess. This often led her into lonely places among the woods and meadows at the foot of the dreaded mountain, but she was never afraid, and always escaped being caught, though many a maid she knew was taken almost from her side. Sometimes she would even lead her sheep up the slopes of the mountain itself, for every one shunned those pastures, so that they were rich and untrodden. And as she got nearer to the castle, and looked up at its dark, frowning walls, she mused more and more upon the poor creatures shut up within it, and how they might be helped to escape. At last the matter got such hold upon her mind that she dreamed of it at night, and her dreams took clearer and clearer shape, until this is what she dreamed. She saw a garden filled with shrubs and flowers, such as she had never known before; dark walls closed it in on every side, but within all was bright and blooming. Yet there was a taint in the scent of the blossoms, and an unwholesome heaviness filled the air. She herself lay upon a mossy bank, and above her hung boughs covered with trails of purple blossom. She tried to reach them, but could not move a limb. Then a dreadful sense of terror came over her, and she called aloud upon St. Anthony, and at once the heavy air cleared, and the weight was lifted from her limbs; and as she rose, cheerful and glad once more, a voice sounded among the trees: "From within the castle help must come—from within."

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The sound of the voice woke her, and there she lay in her own bed at home, and wondered. "From within." Did that mean that she must give herself up into captivity? The more she thought of it, the more she was sure it must be so; but she dared ask counsel of no one, for she knew her parents would never consent to her casting herself into the lion's jaws.

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And there was one other, too, in the village, who would never suffer it either. She thought of him, and sighed; yet now she thought far oftener of her captive sisters even than of him, and his glance and his smile made her sad instead of merry.

The day came—she had felt it coming for long—when she could resist the call no more: the dark walls of the castle drew her as by an irresistible fascination; and when it was time to lead her sheep homeward at evening, she gave them into the charge of another maiden who was going that way, and saying she had lost her staff upon the hill and must turn back to seek it, she sprang up the mountain-slopes.

To her surprise, no one spoke to her, no armed figures dashed out from among the bushes to seize her, but she was allowed to go on unharmed, right up to the castle. She had never been so far before, and when she reached the great gates, they looked so dark and frowning in the twilight, and the whole place so still and lonely, that for the first time her heart sank, and she

almost turned back. But just then the vesper-bell sounded from the valley below, and it seemed to put heart into her, and to remind her that her saintly protector was just as near as in the valley. She advanced towards the gate, and was raising her staff to knock upon it, when it opened silently, and in the dusky porch she saw a tall figure, veiled in black, and holding a golden key. It beckoned to her, and with a beating heart Antonia entered, and heard the great door swing to behind her.

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For the first time her heart sank, and she almost turned back.

As she went forward, the air grew thick and heavy, and she felt the same sense of deadly faintness that she remembered in her dream steal over her now. Presently her guide lifted a dark hanging, that covered one of the doors in the passage they had been following, and they came out into a lofty hall. Here the darkness had fully closed in, and the great, misty spaces of the roof were lit by swinging lamps, that threw out a strong perfume as they burnt. Underneath, all along the walls, ran long divans, or heaps of cushions, covered with silken drapery, and above them hung canopies formed of huge flower-heads, like poppies, whose transparent, blood-red petals waved and fluttered gently in the upper air, shedding the same drowsy perfume as the lamps. Upon the divans many maidens lay sleeping, in all sorts of positions, just as they had sunk down while at work. The faces of some were familiar to Antonia; these were the girls who had been ravished from the village since she could remember; and others there were, who had been taken many years before her birth, and of whom she had but heard. Before every girl—for they kept their youth unchanged—stood a wide tapestry-frame, on which, through each weary day, their fingers wove strange and lovely patterns, in delicate hues of every kind. As long as daylight lasted, the witch, as Antonia learnt afterwards, kept them awake by many ingenious means of torture; by unearthly and startling sounds that broke from the vaults below—by cruel pricks from the magic needles they worked with—by strokes, too, from her fairy wand, with which she walked up and down, and which lengthened at her pleasure, so that none were out of its reach. But even so, though their fingers might move, their heads were heavy and giddy, and no thought of home, no stirrings of a desire for freedom, ever arose with enough strength to give them energy to rebel.

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As she entered the hall, the witch cast off her black veil, and Antonia beheld the cruel red eyes, the lank jaws, and the grizzled tresses, the sight of which had first bereft her wretched captives of all their will and courage. But upon brave little Antonia they failed in their dreadful effect, and the witch saw it with surprise. "Here we have a hearty lass indeed," she jeered; "and truly I might have known it, since she is the first I have known foolhardy enough to come to these gates of her own accord. Perhaps she will be able to bear the burden of the keys." And bending down, she drew from under an iron table a heavy ebony casket, bound with silver, and a huge bunch of keys. Both of these she fastened with chains about Antonia's shoulder, and the poor girl almost sank to the ground beneath their terrible weight. The witch grinned. "I have long been looking for a girl strong enough to carry these about for me," she said, "and perhaps they will keep thee quiet. Now follow me; thy time for slumber is not yet."

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So all through the night, and for many other nights and days, Antonia followed her about, staggering beneath her burden, while the witch visited all the doors and grated windows of the castle, all the underground cells where she put her few unruly prisoners, or where she kept her treasures of gold and jewels, and stores of beautiful silks for the embroideries. Antonia now carried the keys of all these doors, bound about her in such a way that she herself could not raise a hand to touch one.

When the midday sun was hot, all the maidens, and Antonia among them, were allowed to spend an hour in the garden; and as soon as she entered it Antonia knew it for the place she had seen in her dreams. There were the high, dark walls, that matted boughs of ivy, and a poisonous scarlet creeper, only partly succeeded in hiding. There were the strange shrubs and nameless purple flowers, and there was to be felt the heavy, sickly air—she remembered it all so well. The sun struck through the overhanging boughs with a fierce, burning heat, as though it were shining through a roof of glass, and no refreshing breezes ever stirred the leaves, or cooled the brows of the captive maidens. Yet they never complained; and when, during their short hour of leisure, Antonia spoke to them as to old acquaintances, or told them she had come from their home, they did not seem to care about hearing of it, or to have any recollection of their former friends. She saw she could expect no help from them. From whom was she to look for it, then? Surely, only from her guardian, St. Anthony, whose voice it had been, she knew, that had bidden her "give help from within the castle." But where, in all this bewitched, wicked place, could she find a corner to pray to him, or a spot worthy of his holy presence? Not one of the captive maidens wore her rosary, or seemed ever to think of saying a prayer. How could he turn his eyes upon such a household? Oh! could it be that she, in her earnest desire to obey his voice and help her forsaken

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sisters, might be thought worthy to make a shrine for him! Well, at any rate she would try.

And so, day after day, in the little time given her for rest and refreshment, Antonia toiled to make St. Anthony a shrine. She found a spot, hidden among wild-rose bushes—the only flowers in the garden that she knew—where there was a ruined pillar and what looked like the remains of an old archway. Here there were some fallen stones; and others she brought—staggering under their weight and that of her hateful keys—from more distant parts of the garden. Sometimes her strength almost gave way; sometimes she had to stop her work because of the spying eyes of the witch herself; sometimes she had to make great efforts to overcome the dull, faint feeling that the unwholesome air produced, and that she feared above all things.

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But at last the work was done, and a little shrine rose unseen among the thick bushes. She covered the grey stone with a shower of rose-leaves, and the white petals of a fragrant flower that grew among the grass of the garden—and looked proudly and hopefully upon her labour of love. And now she flung herself upon her knees before it, praying St. Anthony to accept her work, to fill the shrine which she had made, and to free his children from the captivity of evil. At first there was no answer; the minutes of her short hour of rest were ebbing fast away, and the bell which called back the maidens to their tasks was beginning to sound, when her eager eyes caught sight of a shadowy form in the niche of the little shrine. It grew plainer, and a figure like that of an old man, robed in grey, hovered for a moment against the wall. Scarcely had his foot touched the rose-covered pedestal, when a sound like thunder rent the air, and a mighty blast of wind swept through the trees of the sleeping garden. Antonia fell with her face to the earth, but in the roar of the storm she was aware of these words, spoken by the same voice she had heard in her dream: “Thy prayer is heard, the prison-gates are open, and thou art freed from thy burden; but it shall fall upon her who laid it on thee—yea, for twice two hundred years.” The thunder rolled louder, and she heard and knew no more.

When she came to herself she was again in her own little room at home, and might have thought this was but a second awakening from a dream, only that a great noise of rejoicing broke upon her ear, and when she went out into the village, she found that in every house whence a maiden had once been stolen away, the lost one was now restored to the love of her people. Her own parents, too, clasped her with joy to their hearts, for she now found that she had been missing for a whole year, and they also had given her up as lost. When her story was known, the enthusiasm of the village knew no bounds; Antonia was looked up to by every one as only next door to a saint herself, and a splendid shrine, you may be sure, was raised by the people to St. Anthony.

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There was one person in the village, however, who thought that nobody had made enough of Antonia, after all, and so he devoted himself for the rest of his days to making up the lack.

And now, amid all the happy faces in the village, faces of parents consoled and lovers reunited, only a few sad ones were seen, those of the maidens who had returned young, to find their loved ones old, or forgetful, or dead. For these Antonia came too late; and thus it is that no evil can be so blotted out but that it will leave some traces in this world.

Of the castle on the hill, however, no traces were left save a few ruins. It was years, to be sure, before any one ventured up there, and then nothing was found but owls and bats and a heap of whitened bones. But something like the old castle still reappears now and then, the people say; only it always shows itself down in the valley, where it first stood, and where the pit now is. It has been seen once or twice, and the saying is, that if only the beholder could throw something that belonged to him upon this castle—a cap, a kerchief, or what not—it would be fixed to the spot and would become his property. Once a maiden, who knew naught of the tale, went to draw water near the spot, and came running home to tell her father she had seen a splendid house standing above the old pit.

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“And didst thou cast thy kerchief on it?” asked the father in haste.

“Nay,” replied the girl.

Then he gave her a stinging box on the ear, and ran out himself, but the castle was gone.

As for the witch, St. Anthony’s curse was fulfilled upon her, and she still haunts the hill, carrying the heavy casket and the huge bunch of keys; nor has any one yet been found to ease her of her burden.

XIII

THE SILVER NAIL

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The Silver Nail

Many years ago there lived in the little town of Stolberg, which is the centre of a mining district in the Hartz Mountains, a certain Joseph Kerst, who was the overseer of one of the neighbouring mines. He had begun work there as a boy, and had no thought or care but for the treasures that were to be found in those dusky depths, so that he had come, early in life, to enjoy a position of trust, and a certain degree of wealth. This, however, was not enough to satisfy him; his great ambition was to discover a fresh vein of silver, that should be his alone, and make him the richest of men; and to this end he would wander night and day about the mountains, and through the disused pits, pick in hand, seeking for a spot that seemed to promise what he desired.

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Now, with the wealth which was his already, he might easily have kept a wife, and, indeed, many a girl in the town was on the look-out for overseer Joseph, and would gladly have become the mistress of the comfortable old house on the market-place. At last he did seem to have made his choice, and a good choice too; for he often spent his spare hours with the watchmaker's daughter Anna, who was the sweetest, gentlest girl in the world, and plainly did not want him for his money, for it was easy to see she worshipped the ground he trod on. If the truth were known, she often wept in secret over his craze for silver, and his dangerous midnight excursions into the heart of the mountains; but the poor, loving creature fancied that when once he had "given her the ring," which he promised soon to do, she could persuade him to turn his mind to other things.

Meanwhile, however, he did not give up his search, and this is what befell him at last:—It was a moonlight night; he had turned his steps towards one of the disused tunnels of the *Auerberg*, and was going to enter it, when he saw that the inside of the tunnel itself was flooded with light, as though the moonbeams had found their way in there also. Yet he presently perceived that this was no ray of the moon, for the shaft of light streamed forth from within, even from the very heart of the cavern, and as he gazed, a sound of far-off music struck upon his ear. Now all miners know that there are spirits in the mountain, who draw the precious metal down to the depths of the earth, or suffer it to rise nearer to the surface, according to their pleasure; and Joseph guessed at once that here might be the clue he was seeking. So, spurred on by the thought that he was perhaps near the realisation of his dearest hope, he stepped with a beating heart into the cavern and along the shining pathway of light. Brighter and brighter it grew; louder and sweeter, too, the music swelled forth, till his eyes were dazzled, and his heart throbbed with so exquisite a pleasure that he could hardly draw breath. And now misty forms, as of men and maidens dancing, began to whirl before his eyes upon the golden floor; and then, as these disappeared, he was aware of one radiant figure, clad in snowy, shimmering garments, who stood alone against the dark rock and beckoned to him. As he went nearer he saw that the form was that of a maiden. Her long, dusky tresses fell round a pale, delicate face, in which the large eyes shone out like lamps; her raiment was woven all of silver threads, and in one hand she held a slender silver staff, shaped like a long nail.

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Presently she began to speak, and her voice was as sweet as the music which had heralded her coming. "Have no fear, good mortal," the gentle voice said. "I have watched many a day for thy coming, for I knew thou wert bold, and wouldst venture much, and I need such a one to release me from my prison. Thou art seeking for precious ore. Know, then, that the silver nail I hold can guide thee to the spot where lies the richest vein in all these mountains. But there is a price to pay." As she spoke these words a smile dawned upon her face. But Joseph had no ears save for the welcome news of the vein of ore; he forgot all his alarm and doubt, and springing forward, cried: "Beautiful spirit, there is no price I would not pay for such knowledge!"

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"Art thou sure, Joseph? For this is the price—even that thou shalt wed me, and promise that thou wilt not ever, in the time to come, cast it in my teeth that I am a being of the under-world, and that thou hast been my releaser. Only thus can I be freed; for I seek for love, yea, as thou seekest for wealth; and if there be one in the town yonder who hath already taken thy love, why then the price is not thine to pay, and I warn thee to pause and consider ere thou promise it."

Joseph felt a chill creep round his heart. He thought of Anna, but her image seemed to grow pale beside the one before him. Yet—a spirit dwelling in the old house on the market-place! How might this be?

The fairy maiden saw his hesitation, and her smile died away. "Nay, not now," she cried as he opened his lips to answer, "not yet must thou reply, for thy fate and mine will be dark if thou dost promise what thou canst not fulfil. To-morrow night, when the moon is full, come again to the mountain, and let thy heart be honest and thy purpose firm, to answer according to truth." As she spoke the light vanished, and Joseph stood once more alone at the cavern's mouth. The moon was setting, and its beams were scarcely bright enough to guide him homeward again, but he stumbled on, unheeding, his mind in a whirl of perplexity and doubt. When he reached his own door, and creeping in, sat down by the warm stove, he could scarcely have told whether he had not been sitting there all night, or whether his adventure had been anything but a dream. Yet nay—he had surely set forth to the Auerberg that evening, and in such haste that his half-finished supper still stood there upon the table. Suppose it were true, and he within an ace of being the richest man in the land? There was Anna—but did he really love Anna? Had he promised her anything? He thought not; all his intercourse with her seemed misty and far off now. Thus through the night and day he struggled with one thought and another, his mind in a whirl. His work was neglected, and even his underlings laughed, unreprieved, at his distraught and wandering looks. By evening he had reached a condition in which he could not have sworn to the truth of anything. Probably what he had seen the night before was all fancy; but he must prove it to himself, for if it were true, what vague and foolish lovers' talk was there in the world worth giving up such a chance for?

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Midnight and the full moon saw him standing again at the entrance of the cavern, his mouth dry and his heart beating with anxiety. He waited long. Despair, and a secret rage at his own credulous folly, were beginning to seize hold on him, when his straining eyes caught sight of a faint glimmer spreading through the dark. He hurried forward, and with each step the light grew brighter and brighter, till it led him at last to the rock where he had seen the maiden the night before. But she was not there; the only thing that met his eyes was an iron door, let into the rock on the spot where she had leant. He thrust against it with all his might, and straightway there rang out a strain of the sweetest music, such as he had heard before. And with the sound of the music, these words were borne to his ear: "If thou truly and with a loving heart seekest Eruna, call and she will answer."

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"Eruna!" repeated Joseph with trembling voice; "Eruna!"

At the second call the door flew open beneath his hand, and discovered a rock-hewn chamber, radiant with light that streamed from its walls, and at the farther end of it, just as he had seen her before, stood the magic maiden he had learnt to call Eruna. A golden table stood beside her, and upon it were a book, and a golden candlestick holding a burning taper, and the candlestick was in the shape of a tall lily, with buds and blossoms of gold. But in front of the table, on either side, crouched two strange, terrible creatures with flaming eyes, and their form was like that of a lion.

"Come to me without fear, Joseph," cried Eruna as she saw him start back; "these beasts are my faithful guardians, but they will not touch one who comes without fear." As she spoke she raised the silver nail in her hand, and a feeling of triumph swept over the heart of the man. It was true, then; this beautiful being and her promises were no dream, and he had reached his goal! He sprang forward, all fear driven out by his eager hopes, and the beasts crouched lower, as he passed them and fell at the feet of the radiant Eruna. Ah, lions with the flaming eyes! why was your sight darkened then, and why did no kindly instinct tell you that daring is not born of love alone?

"Joseph," said the gentle voice again, "art thou truly come to set me free and take me for thy wife? And dost thou make the promise I asked of thee? Then raise thy hand and pluck this golden flower from its stem." He obeyed, scarcely knowing what he did; and lo! as he broke the lily from the stalk, again the sound of music rang forth and echoed through the vaulted chamber. And at the plucking of the lily, the taper was extinguished, and with it all the light in the room. Darkness enveloped them, and he felt Eruna grasp his hand. He dropped the golden blossom, and would have fled, dragging her with him, for now the music had changed to a discord of horrid sounds, and he could hear the wild beasts moving towards them. But Eruna stopped him for a moment. "Wilt thou leave this behind thee," said she—"the token of our love?" And raising the golden blossom from where it had fallen at her feet, she laid it in his hand. "Now, indeed, fly," she hurriedly added, "or the door will close!" And, in truth, they had scarcely reached it, she guiding him with unerring steps, when the door clanged behind them—even striking Joseph upon the heel as he fled—and the clamour within rose to a hideous pitch. "I have angered my people, the spirits of the mountain," murmured Eruna; "then do not thou, O love, ever forsake me!"

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Joseph shivered; an iron hand seemed to clasp his heart, but he replied, with the best grace he could muster: "I have sworn to love thee, Eruna, if thou hast indeed a mind to come down into our life, and bear our burdens; but, that we may be happy, and that I may give thee all it befits thee to have, wilt not thou, too, keep thy word and show me that which I was seeking when I first saw thee?"

He felt Eruna's hand tremble in his. "So be it, foolish man," she said. "I was nearly forgetting the store thou dost set by the dross that fills this mountain, and the sight of which wearies me. Come hither, then, and where I strike in my silver nail, do thou smite with thy pick, and leave it hanging there. To-morrow thou shalt find what thou seekest." As she spoke she paused at a certain point of the rocky wall beside them, and raised her silver nail on high. Immediately a pale light shone round about them, and lit up the side of the cavern. Choosing a spot, she thrust in the point of the

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silver nail, and it sank into the rock, leaving scarcely a trace behind. But into the track it left Joseph eagerly drove his pick, and rolling up a large stone further to mark the spot, he turned to leave the cavern with Eruna.

All night long such a storm raged among the mountains that their rocky peaks seemed to reel beneath the echoing thunder-claps. Joseph never knew how he got home that night, or whose hand it was that tended him as he lay, smitten half senseless by the violence of the storm, upon his cold hearth-stone.

In the morning curious neighbours, and workmen from the mines, came pressing in to see if he were at home, and to inquire why he had been absent so long, and then he knew, for the first time, that a whole week had elapsed since his departure from home on a certain moonlight night. But this was no longer, any more than the rest, a surprise to Joseph; indeed, he rather welcomed the discovery, for how could he else have accounted for the sudden appearance in his house of the beautiful, pale woman with dusky tresses, who moved about with timid, uncertain footsteps, as though the place and its ways were strange to her? He was relieved to see her silvery raiment had disappeared. But she wore a garb somewhat different from the dress of the women of the district, and a happy thought struck him.

“Ha! ha!” he laughed, “I have stolen a march upon you all! Ye have often told me I needed a wife, and here I have one, but she comes from afar, from the other side of the mountains. I became acquainted with her last year, when I went to see my kinsfolk yonder, and I have had it in mind to wed her ever since; but I will have no gossips plaguing me about such matters, so I even went to fetch her home by myself, without any ado.”

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The neighbours looked at one another, and those on the outskirts of the crowd slipped off to tell the news, with much added detail, to Anna, who was too sick to leave her bed. For the poor child had fretted herself into a fever over the supposed death of Joseph during one of his lonely rambles among the mountains.

“Why, then,” cried one of the miners in the crowd, “we have taken a deal of trouble, master, for naught; we have been seeking thee at the foot of every precipice in the country for days past.”

“Plague take ye for meddling fellows!” cried Joseph. “Cannot such a man as I go away for a holiday but it must raise the whole country-side? I’ll warrant you’ve been making it an excuse to do scant work; but wait a while, I shall have work enough for ye all soon—ay, and for many more!”

He would have driven them forth and hurried away to explore the fateful spot where he had left his pick hanging, but that a cry of wonder arose from a woman who had ventured close up to the spot where Eruna was standing—the spot where Joseph had lain through the night. She had picked up from the ground a tall branch of lilies, bud and blossom, all fashioned in pure gold, so cunningly that no such goldsmith’s work had ever been seen; and the weight of the branch was so great that she could scarcely lift it. Exclamations and questions rose on every side, and every one crowded round the holder of this wonderful treasure.

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“That is my wife’s dowry,” explained Joseph, a little taken aback by the discovery of this prize, which he had forgotten for the moment, but proud enough of it withal. “There is naught like it, I’ll be bound, in all the length and breadth of Germany!”

The people stared open-mouthed, and the men were disposed to envy Joseph both bride and dowry, but many of the women, though they could not disguise their wonder and admiration over the golden blossom, began to cast suspicious glances at Eruna. Joseph was soon aware of them, and they only increased the uncanny feeling of deception and mystery which was to become but too familiar to him. For the moment, however, he smothered it in anger; and declaring that he would have no more gaping fools in his house, disturbing his honeymoon, he drove the neighbours forth, only to send them carrying the news of his wondrous marriage far and wide over the country.



And declaring that he would have no more gaping fools in his house, disturbing his honeymoon, he drove the neighbours forth.

As soon as they were gone, he too rushed out to the mountain, and presently found the spot marked by his pick. A few hours' work convinced him that Eruna's promise had not been false, and that here was a vein of silver whose richness surpassed his wildest dreams. And now for a time, indeed, Joseph reaped his reward. The country-side rang with tales of his strange marriage, and of his still more wonderful discovery of silver. Miners came from all sides, and found employment at the new works, for a shaft was being sunk, and the vein seemed inexhaustible. Joseph refused to give any particulars as to how he had made his discovery; he only insisted on calling the shaft "The Silver Nail," a name which caused fresh wonderment among the townspeople. He was fast becoming a rich man, and the tale of his good-luck, and of the wondrous golden lily he owned, spread through the land, till it reached the ears of the King himself, who expressed a wish to behold the treasure that had fallen into the keeping of a working-man. So Joseph had to travel to court and show his golden lily—for he had almost forgotten that it belonged as much to Eruna as to himself, and had only been entrusted to him as a guerdon of their love. At court he was forced to baffle as best he could the inquiries that were made as to how he had come by this marvellous piece of work. It was an heirloom, he said; none knew how it had come into his family, and for years it had been hidden in the earth, lest thieves should get at it. Some one whispered to the bewildered man that he must offer it to His Majesty, since all treasure-trove rightly belonged to him. This had certainly not been part of Joseph's plan, but the King and his courtiers overawed him, and he stammered forth his willingness to lay the offering at His Majesty's feet.

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"In sooth," the King replied, "this is too rich a treasure for me to purchase it, or to think of taking it as a gift either, from this good fellow; yet I were proud to possess it, and it is, indeed, only fit for a king's treasury. Now I have found a way. Leave me thy flower, Joseph Kerst, and take instead the barony of Stolberg, for thou hast enriched thy native town, and hast paid due homage to thy King, and art worthy to be reckoned amid the nobles of the land."

So Joseph went forth a great man, and thought to return home and bring joy to his bride, Eruna, for whom he cherished a kind of awe-struck admiration, as the being who had brought him all his luck. But take her honestly to his heart, as a simple woman, and love her as he might have loved his faithful Anna, whom he had known from childhood, that he felt he could never do. He was dismayed, however, on his return home, to find a different reception from that which he expected. The townspeople, indeed, received him with acclamations, as their new baron, but Eruna's eyes wore a sadder, more wistful look than usual.

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"Thou hast parted with our lily, our marriage token!" she moaned. "Woe be to us, Joseph! what are lands and names beside the guarding of our love? Oh, blind of heart! hadst thou no care for the token that bound us together, or even for the treasures which my love alone can bring for thee from the depths of the earth? Take heed to thy tongue, then, for if love guard it not, it may easily speak the fatal word."

Joseph would have replied angrily, but the close of her speech reminded him of the promise he had solemnly made on that night, which now seemed so far away, and he choked back his wrath.

But from that day things went crookedly. He spent his money right and left, so that it was gone almost as soon as it came from the mines. That was of no consequence, indeed, since there seemed to be no end to "The Silver Nail" vein; but the riches soon ceased to bring him all the pleasure he had expected. He was ill at ease in his lordly castle, and heavy at heart when he went down into the town and saw how his old acquaintances shunned him, partly from awkwardness at feeling him now so much higher placed than themselves, and partly on account of the suspicions and rumours that were whispered about concerning his mysterious wife, who could never learn the ways of the other women, or talk like one having interests akin to theirs. Only Anna, who had so just a cause of offence against him, yet treated him as she had done of old; and when the poor child arose from the long illness which fell upon her at the sudden news of his marriage, her gentle, forgiving spirit gave him shelter as a friend, who now could never be a lover. In talk with her he learnt more and more to see how great a gift he had bartered away for his heaps of hard coin, and his lordly, unhome-like home. Yet Anna was often sick, and could not speak cheerfully even to him, and her father and the neighbours looked coldly upon his comings and goings.... And up yonder, at the castle, the pale face framed in dusky tresses gazed forth with despairing eyes as he turned his steps to the watchmaker's house.

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At last there came a day when Joseph too looked sadly down from the hill, watching a funeral train that wound its way along the valley; a train he might not join, for the people whispered, loud enough for him to hear, that Anna's death lay at his door, and that he could do no less than let her go to her grave in peace. So he watched her go with remorse in his heart, and as he watched there was that in his face that no one could mistake. Eruna read it, and the fount of misery that had been gathering in her breast broke forth, for the first time, in uncontrollable wailings.

"Her, her thou hast loved, Joseph!" she cried, "and hast been false both to her and me! Ah, woe is me that I could not read one mortal's heart aright!"

Now the pent-up wrath and pain in Joseph's heart were more than he could bear. No remembrance of his covetous longings or of his false-hearted dealings withheld him, and he turned upon her, crying—

"And if it were so, what is that to thee? For what did I barter my happiness but to release thee and give thee mortal life, thou soulless clod of earth!"

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Even as he spoke Eruna glided close, and threw her arms about him, trying to stay his speech. But it was too late, the words were out, and as her cold white hand touched his lips, he felt a deadly chill at his heart, and fell senseless to the ground.

A clamour of voices, and the sound of hurrying footsteps, brought him to himself, as the workmen from his mines crowded into the hall.

"Woe be upon us all, master!" they cried, "where is thy lady? She is not to be found in the castle, and but an hour ago, as we were leaving our work to go homewards, we saw a white figure, that wore her face, though not her garb, glide past us and reach the mouth of the 'Silver Nail' shaft. And we followed after in fear; but as we approached, before any one could reach it, the white figure cast itself down the shaft. Then we were affrighted indeed, and the foremost of us went down, fearing to find a shattered form at the bottom, but there was no one—no, not a sign, though we searched with care. But strange sounds rang through the mountain, master. And we came up again, and hither in haste, to see if perchance she were dead and we had seen her wraith—but nowhere in the castle halls or woods can she be found."

Nor, indeed, was Eruna ever found again; and, what is more, from the day that the white woman leaped down the shaft, no more ore was found in the "Silver Nail" mine, and though it still bears that name, no silver has again been found there to this day. But Joseph wandered away, distraught with grief, into the mountains; nor could any one prevail upon him to return again to the castle, but he continued to wander, seeking for his vein of lost silver, till he met his death by a fall from one of the mountain precipices, leaving behind him, as the only tokens of the riches so dearly bought, a ruined castle, and the forsaken shaft of the "Silver Nail."

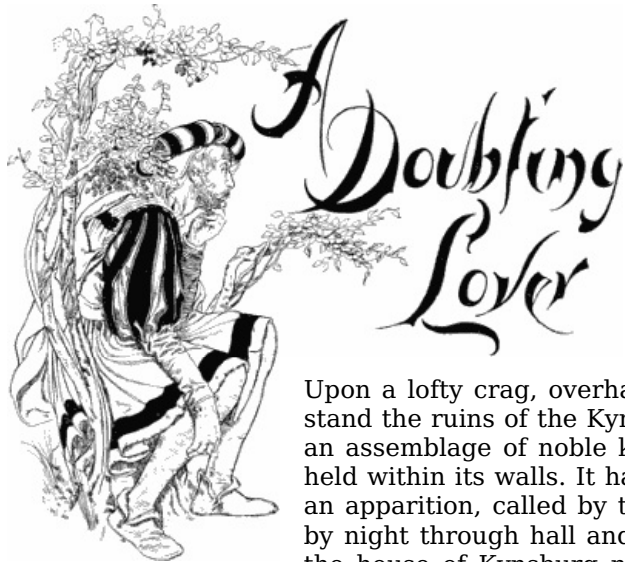
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XIV A DOUBTING LOVER

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Upon a lofty crag, overhanging the river Weistritz, in Eastern Germany, stand the ruins of the Kynsburg. Once it was a splendid castle, and many an assemblage of noble knights and ladies, and many a gay revel, were held within its walls. It had its guardian spirit, too; for the tale went that an apparition, called by the castle-folk "the white lady," often wandered by night through hall and garden, and most of all when some maiden of the house of Kynsburg needed help. So it had been, they said, when a

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daring and cruel knight once waylaid a daughter of Kynsburg as she passed alone at even along the corridor. For this knight had cast his eyes upon the maiden, who was beautiful, and had urged her to give him her love, but she denied it him; and so he would fain have won by foul means what he could not get by fair ones. But this maiden had, from her childhood, loved to hear of the "white lady," and to fancy she was under her protection, and many a prayer had she said in the castle chapel for the repose of her soul. And now, in the hour of need, she called upon her, and at once the mysterious white figure appeared; and while the reckless knight fell upon his knees in terror, the closed doors of the corridor silently opened, and the girl fled through them to a place of safety. But next morning the knight was found lying dead upon the floor.

This was the story that was handed down from generation to generation among the folk of Kynsburg, and Adelheid, the beautiful daughter of the house, had often listened to it with eager ears, and had longed in her turn to see the "white lady," and invoke her help.

For Adelheid, too, had her trouble, though it was hard to see how any, save one person, could mend it. And that person was not the "white lady," but the knight, Bernhard von Haugwitz, whom Adelheid had secretly loved ever since she first saw him ride by to the hunt, in all the splendour of his youth and noble bearing. But she had no certainty, nor much hope even, of her love being returned, though sometimes, to be sure, she caught his eyes fixed upon her as earnestly as though he would have read her very soul, so that it needed all the pride that her blood and her upbringing had taught her, to help her to hide her agitation. And just at the time I tell of, the knight was at the castle, for the lord of Kynsburg was giving a great feast to celebrate the beginning of the autumn hunt; and all the nobles of the country, far and near, were gathered together for it. Many of their wives and daughters had come with them, too, so that the castle was overflowing with guests and merriment, and little time left for Adelheid to brood over her own thoughts. Yet even now she would sometimes draw aside from her young companions, as they paced the gardens or the terrace together, for she hoped that the knight would come and seek her out for a few moments alone, as he had done once or twice before. But he came seldom, and her heart grew heavier each day.

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If only she could have known! If only she could have read that proud and secret heart, and seen how it was filled with love for her, which gloomy fears and doubts alone kept silent! For Bernhard von Haugwitz was not the cheery, hopeful being that his years and his fortune should have made him. Bitter experience and sorrow had already overshadowed him, and shaken his trust in his fellow-creatures, and his belief in the happiness of life. He would not, so he told himself, again stake everything upon the love of a woman; he hesitated to pluck the fruit, for fear it should leave a bitter taste behind. And this though his heart was wrung for longing after Adelheid's love, and pity, too, for her; for he knew that she loved him, and that her life was consuming away for his sake; nor had he any good reason to fancy that her love was not pure and faithful.

He thought upon it as he sat with his companions round the great oaken table in the castle hall; the gold and silver flagons passed from hand to hand, but he let them go by untasted; songs and jesting sounded merrily on every side, but he did not heed them; the present scene faded from his sight, and he saw only the tall figure in the white, gold-embroidered garments, and the wistful eyes gazing into his, as he had seen them that evening, when he stood for a moment beside Adelheid in the dusky hall. As he mused he felt his resolution weakening, and swore that he would flee from the temptation to which he would not give way. Why not now, at once, without seeing her again? for a meeting might give rise to words and looks that could only increase his pain and remorse in the future. What had he to do with these carousing knights, whose thoughts were far from his own? He would slip out and look for his page; then the horses should be saddled forthwith, and they would be up and away. He rose and went out through the ante-rooms to the terrace of the castle, glad to let the night-wind lift his hair and cool his throbbing brow.

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The stars shone bright above the opposite hills and sparkled in the river below. A little breeze whispered in the branches of the poplars; it was as though the trees talked together. A strange feeling of expectation was in the air; could it be only that he was looking upon this spot for the

last time? Something moved beside him in the shadow—he turned, and saw that a tall white figure stood beneath the poplar-trees. He strained his eyes through the dark—surely he could not be mistaken, it was the maiden he loved and was leaving for ever.

“Adelheid,” he called almost in spite of himself, “is it thou? Then bid me farewell.”



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Yet even now she would sometimes draw apart from her young companions, as they paced the gardens or terrace together.

The figure moved, as though making a sign of assent, and beckoning with her hand, glided on under the trees. He followed, scarcely knowing what he did. Onward along the winding paths the figure hurried, and now came out upon the open space before the castle, where stood the old well, overshadowed by a spreading lime-tree. Here the light from the windows fell in patches upon the flags; and before Bernhard had time to reach the fleeting white form, he saw it cross the streaks of light, and with a quick movement, spring upon the worn stone margin of the well. He dashed forward, but too late. With a despairing wave of the white hands, the figure had plunged into the deeps below.

Bernhard stood for an instant motionless with horror; then he roused himself and rushed toward the castle, raising an alarm. “Help, help!” he cried; “the Lady Adelheid ... the well!” His tongue refused to utter anything more; he stood gasping, and clinging to the pillars of the gateway, while a horrible sense of remorse and hopeless desolation began to stir in his heart. In the castle all was dismay and confusion; in an instant the knights and serving-men flocked out with torches, ropes, and ladders. The cries of Adelheid’s mother rose above the shouts of the men, and from the woods beyond the terrace came trooping the band of white-robed maidens.

“What is it?” asked one and another as they hurried along.

“Adelheid,” was the answer, “Adelheid has fallen down the well.”

“Adelheid!” repeated the maidens in astonishment. “Nay, she has been with us, yonder; she does but linger behind.”

And as the group parted, Bernhard beheld Adelheid, a flush of surprise upon her cheek, coming towards him down the line of eager, questioning maidens. The tide of sorrow which had gone nigh to drown his soul, turned to a flood of great joy, which swept every fear and doubt away. He sprang forward and cried, as he fell at her feet—

“Oh love, my love! that I thought by my folly to have lost! But thanks be to Heaven, who in the fear of the loss hath made certain to me the joy of the gain! Here, before all men, I own my love, too long hidden, and offer thee my heart and my life.”

So, in all the company, the brief moment of sorrow was turned to sweet rejoicing, and most of all in the hearts of Bernhard and Adelheid, who never to their lives’ end had any need to regret the events of that mysterious night.

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So soon as she heard the story, and that no one else was missing from the castle, Adelheid felt sure she knew who the mysterious lady had been; it was the "white lady" of her dreams and fancies, the guardian of the maidens of Kynsburg, who had thus found a way to end her long uncertainty. But the question was not so easily answered for the rest of the company, and some doubting spirits insisted that the well should be explored. Blazing torches were lowered into its dark, silent depths, and long poles thrust down to sound it; but nothing was discovered, and the glare of the torches showed only the damp, moss-grown walls and the calm face of the slumbering water.

So the story was proudly added to the annals of Kynsburg, and since then many peasant youths and maidens have been quite sure that the "white lady" watches over their love-affairs, and that they have seen her wandering by night in the woods of the castle, and beside the old well.

XV A LEGEND OF WALPURGIS-NIGHT

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There was once a young fellow who dwelt near the Brocken, and he had won a lovely maiden for his bride. He thought himself a lucky man, but then he did not know that both the girl and her mother were witches. Now one evening he tarried very late at his bride's house, and could not guess why she and her mother were so eager to send him away, for generally the maiden was loth to let him go; and he did not know that this was Walpurgis-night, the great meeting-time of the witches. Yet he grew suspicious, and after he had bidden his dear "good-night," he hid himself in the hay-loft, for he half expected to see another man creep up for a stolen meeting with his sweetheart, and was ready to fly at his throat. But, instead of this, he beheld mother and daughter step into the hay-loft alone, and the mother held in her hand a strangely shaped glass. There they stood in the middle of the barn, and spoke strange words, and drank from the glass, when lo! on a sudden they had disappeared.

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Now this tore the bridegroom's heart with dread and foreboding, and he determined to follow them. So he came from his hiding-place, and took up the glass they had left behind. A few drops of red, fiery liquid still remained in it. Then the lad went out and plucked a garland of dragon-wort, which he wound round about him, to preserve him from witchcraft; and after he had done this, he boldly drank all that remained in the glass, repeating the same words that he had heard his sweetheart use. And behold! in the twinkling of an eye, he found himself on the Brocken, in the midst of the magic circle among the rocks, where the witches meet.

Jagged peaks and giant fir-trees, with boughs bent crooked by the breath of the storm-wind, rose on every side, and here and there, on the rocks, huge fires were burning. The company was arriving in great numbers, and the bridegroom was astonished to see how many of his neighbours and familiar acquaintance came riding up, some on pitchforks, some on goats, cats, or geese. His lovely bride was there, riding pillion behind her mother on the hay-fork that had been lying beside him in the loft. He himself was sitting, he knew not how, on a great hay-waggon, that was drawn to one side of the open dancing-space, and he laid his wreath of dragon-wort so as to form a kind of circle around him. Presently the oldest and fiercest among the witches came swooping down upon him, riding a huge tom-cat. "Ah!" she cried with a disappointed scowl, "curse thy hedge of dragon-wort, thou interloper! 'Twould have gone ill with thee but for that!" The tom-cat gave an angry spit, and the baffled witch pulled him round by the whiskers, and rode away into the dance. For the dance had begun, fast and furious, so that the lad could hardly see which way the frantic creatures bounded and pranced; and all the while there was a terrible being with horns upon his head, who moved about and directed the festivities. And what was the bridegroom's dismay when this fearful being came towards him, and looking up with a jeering expression, said: "A bridegroom should have a merry heart, and thou art not here only to stare and be idle, I take it. I know thee well enough for a fine cornet-player; here, catch hold of this instrument, and help to play for our dance."

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With that he threw up a splendid new cornet into the waggon, and the bridegroom was fain to take it, and join in with the other players, who, hidden among the rocks, where he could not see them, were filling the air with a burst of music. Now the bridegroom could not help agreeing with the opinion expressed about his playing, and so for some time he played on, not a little pleased with himself, upon the beautiful cornet.

But after a while the Terrible Being gave a sign, and music and dance stopped at once. Then all the company stood silent, while he drew water from the "witches' well," and poured it into the "witches' basin," where the witches then had to wash themselves, while he sprinkled some of the water, too, upon them.

While the bridegroom was watching this dread ceremony, he became aware that his sweetheart had spied him out, and was gazing at him anxiously. As soon as she caught his eye, she danced up, and whispered: "Dear lover, come with me, and I will prepare a couch for thee, for thou must be weary of this long, wild night." He would have opened his lips to scold her, but she touched them, and he was unable to say another word. Then, taking him by the hand, she drew him, as he thought, into the neighbouring thicket, where she showed him a downy feather-bed, shut in by flowered curtains. "Creep in there," she whispered, "and sleep; but thy new cornet thou mayst keep as thy reward for playing so finely; our master hath said so." With this, she was gone, and he heard the music and tumult of the dance break forth again, but presently a great weariness overcame him, and he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was high noon, and he lay in a meadow close to his home; the downy bed with thick curtains turned out to be the skeleton of an old horse, which had lain mouldering in the fields, and between the ribs of which he found himself wedged. The new cornet, too, proved to be nothing but a dead cat, with a stumpy tail, which he had almost chewed off during his fine musical efforts.

The bridegroom went home, seething with indignation, and bent upon revenge. That very same evening he betook himself, armed with his righteous wrath, to his sweetheart's house, and began:—

"Wretched girl! what honest man can have any more to do with thee now?"

But in a moment the tables were turned, and he found himself in an unexpected position. "Wretched!" cried she. "I? whom thou hast spied upon, stolen a march upon, from whose magic glass thou hast dared drink, and but for whose care thou wouldst have been crushed to powder last night, thou foolhardy meddler!"

"'Twas not thou, but my dragon-wort, that saved me," began the unlucky fellow.

"Nonsense!" screamed mother and daughter, now both together. "Dost think that could have availed thee at all had we raised our voices against thee? Nay, 'twas we who saved thee; and hadst thou not been kept out of sight and put to sleep, thou couldst never have lived through the terrible hour of the 'witches' sprinkling.'"

"At any rate," complained the brow-beaten man, trying to keep up his dignity, "I should have been warned it was a witch I was taking for my bride. But it is time yet," he added angrily, "and take such a bride I will not—I will not, I say!"

"Warned!" shouted mother and daughter at once; "he, a common mortal, *warned* of the honour we did him in stooping to mate with his like! Nay, 'tis plain he is only fit for one lot—a donkey's! And a donkey he shall be; let that be his punishment."

So before the hapless bridegroom could defend himself, or take refuge in flight, the magic words were pronounced, and he went forth, an ugly, rough, braying donkey, a terrible example of man's folly in attempting, with however much right on his side, to argue with a witch—or a woman.



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**The company was
arriving in great
numbers.**

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But in a moment the tables were turned, and he found himself in an unexpected position.

Down the road the poor donkey ambled, trying to express his deep sense of injury by piteous brayings. Presently a neighbour heard him, and though far from recognising in him an old comrade of the workshop and the ale-house, he still had pity on him, and noticing, besides, that he was a fine donkey, he drove him into a stall and put fresh hay before him. But the donkey could neither eat nor drink, nor bear to be put to work, so at last the farmer lost patience and drove it out of his stable. And now the wretched donkey wandered about the country, munching such dusty grass and thistles as he could find by the wayside, but driven out of every green paddock as a useless beast, and receiving more kicks than kind handling. At last, half starved and hopeless, he determined to swallow his pride, and return to beg the cruel witches for mercy.

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Now, his bride had been thinking things over, on her side, since he had been turned from her door in the shape of a donkey. She noticed that the village-folk shunned her more of late, and besides, they had always held a kind of suspicious attitude towards her and her mother.

What if the bridegroom should have let out the horrid truth, during those few hours that he had spent in the village, after awaking from his enchanted sleep? What if she should get no one else to woo her now? So, when she saw the poor donkey appear beneath her window, with lean ribs and drooping ears, her heart was quite prepared to be softened, and she listened graciously to his bray of apology and repentance.

"Well, I will forgive thee this once," she said, "on one condition, and that is, that thou dost wed me within twelve hours of the time thou art rid of thy donkey's skin. If thou wilt promise this, I will tell thee how to get back thy proper shape."

The donkey went feebly down on his knees in the dust, and held up one hoof, as a solemn sign that his promise was given.

"Listen, then," said the little witch; "thou must watch for a child to be christened in the village, and wait at the church door till the water from the font is thrown out; if some only falls on thy back, thou wilt be changed directly."

The donkey threw up his hoofs in glee, and trotted off to the village. It was a long time before any christening took place; never had there seemed such a scarcity of births before. But at last the donkey heard that the son and heir of his old friend the farmer was to be christened the following Sunday, and he watched eagerly for the party to go to church, and return again, and then for the beadle to come out upon the porch and empty away the water from the font. When at last he did so, the donkey stood right in his way. "Get away, foolish beast," called the beadle; but the donkey did not budge. "What care I?" the beadle thereupon angrily exclaimed, and threw the whole pan of water over the donkey's back. He nearly fell to the ground when he saw his old friend the bridegroom, who had so long been missing, standing in the donkey's place; but the young fellow gave him a golden crown to hold his tongue, and trump up some tale about his having been away on a journey, and he firmly believed ever after that the beadle had done so.

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Then the bridegroom hurried to claim his bride, and keep his promise, which was not so very hard after all, for she was a pretty bride, and one only had to forget that little matter of the Brocken, and take care to sleep sound on every future Walpurgis-night. But she kept him in order—"For, mind," said she, "if ever thou dost treat me to any foolish behaviour, back into the donkey's skin thou shalt go again, and this time every one shall know of it."

XVI SEEKERS AFTER GOLD

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Seekers after Gold

Among those mountains of Saxony known as the Obererzgebirge, once famous for their silver-mines, there lived, nearly three hundred years ago, a man named Ran, who was overseer of the mines of Schneeberg. Now many among his workmen tried to win the favour of overseer Ran, not only because he was master of the works, but because of his only child, his beautiful daughter Gretchen. Her loveliness and her sweetness were the talk of the country, and every young man in Schneeberg fancied himself ready to jump down the shaft of the mine for her sake, if it were required of him. This, however, was not what Master Ran needed. He was a grasping man, and the constant handling of precious metal seemed to have increased his thirst for riches. So he was determined that lovely Gretchen should be a mine of wealth to him, all the more, perhaps, that the other mine with which he had to do was no longer as prosperous as it had been. There were general complaints over the quantity of "blind ore," as the people called it, that had lately been found—worthless stuff, that did not repay smelting. This misfortune was said to be due to the "silver-thief," or "Kobold," a wicked little dwarf that was supposed to haunt the mountain, and draw the silver down out of the quartz as the workmen approached. At any rate, the failure of the mine, whoever was to blame for it, was like to bring poverty among the folk of Schneeberg, and Ran was all the more anxious to secure riches for himself and his child against that evil day. So he let it be known that the man who could produce the largest bag of gold in all the district, should have the beautiful Gretchen to wife.

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"Let those who would get her seek," said he, "for it is well known there is plenty of gold in these mountains for any who have wit to find it, and courage to risk something in the winning of it."

Now here was a gauntlet thrown down. Every one knew that the overseer must be speaking of the mysterious treasures hidden under trees and in caverns by the dwarfs, and other mountain-spirits; and at the ale-house of an evening, when the men were gathered together, every one had some tale to tell of people who had tried to "lift" these wonderful treasure-pots, or who had been befriended by the dwarfs.

One told of the dwarf-king who lived in a cave under the neighbouring mountain, and was mightily fond of teasing people, but would also do them great kindnesses now and then. Thus a poor maiden was once picking up wood in the forest, at the mouth of the cave, on a cold winter's day, when she met a tiny man with a crown upon his head, and he said to her: "Kind maiden, I pray thee, pick me up and put me in thy basket; it snows, and I am so cold and tired, and have no shelter. Have pity on me, and take me to thy cottage." The maid had never seen the dwarf-king before; but as he begged so earnestly, she picked him up, put him in her basket, covered him over with her apron to keep the snow off, and turned homewards. But on the way the little man grew so heavy that she could hardly stagger along under the weight, and had much ado to get her basket home. She put it down by the fire, and whipped off the apron, crying: "Let us see what thou art made of, little man, to weigh so much!" But what were her surprise and joy to find the little man gone, and in his place a great lump of solid silver!

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"That is an easy way enough to get rich," said another miner, taking the pipe from his mouth. He was a native of the Hartz Mountains, and was looked upon with suspicion for having left his own province to seek for work so far away. "But every one does not come off so well as that. There is plenty of treasure hidden in our mountains too; and there is one spot I mind, near to where I was working, not so long ago, that I can tell a strange tale of. 'Twas hard by a copper-mine, and the

owners of the works were very rich. But one night the works, the owners, their house and all, disappeared; all that was left was a great heap of slack. People said their money was buried beneath it; and not long after, we began to notice that a blue flame would flicker up from the slack every night between eleven and twelve. And there was a tall, black man's figure, too," he continued, lowering his voice, "that would stand over the flame, and try to keep it in till twelve o'clock. That should have been enough to keep folk from meddling with the place; but there was a man from Sonan, who declared he had lifted many a treasure, and was going to have a try for this. And he talked over my brother and some other men, poor fools, into giving him a helping hand. It was settled they were to meet at sunset—for that was the right time—by the slack-heap. 'Only be sure,' said the leader, 'not to speak a single word while we are at the job, whatever chances, or all is lost.' At the appointed hour the work began, and sure enough, after a short time, they came upon a great pot, brimming over with golden ducats. Now it had to be lifted. The levers were soon at hand, and up, up, it came. It was almost on a level with the ground, when a wild shouting and yelping of dogs were heard; and the workmen turned, resting for a moment upon their poles, to see what it was. Then behold! from the shadow of the woods, the Wild Huntsman and his train swept forth, flying through the air, and followed by their baying hounds. Every one has heard of the Wild Huntsman, but it is given to few to see him. He went by so fast, my brother said, that it was as the passing of a shadow across the sun; yet they could see he wore the dress of a forester, and his mantle fluttering in the breeze looked like the beating of a huge wing. Not one of the men spoke as he passed—'tis bad luck to do that; and besides, they remembered their leader's words; but they swore he looked back at them as if angered at getting no answer to his loud hunting-cry: 'Hoi-hoi!' that he shouts as he goes. But no sooner had he passed than another sight was seen—a queer little man humped together in a common kneading-trough, who came sliding and pushing along in the track of the wild train, shouting as he went: 'If I could but catch them up! if I could but catch them up!' Now at this laughable sight the men forgot both fear and prudence; they shouted with merriment, and one cried: 'He will have a hard job to do that!' And there! as he spoke, the pot of gold was gone, and all their efforts to find it were in vain! The men went home with long faces, and well they might, for their hair presently turned grey with fretting over the lost treasure, and every one of them died not long after."

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"Well," began one of the Schneeberg men after a short silence, "'tis true enough that the gift of holding his tongue is needful to him who has dealings with the mountain-spirits. See the case of poor Hans of Donat. He was always bemoaning his poverty, and on the look-out for treasure; and the mountain-dwarf gave him riches, too, but only on condition that he should hold his tongue about the business, and bring him a penny loaf and a penny dip, every time he went on duty in the mine; for Hans was a miner. All went well for a bit, and Hans had plenty of money and to spare; but one day, at the ale-house, drink unloosed his tongue, and he let the great secret out. And not many days after, when his comrades were waiting at the mouth of the shaft for him to give the signal to haul the bucket up, he kept them there a long time, and then there was a mighty pull on the rope, and a bright light flashed up the shaft. They hauled as fast as they might, but when the bucket got to the top, there lay poor Hans in it, dead, and all round the edge of the bucket penny dips were burning, and the last loaf he had taken to the dwarf lay untouched on his breast. So it was easy to see who had given him his death-stroke. Poor Hans—to think he bought his own funeral tapers, too!"

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"Come now," another of the Schneeberg men rejoined: "all the stories of treasure-seekers aren't as dismal as these. Look at the story of Jahnsbach. Jahn was a poverty-stricken fellow, tramping about after work; and one night, as he was wandering in the forest near the Greifenstein, having lost his way, he too met a dwarf, that stood beckoning to him. He followed, not without fears, and the dwarf led him into a dark, narrow-mouthed cavern; but no sooner were they within, than it broadened out into a stately hall, with walls of silver and chairs and tables of gold, all lit up as bright as day by thousands of wax-candles in crystal candlesticks. At one table sat twelve men of noble mien, each wearing the stately dress of a knight. The dwarf invited the astonished Jahn to sit down and eat with them, and he obeyed, for hunger gets the better of shyness. He had never before had such a meal, and he felt refreshed after it, and in excellent spirits. The twelve men seemed to enjoy his company, and bade the dwarf fill up his wallet. Jahn took leave of them with hearty thanks, and the dwarf led him out of the cavern, showed him the road he was in search of, and then disappeared. When Jahn unpacked the wallet, which was very heavy, he found that the kindly spirits had filled it with bars of gold and silver. In his joy and gratitude, he vowed that he would make a good use of it; and so he built, not far from Thum, a little group of houses, which he gave rent-free to the poor; and they say he did much good besides, to the sick and needy. And I never heard that any harm happened to him. Ye may prove the truth of the tale, for the village of *Jahnsbach*, which grew up round that knot of houses, is called after him."

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"It seems to me," said a young man, who, sitting by the fire in deep study over a roll of paper, had not yet spoken, "that in these tales of yours, only those came to harm who themselves sought after money, greedily, and merely for their own use. But methinks, after all, the best and safest way of getting wealth is to work for it. I, too, hope to find a pot of gold in the earth, but not by your manner of seeking."

The men turned and looked at him, with more dislike and suspicion in their faces than they had shown to the Hartz miner.

"Yea, by witchcraft," muttered one of them under his breath, in response to the young fellow's words. For Christopher Schürer, also, was no native of these mountains, and, besides, his doings were too strange, in the eyes of the rough mining-folk, to be regarded as anything but uncanny.

He had fled from his native province of Westphalia to escape religious persecution; and his knowledge of chemistry, and general cleverness, had quickly won him a high position in the works. Here was already food for jealousy; but, besides this, he had lately taken to shutting himself up in a little workshop of his own, and busying himself with experiments, by which, if the truth were known, he one day hoped to turn the hateful 'blind ore' to good account, and build up the fortunes of Schneeberg and its people. But this was a deep secret; all his fellow-workmen knew was that he kept his "smelting-hut" carefully locked, and would tell no one what he was doing. "And what could that mean save one thing?" said they. Had they known as well, that he had raised his eyes to Master Ran's lovely Gretchen, and that his love was returned, their feeling against him would have been yet more bitter.

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"Well," resumed the Hartzman, a bold fellow, who had been heard to declare that he would stake body and soul on winning beautiful Gretchen, "I say again, there is danger in 'gold-lifting,' but I am not the one to give up happiness and wealth for that. Danger or no, I am off to seek for gold, away from this poverty-stricken place; and it is back to my own mountains I shall go. That is the place for hidden treasure. But I think Mistress Gretchen's suitors should play fair; one must not sneak in before another; so, if there be any here bent on the same quest, let them stand forth, and agree with me to fix a time when we shall all meet again, ready to go before Master Ran and show which has won the wager."

"That is but right," answered the men; and two of them stood up and announced that they meant to join in the contest. One was a strapping young fellow, bold and careless, fond of the dice and the bottle, and well known to be one of Mistress Gretchen's most desperate admirers. The other was a pale, red-haired man, with a shifty glance; it was plain he could never hope to get any girl except by tempting her with gold.

"What, only three of us!" cried the Hartzman; "only three to contend for the winning of so fair a flower?"

"The stakes are too high for common men to take a hand," replied one of the Schneebergers, laughing awkwardly: "perhaps when ye have all failed, there will be a chance for humbler and less daring folk."

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"Well, so be it," rejoined the Hartzman; "I have no fear of failure, and six months is enough for me, but that I must have, for my goal lies far off. Say, comrades, shall we meet here again this day six months, and report our success?"

"There is one more would join you," spoke a quiet voice from the chimney-corner, and Christopher Schürer rose and came towards them. "I do not mean to dig for pots of gold, or to follow dwarfs into dark caverns, but if I get the needful wealth, I suppose I may contend with the rest?"

He spoke with a somewhat scornful smile, for he marked the look of dislike upon his comrades' faces.

"We cannot gainsay thee," said Fritz, the tall young Schneeberger, after some hesitation, "for there is nothing to keep any man from taking part in this contest—but methinks thy trouble will be in vain," he added, with a self-satisfied air.

"Unless the devil help him!" growled the Hartzman, who looked more like a comrade of the devil's himself, as he glared from under his heavy brows at his rival. "But let be—fair means or foul are alike to me," he muttered low to himself, "so I do but keep your smug face out of this fight."

So the four parted, and next day the tale was all over Schneeberg, and Mistress Gretchen was sorely teased by all the wives and maidens among her friends, on the subject of the event that was to decide her fate. Master Ran bit his lip and frowned angrily, when his old friends upbraided him with his indifference to his daughter's happiness and said that such wealth as her suitors had been driven to seek for would never bring luck; but he stood firm, even against his daughter's prayers—the richest man should have her, and no other. "Who knows," people began to say, "what his own secret troubles may be, or what money he needs to cover his own ill doings?"

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Gretchen had indeed implored her father to withdraw his rash promise to the gold-seekers, and had sworn she would be bought by no man to wife, for a pot of ill-gotten money; yet his obstinacy did not seem to cause her as much uneasiness as might have been expected. Perhaps she knew what was going on in Christopher's little smelting-hut, or perhaps he found words wherewith to comfort her, during their stolen interviews and walks in the lonely pinewoods far up the mountain. He, at any rate, did not believe in the likelihood of the seekers finding hidden treasure.

Fritz had gone forth on his wanderings alone, and alone, too, the Hartzman had departed to his native mountains; but Master Red-hair had taken a friend with him on his journey, and Christopher, as has been said, remained quietly at home in his workshop. Time sped on, and as the six months drew to their close, Gretchen began to look more anxious, and Christopher more careworn and pale, and overworked.

At last the great day arrived, and all the men gathered eagerly together at the ale-house, where Master Ran, too, was to be seen looking out for his would-be sons-in-law. It was known that not one of the wanderers had as yet turned up in Schneeberg, and Christopher Schürer, too, seemed to have forgotten the day, for he had not left his hut since morning.

It was summer, and still quite light, for the men had assembled early. Now, as they sat at the tavern door, looking anxiously down all the roads, there appeared on the edge of the forest, to the left, the form of a man staggering along with a heavy burden upon his back. Expectation rose to the highest pitch; but what was the horror and dismay of the company, when it was seen that the man was that friend whom Red-hair had taken away with him on his quest, and that the burden he bore was the body of his unfortunate comrade! With awe-struck faces they carried the dead man into an inner room, and then supplied the weary bearer of this sad burden with food and refreshment. When he was able to speak, he told the story of Red-hair's ill-omened journey:—

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“We sought for many weeks,” he said, “far and near, following up any clue we could get about buried treasures; but we never found anything, nor could we even get enough information to make a trial, until a week or two ago, when we were returning homewards in despair, and learnt that in a cliff, about a day's journey from here, there was a ‘treasure-chamber,’ where gold and silver lay in heaps. More than one of the villagers swore to having peeped in and seen it, but none had dared venture farther, because there was said to be a wild beast in the cave, whose growlings could be heard outside. Master Red-hair had much ado, methinks, to muster up courage for the venture, but one day, towards evening, after he had been drinking deep at the tavern, he armed himself with a stout stick and a knife, and called me to climb the cliff with him. The climb in the hot afternoon sun brought the blood to my cheeks, but he grew paler the higher we got, and when at last we stood at the mouth of the cave, he stammered: ‘See here, comrade, thou art a stronger man than I, and art not troubled with such a fluttering heart; what if thou shouldst first step in and see how the land lies? I will join thee at thy first call, and—thou shalt have half the treasure.’

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“‘Nay, nay, comrade,’ I answered; ‘each man for himself. I agreed to come with thee for company, and to give thee a helping hand in case of need, but this is not my venture, and I never said I would risk *my* skin to win thee a bride. As for treasure—I have wife and babes at home, ‘tis true, yet I warrant we would all rather be there together, in poverty, but with whole skins, than risk life and limb for a pot of gold that had a curse upon it.’ This did not seem to cheer him much, and I saw I had gone the wrong way about to hearten him up. ‘Yet I see nothing greatly to fear in the look of the case,’ I continued, ‘and a step within is not much to venture, to win a bride that is so beloved’—for I had often heard him call on Gretchen's name in his dreams—‘and for that matter, I will come *with* thee fast enough; only mind, thou wilt have but half the treasure if I do!’ This seemed to decide him, and he said he would venture in if I promised to stand by the mouth of the cave and run to his help at his first cry. This I promised to do, and saw him disappear into the darkness. The mouth of the cave was wide, but it narrowed immediately within, and what was my horror when I saw, as I stood watching it, that it was beginning slowly to close—and yet Red-hair had given no sign! As I saw the opening grow smaller, I shouted to him to return, and would have gone in search of him but that I could not push my way along the narrow windings of the path. But at that moment I heard his voice answering with terrified cries to mine, and mingled with them, the sound of an angry growl. I thrust my hand through the opening and groped about, for I felt sure he was not far off. In another instant I had, indeed, grasped him by the arm, and with much ado, dragged him through the chinks of the rock to the outer air. He was torn, bleeding—and empty-handed.

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“When he could speak, he told me that it had at first been light in the cavern, and that at the farther end of it he had found, sure enough, a great chest full of gold. He was busy filling a sack he had brought with him, when he heard my call, and turning, saw that the front of the cavern was growing quite dark, and closing up. In horror, he started towards it, dragging his half-filled sack; but before he could reach the cave's mouth, a huge black form, like that of a monstrous dog, dashed upon him out of the shadow and struck the sack of gold from his hand. He fell fainting to the earth, and never knew, he said, how he reached the spot from which my hand dragged him forth. I carried him to the village; but when the folk who lived there heard where he had been, they would have nothing to say to him, and we were fain to take refuge in a lonely hut, where I cared for his wounds as best I could. But he never held up his head again, and died yesterday. There was nothing left for me to do, since none would help me, but to carry him home as ye have seen.”

The man stopped speaking, and an awe-struck silence fell on the company. The first to break it was a stranger, who had joined them, unheeded in the common excitement.

“I fear,” said he, “that ye miss yet another of your countrymen from among you to-night, and though I am no friend of his, yet I, too, felt it was all I could do to come hither and bring you tidings of him—sad ones though they be. One Fritz of Schneeberg took up his quarters in our village, many long miles from here, a few weeks back. He, too, told us he had been wandering in search of adventure, and asked if there were no hidden treasures in our land. Well, to be sure, we told him of the Güss, a deep lake that lies in one of our valleys. It is said that a rich and prosperous farm once stood there, of which the owners were as wicked as they were rich. So one night, thus the tale runs, this lake rose suddenly from the depths of the earth, and swallowed up the farmhouse and all it contained, yet the gold belonging to those wicked men is still lying down below there, for any bold diver who has a mind to go and try for it. No one in our village has ever tried, within the memory of man; but this Fritz declared he was at home in the water and did not fear to make the venture. He was a bold fellow. Many of us tried to dissuade him—yes, some of our maidens amongst the number,” he added with a half-smile; “but no one succeeded, and the tale went through the country-side that a stranger was going to dive to the bottom of the Güss for the treasure. Fritz spent some time every day swimming and diving in the lake, and soon got to

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know its deeps and shallows, and the exact spot where the house stands, for on clear days one can plainly see from a boat the shadow that it casts. At length the day came on which he had promised to make the trial; and a great crowd of people, among whom were some very wealthy noblemen from a neighbouring castle, assembled to see it. Fritz dived once, and it was a long time before he reappeared; ye could have heard a pin drop in the crowd while we waited. But he came up again, and told us he had seen the house, as plain as he saw the boat we were awaiting him in. The roof had fallen in, and in one of the top chambers he had seen the promised heap of gold. Every one gaped, except those grand gentlemen, for they, one could see, didn't believe him.

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"I am ready to go again," cried Fritz, standing up on the boat's edge. "I will have that gold yet!"

"The noble gentlemen looked scornful, yet one seemed half convinced, and said—

"Thou'rt a bold lad. Do but bring me one of yon pieces of gold, and I will add a thousand golden crowns to it!"

"The unlucky lad needed no other spur; in he leapt, and we waited, hopefully at first, but all in vain. Fritz never came to the top again, and we tried without success even to drag the lake for his body."

This second dismal tale was received with lamentations, for Fritz had been a popular lad, and had left a widowed mother behind him. Some one was heard to say that Mistress Gretchen stood a poor chance of getting any husband at all, since her father's greed had been the means of bringing ill luck to so many poor fellows—for the Hartzman had not turned up either, and doubtless he too had come to a bad end. "Ah!" said another bystander, "Christopher Schürer was right, and it had been better to have worked for their wealth like other men."

"Schürer, indeed!" echoed Master Ran, trying to put a bold face on it, despite the dismay which he, too, secretly felt: "And where, prithee, is he? Did he, too, not promise to show himself on this evening?"

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"Thou wilt not see him, Master Ran," replied the sheriff of the town, coming forward from among the crowd, where he had hitherto stood concealed, "till I give my men leave to open his door. I have had my eye on yon fellow for many months, for ye all know that he has long been suspected of witchcraft and sorcery; but what no one knows is, that the Hartzman, before he left this place, gave me further and more telling proofs of Schürer's evil doings, which he had noticed unawares. Only he prayed me not to denounce him—except he should try to fly from the town—until this day arrived. I have kept my word, but Schürer has been a prisoner in his smelting-hut since this noon; and if ye will, we can now go there, and judge of his doings for ourselves."

No sooner said than done. The sheriff, Master Ran, and the whole company turned their steps to the little hut on the hill, followed, I dare swear, at a short distance, by the trembling Gretchen. As the bolt which the sheriff had fastened across the door was withdrawn, a joyful exclamation greeted the startled officers of justice, and Schürer came towards them with a glowing face, holding in his hand a trough full of a blue powder of beautiful colour.

"Welcome, my masters!" he cried, without noticing their black looks. "Are ye come that I may prove to you the sooner how I have kept my word?"

"Not so fast, Master Schürer," interrupted the sheriff; "keep thy welcome till thou seest how far it is due. We have come to charge thee with witchcraft and sorcery. What hast thou to say against that?"

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Christopher's face darkened, but he showed no dejection. "I say," he answered, "that ye should prove before you condemn; and here now I have the proof to give. A few days past it might have gone harder with me, for I could not have convinced you of the sincerity of my aim; but within the last few hours, thank Heaven, the work of long months has been successful, and I can bring the 'pot of gold'—or what is as good—that I promised to produce to-night, as the price of Mistress Gretchen's hand." His eyes sought those of some one in the crowd, and seemingly found what they sought, for he continued with a joyful smile: "See this powder; it is prepared, by an invention of my own, from that ore which you think worthless, and cast away out of the mines; and if I mistake not, it will be of great use, and bring work and wealth back amongst our people."

He then showed them how the powder was made, and what its use was, and soon convinced even those who would most willingly have continued to suspect him, that he was free from the charge they had made against him. Master Ran, too, presently saw that the discovery of the beautiful blue powder, which the people at first called the "blue wonder," but which was afterwards named smalt, would be as good as many a pot of gold to Christopher, and so he ended by giving him his daughter with a good grace, all the more that he saw well enough the young people would never suffer to be parted. The wedding feast was clouded only by the memory of the unhappy suitors who had fallen victims to their own folly and Ran's greed.

Many people, and Gretchen amongst them, often wondered what had become of the Hartzman, and whether he had been punished by some dreadful accident for his plot against Schürer. But no answer was forthcoming to this question, for many years. Mistress Gretchen was already the buxom mother of many fair children, when one day a man, worn and old before his time, came toiling up the village street, and stopped before the ale-house. Master Ran, now quite an old fellow, was sitting at the door, and seeing the man's gaze fixed upon his face, noticing, too, something familiar in his look, he inquired: "Dost thou know me, friend, or can I do somewhat for

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thee?"

"I see," answered the traveller, "that the Hartzman is forgotten. I suspected as much, and suppose, indeed, that the game is played out, but I wanted to come and see for myself!"

"The Hartzman!" cried Ran. "Why, we all thought you lost, man, long ago, with the others. For know that they were lost, all save my son-in-law, Christopher, who has made Schneeberg rich. But tell us where thou hast been these many years, and why thou didst give up the prize that once so tempted thee—yea, tempted thee to do a dirty trick, too. But let bygones be bygones!"

"So he got her after all," mused the Hartzman. "Well, when I saw what had befallen me, I guessed that all was lost."

By this time a crowd had collected round the stranger, and a whisper went round, explaining who he was.

"And what was it befell thee?" asked one of the Hartzman's former comrades.

"When I reached home," the latter answered, "I went to the Morgenbrots Valley, near the Brocken, for I knew many wonders happened there, and that it was the likeliest place for me to find the sort of treasure I was after. Many days and nights I wandered about the hills and woods of that district, hoping to overhear some word of counsel from the voices of the underworld. At last, one morning, as I sat near a spring that rises toward the head of the valley, I suddenly saw a man of strange appearance, and wearing a foreign dress, standing by the spring, where no one had stood the moment before; and he was holding a sieve under the waterfall, but as the stream rushed through it, the sieve caught and held a number of large pearls. When his sieve was full of them the man washed his hands in the spring and said:

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'In the Morgenbrots Valley I wash myself,
In Venice town^[8] I dry myself.'

With that he disappeared, and I hurried to the water's edge, but could only pick up one or two pearls that he had let drop; nor could I find any more. This was not enough, so I determined to follow him, and repeated the charm, making sure it would carry me into some hidden treasure-cave. But I had hardly finished the words before I found myself in a strange city, where I saw not a soul I knew, and could not understand a word any one said. I am a bold man, but I am bound to say this dismayed me, and I wandered about till nightfall, wondering how I should keep from starvation. I was beginning to despair, when, on one of the bridges of which the city was full, I met the same man whom I had seen that morning in my native mountains. He could understand me, I knew, and I spoke to him and implored him to help me.

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"I know thee, and thy history," said the man, and his face was ill to look upon. "Thou art a fool, and wouldst have been a thief. Wherefore should I help thee?"

"Sir," I cried, "have pity on me this once, and know it was but love that made me covetous and reckless. I am a fool, in truth; but I am also, surely, a countryman of thine, and in a wretched case. I pray thee, send me back to my own land."

"At last he was moved, and took me home with him to a splendid house, where the very bed I slept upon was hung with tassels of pure gold. And all this treasure he had got out of our Morgenbrots Valley. He told me to go to bed and sleep in peace, and that on rising in the morning I was to take water and wash my hands, saying:

'In Venice town I wash myself,
In the Morgenbrots Valley I dry myself.'

and I should at once find myself in our Hartz Mountains again. I did as he bade me, and all came to pass as he said. Only, when I looked at my face in the spring, and when I questioned the folk in the villages hard by, I found that not one night, as I supposed, but many years, had passed since I left the valley. Home, relations—and bride, I had lost all. I knew it was vain to return here, yet I have come all the same."

"Upon my soul, 'tis a worse punishment than thou didst deserve!" cried Master Ran. "But come home now, at any rate, and greet my daughter."

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"Nay," replied the wanderer, taking up his staff again, "there is no place there for me, and I had best go on my way. I shall never be anything but a homeless man now."

XVII THE MAIDEN'S ROCK

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On the left bank of the Elbe, near Pirna, stands a lofty crag, called the "Maiden's Rock." One part of it, in fact, is shaped like a maiden's figure—and this is the reason why:—

It seems that, a thousand years ago and more, there dwelt in the village of Pfaffendorf, close by, a terrible old witch, who went by the name of Mother Gundelheind. No one dared go near her or enter her house, but those who had ventured to peep through the window in her absence declared that a blue flame danced upon her hearthstone, above which some devilish brew hung boiling, and that a black fox crouched whining beside this uncanny fire. Many a belated passer-by had seen her at night, flashing through the air upon her broomstick; and sometimes she had a companion, a fiery dragon who flew by her side, and brought her great store of red, molten gold, that he dropped from his wings before her threshold. It is needless to say that she was never at home on Walpurgis-night, the great meeting time of all the witches and evil spirits; but, indeed, she was oftener abroad than within doors, for when she was not revelling with her own kind, she was busy working evil spells upon her neighbours, bewitching their wives, their children, and their cattle. Plenty of people had seen her at it, but there was nothing to be done; complaints and lamentations were of no avail against her stony heart, and punishment was not to be thought of, for her revenge would have been such as no one in the land dared brave; and besides, how can any one get the better of a witch so mighty, that neither fire nor water have power over her? Yet her punishment awaited her, and she feared it, and had, in her great wickedness, found a way out of it, as she thought.

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For there was another person who dwelt in that ill-famed cottage, and was in all ways the opposite of the terrible Mother Gundelheind. This was her young daughter Truda, and how she came by such a daughter none can tell; for Truda was as sweet as a May morning, and her hazel eyes had the look that the angels wear, in the church pictures. Instead of the old woman's horny, blackened hide, Truda had a skin as fair and soft as cream; instead of her mother's harsh and grizzled locks, she had long, silky tresses, the colour of a newly ripened chestnut; and instead of the witch's cruel, rasping speech, a voice as gentle and musical as the ringdove's. And her mind and soul were as beautiful as her body, so that every one loved her, and looked after her with friendly smiles, while they turned their eyes from the wicked mother and her ill-omened glance. To be sure, this made it hard for Truda to have any of the friends or the pastimes befitting her age and sweet nature; for none would cross the threshold of her mother's house, nor would she suffer her daughter to enter one of the neighbours' dwellings. She kept Truda fast at home, sewing, washing, or spinning; for it can easily be believed that the old witch herself had no time or mind for such a wholesome work, and the housekeeping would have gone to ruin but for Truda.

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Nor was this all: the capricious creature would have her child as pious as she herself was godless, and made her learn her Catechism, and go to church on Sundays, and fast, and do penance, with such zeal that the poor child was sometimes quite worn-out. Never a day's merrymaking did she get; never might she join the dance upon the village-green, or wander by the river in the moonlight, like the other young folk; for even when her mother was from home, she could watch and spy upon her by means of a magic mirror, in which the old witch could see at her pleasure all that was happening at home, or, indeed, in any place she chose to think of.

Now, it may be thought that the old woman was not so graceless but that she still had some lingering care for her child's well-being—but this, alas! was not the cause of her watchfulness, for which she had only too horrid a reason. It is needless to say that this wicked creature had long been given, body and soul, to the Evil One; she knew that the day would come when he would surely claim his prey, and, as has been said, she feared her punishment, and was ready to pay any price to escape, and to be allowed to go on freely in her wickedness. Now, upon one of those midnight wanderings, during which all dark secrets were unveiled to her, she had

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happened to find out that the Prince of the lower regions was not so particular as to the fashion in which his debtors paid their score, and that he would be willing to take her little daughter Truda in her place, so long as the girl was innocent of any sort of wrong-doing. And this was why Mother Gundelheind scolded and spied, and used every means in her power to bring up her daughter a model of pious perfection.

She had succeeded pretty well, to be sure, and her bad example, far from doing any harm, seemed rather to have driven the girl in an opposite direction; but there was one thing that had so far escaped the old hag's notice. She could not choose but let Truda go into the village sometimes—to market, for instance—because no one would have any dealings with the witch herself, if they could help it, while to Truda they gave their freshest fruit and richest cream. And again, she must go to church, for that her mother dared not let her miss. So it came to pass that Truda made a few friends, and one especial admirer, Wippold the forester, who spent half his life in planning stolen meetings with her, or in waiting to catch a glance from those hazel eyes as she went demurely by, prayer-book in hand. Old Mother Gundelheind had by this time got into the habit of trusting Truda, perhaps over much; but even witches will be caught napping sometimes, and this was the time of the Walpurgis Feast, and her head was full of other matters. So it came to pass that she forgot, once or twice, to look into her magic mirror, and never knew that Truda held tryst with the forester upon the rock overhanging the Elbe, to which the country-folk sometimes climbed up on their Sunday rambles. For the witch's harsh and unnatural behaviour had borne fruit at last, and had driven even the sweet, confiding Truda into underhand ways, because they were the only means of bringing a little relief into a life that would else have been nearly unbearable.

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But it was hard work to keep anything from the old hag for long; and presently she began to notice that Truda was wont to sit dreaming by the hearth of an evening, while her spindle lay idle beside her, and her wheel stood silent in a corner. Then the witch grew suspicious, and observed her more closely again; nor was it long before she spied out Wippold escorting the girl home from market one morning. He left her before they turned the corner of the cottage, to be sure, but as soon as Truda's hand touched the latch, the old woman flew at her like the fury she was.

"What is this?" she screamed. "What good-for-nothing acquaintances hast thou been picking up, idle baggage that thou art? Never think to deceive me! If thou dost so much as give yon fellow a 'good-day' again, I will rather starve here at home with thee than suffer thee to set foot in the market!" And she flung herself down, quite out of breath, in her dark ingle-nook, muttering something about "running no such risks."

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Truda betook herself to her wheel, silent and bewildered, and ventured no word of self-defence. But that evening, as she sat gazing into the flame that flickered up with blue tongues from the blackened hearth-stone, she plucked up courage and asked—

"Why must I never speak to a man, mother, or have any dealings with the village-folk, as other maidens do?"

"Because men, and all human folk, are evil. Thou shalt speak to the man I shall choose for thee, and to no other," rejoined the hag, with a grim chuckle.

"Have men wrought thee harm, then, that thou dost shun them so?" continued the girl. "Methinks the folk at market fear thee more than thou dost them. And yet there be some folk whose company thou dost seek, I have heard thee say, when thou goest forth on these long journeys. Whither dost thou go so far, mother, and wherefore?"

"Fine doings!" sputtered the old woman viciously. "Listening to evil spoken of thine own mother, and spying upon her! Little white-faced fool! what knowest thou of that which is fitting to be done? But have a care, or thou wilt find out something of my power, and of how I can punish when I have a mind."

Truda sank into terrified silence, and brooded in her own heart over the mysteries of the dark fate which she seemed unable to escape.

But she would escape it yet! She would not give up her love, and everything that made life happy, without a struggle! Only her weapons must be guile and secrecy, and she was but little skilled in the use of them, poor child. For days and weeks she worked and drudged at home, to quiet her mother's suspicions; only now and then, as she hurried along to get some few things they could not do without, she managed to give Wippold a sign that kept him quiet. At last, one Sunday, the old witch, afraid to keep her from her pious duties any more, and feeling sure that she had frightened her into obedience, bade the girl get ready to go to Mass; she herself would see her to the church door, though she might go no farther. Truda could not quite keep out of her face the joy which this order gave her, and her mother did not fail to notice the radiant gleam which lit up her eyes. She hurried away to get ready; and before the bell had ceased ringing, her mother had watched her run lightly up the steps and disappear into the church. Could she at that moment have seen through stone walls, she would have beheld her daughter reply to a sign made her by the young fellow who stood waiting behind one of the pillars and follow him out at the small north door, which was nearly opposite to the one by which she had gone in. And now, keeping close in the thickets, so as to be seen of no one, the pair of lovers hastened towards the lonely rock, where they were sure of a quiet hour together, and where Truda could unburden her heart of all its fears and sorrows, and hear from her lover that he would never rest till he had carried her away from her unhappy home.

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Meanwhile the old witch had returned to her cottage, thinking over her daughter's behaviour that morning. "I wonder why she was so overjoyed to go to church," she mused; "it was not always her wont." She could not get the matter out of her mind, and after a time she was so tormented by suspicion that she fetched out her mirror, and sprinkling some drops of magic water upon it, desired it to show her the spot where her daughter was.

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Immediately there arose before her the picture of the lofty rock—its surface sparkled in the sunshine; down below, the blue Elbe wound along amid the meadows, and on a narrow green space near the top of the crag, and overshadowed by it, she saw the forms of the two lovers. Her Truda, the virtuous maiden, on whom she had staked all her hopes, was folded in the arms of the forester, while he pressed burning kisses upon her lips, and prayer-book and rosary lay forgotten at their feet.

Every drop of blood in the old hag's veins tingled with fury, a hellish light gleamed in her sunken eyes, and seizing her witch's staff in her hand, she went raging forth, and in the twinkling of an eye had rushed like a storm up the rocky ascent, and fallen upon the luckless lovers.

"Accursed child! and hast thou lied to me, and is this the Mass thou wentest forth to hear? And thou, thrice accursed fellow, it was an evil day for thee when thou camest a-wooing of Gundelheind's daughter!"

And before the ill-fated man could so much as attempt to defend himself, the witch, suddenly grown to an immense height, and towering grimly above him, seized him in her huge horny hands and cast him down the cliff into the river below.



And in the twinkling of an eye had rushed like a storm up the rocky ascent, and fallen upon the luckless lovers.

Truda, white and cold with anguish, stood rooted to the spot, and now the raging fury sprang upon her also. "Now it is thy turn," she hissed out. "Ah! hast thou lied, and blasphemed, and dallied here with thy lover? A pretty ransom thou art, and much that creditor of mine will care to get thee now! Hence go all my chances of safety! But at least thou, accursed creature, shalt never be a witness of my defeat!" And lifting the staff with which she wrought her wicked spells, she struck her daughter across the face with it. But Truda never felt the blow. Beneath her fiendish mother's curse she had turned to stone; the rock folded her, as it were, in its inflexible arms, and to this day bears, as a witness of the terrible deed, the form of a maiden.

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But where, as she fled through the night from his vengeance, the Arch-Enemy's stroke fell upon Mother Gundelheind, that the legend forbears to say.

THE WATER-SNAKE

The Water Snake



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Old Lisbeth sat by the fire and spun, but on the opposite side of the hearth her son Dietrich crouched idle, his cheek upon his hand, gazing into the embers. For many weeks he had been growing more and more silent and listless, and no one could tell what ailed him. Was it that Johanna, the maiden he was courting, had been cruel to him, or was something wrong with his work? His old mother looked across at him and wondered. Outside the wind was blowing, and brought plainly to their ears the sound of the river as it rushed through the valley towards the lake of Pöhlde, that the Hartz-folk call the Tumpensee. Now and then the blast rose to so shrill a pitch that you might have thought a voice was calling from afar; and when this happened, Dietrich would start from his seat and make as though he would rush from the house, but each time he checked himself, and sank with a shiver upon the bench again. At last Lisbeth could bear it no longer.

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"What ails thee, son?" she cried. "Art thou bewitched, that a mere gust of wind can set thee all a-tremble?"

Dietrich was silent for a while, casting furtive glances toward door and window, as though he were afraid that his reply might call up some unwelcome sight. At last he answered in a whisper —

"I doubt I am, indeed, mother! Hast thou ever heard tell of voices rising from the river and the lake yonder? Or was any one drowned there these days, that one should see a gleam of red-gold hair beneath the water?"

Lisbeth turned pale.

"Heaven help us!" she exclaimed in a low voice, as though she, too, were afraid of being overheard, "do thou have nothing to do with the river-side or the banks of the lake, Dietrich. That is how men come by their death."

"But knowest thou anything of it, mother? What is there to fear, if fear there be?" persisted the young man.

"What care I for such tales! Tales there are of spell-bound maidens who call for some one to deliver them, and of water-snakes, and such nonsense; the country is full of them, thou knowest as well as I. But there is no need to believe them," continued Lisbeth hastily, as if fearing she had said too much. "Do thou take thy Johanna to wife, and bring her home; that will drive all such fancies from thy head."

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A look of pain crossed Dietrich's face.

"Ah, Johanna!" he exclaimed, "if I could but turn my mind to thoughts of her! Yet I fear she has fancied me cold and neglectful of late."

"Nay, nay, son," his mother answered, "Johanna has eyes but for thee; trust my word for it. See, the storm is passing; do thou go over and bid her good-evening, and tell her that the old mother needs some more of that yarn she can spin so stoutly, and thinks she might even bring it over herself, and gladden this house with a sight of her face. There is a gloom hangs about it when she is away, and the sooner she lives with us for good, the better it will be."

Dietrich took his cap from the peg and opened the door, but as he stood on the threshold, he turned to his mother once more.

"What if I should bring *her* to harm too?" he said, and was gone.

The old woman mused on by the hearth; her thoughts were not cheerful, for in her secret heart she firmly believed that some water-sprite had indeed bewitched her unlucky boy, but she put a bold face on it, and stuck to the idea that his marriage with Johanna would be the saving of him. Her thoughts would have been sadder still could she have seen how Dietrich swerved from the path that led to Johanna's cottage, and, almost as though unaware of what he did, wandered down toward the banks of the river. Here, where it joined the lake, the swirling torrent became calmer, and patches of sedge and water-willow grew far out into the stream. It was now growing

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dusk, and the wind had dropped. As Dietrich paused, standing in the long, dank grass, he heard a sound, scarcely more than a whisper, borne to him on the dying breeze: "Dietrich!" and in a moment again, a little louder: "Dietrich!" A dread, irresistible fascination drew him nearer to the rush-grown banks, and as he went, he heard again and again that voice, calling his name with sweet insistence. And now, far down, almost hidden amid the tangle of willow-boughs and waving blue forget-me-nots that swept the surface of the dark lake, a face appeared—a lovely face, with a bloom as delicate as a rose-leaf or the heart of a shell, and all around it long tresses of red-gold hair floated upon the water.

"Dietrich," the sweet voice continued, "I have called thee unto seven times. Hast thou not heard? Wilt thou not come and save me?"

Dietrich sprang forward, parting the overhanging boughs, and trying to get a clearer sight of the vision. "How shall I save thee?" he cried, almost in spite of himself, while fear and longing struggled together at his heart, "and who art thou?"

But lo! the face was gone; only a rustling was heard in the bushes, and presently a water-snake reared its head among the reeds, and shooting out its forked tongue, glided towards him. As it came nearer, the same voice sounded again upon the silent air. "Save me by a kiss," it said. But fear now gained the mastery, and with a cry of horror, Dietrich turned and fled; yet, as his hurrying feet bore him from the water's edge, the voice pursued him still.

"So mightest thou have broken the spell and saved me," it wailed, "but thou art afraid! Oh, wretched man, who hast seen my face and fled! And oh, miserable me! for now none may save me, till the oak-tree be sprung from the acorn, and the cradle carved from the oak!"

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Almost beside himself, Dietrich reached the top of the river-bank, and hurried through the wood to his cottage, where his mother found him late that night—when she came anxiously out to watch for his coming—lying senseless on the steps of the little porch.

An illness now laid hold upon him, through which Johanna and Lisbeth nursed him with untiring care. During the weary weeks of his slow return to life, Dietrich turned to Johanna as the flower turns to the sunshine; and, indeed, she was his one ray of comfort, and in her presence only could he shake off the gloom that overshadowed him. He was glad enough to obey his mother's wish, and make Johanna his wife as soon as might be; and the girl's loving heart did not shrink from the lifelong task of cheering this broken-down man.

So she went to live in the cottage, and in due time a little son, too, came to brighten their home. Dietrich worked as usual again, but always showed an unconquerable dislike to going near the river or the lake; and the sight of a snake was enough to send him into a fit of shuddering terror, such as none could understand.

Time went on, and Johanna fancied that he was becoming more like himself again, till one day he happened to notice, in an open space beside the cottage, a tiny oak sapling springing up from the grass.

"Dost thou know how yonder little tree came there?" he asked of his wife.

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"To be sure," replied Johanna. "One day, when thou wert sick, and I was heavy at heart, and came out here for a breath of air, I found an acorn in the wood, and bethought me of planting it here. 'If it grows up,' I thought, 'I shall take it as a good omen;' and now, see how it thrives!" Johanna laughed merrily, but Dietrich's face darkened.

"A good omen," he murmured. "Who knows? 'When the oak-tree is sprung from the acorn——' I cannot read the saying."

That night Lisbeth said to her daughter-in-law: "My son looks again as he did in those unhappy days. Didst thou not notice the terror-struck look he wore this evening? Heaven help us!"

Johanna laughed it off, but in a few days she said to her mother: "Thou wert right; he goes down to the river-banks again, as he used. What shall we do?"

There seemed nothing to be done. Neither his wife nor his little son could cheer him any longer. Once Johanna saw him stride out to the open patch, and make as though he would have torn the sapling up by the roots, but he suddenly stopped, as though an invisible hand had held him, and turned down through the woods to the river.

He never came back. They said that he had lost his footing in the dusk, and fallen into the deep, reedy pool that lies beneath the steep bank where the river joins the lake. At any rate, he was found there, drowned and dead; and his death was that of old Lisbeth, too, for she never raised her head again after the news was brought to her.

The years rolled on, and young Dietrich, Johanna's son, grew to be a man. The oak-tree, too, grew tall and strong, and overshadowed the little cottage.

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Dietrich the second was a sober-minded fellow, and gave no heed to the maidens, nor could he be got to think of marriage till he was well on in life. He followed the calling of ferryman, and ferried people over the narrow end of the lake, just above the place where the river rushes out of it again. His mother disliked this work for him, and often tried to persuade him to give it up, but he had a fondness for the water. Once he filled her with a great fear.

"There must be something wrong with my hearing," said he, "for I often fancy my name is called across the water, and I hurry back with my boat, but there is no passenger there."

Johanna remembered how Lisbeth had told her that it was a voice calling from the water that had bewitched the boy's father, and she determined her son should not fall a prey to the same fate.

"Dietrich," said she, "thou must marry. Thou art past thirty now, and over grave even for thy years. I am getting old, and need help in the cottage, too."

"Have it as thou wilt, mother," he replied, with a sober smile; "only find me a red-haired maiden. I have ever had a fancy for red-haired women; I do not know whence I got it, for there are not many such hereabouts."

His mother wondered at what seemed to her an idle speech, and one very unlike her grave son, but she thought little more of it, and presently told him she thought he could not do better than take their neighbour's daughter Alice to wife; "for, if she is not red-haired," she said, laughing, "she is red-cheeked, and as merry as a squirrel—a good mate for a grave fellow like thee."

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Dietrich said there was no hurry, but at last, for the sake of peace, he yielded, and was betrothed to Alice.

But before they could be married a strange thing happened. As he sat waiting one day on the bank of the lake beside his empty boat, he heard a sound among the bushes behind him, and looking round, fancied he saw a gleam of red-gold hair through the leaves. At the same time, he could have sworn that a voice quite close to him murmured these words: "Is the oak-tree not yet grown?"

He sprang up and went in search, as he thought, of a would-be passenger, but no one was there; only, as he bent his head down to peer through the under-brush, a slender water-snake glided from amongst it, almost touching his face with its forked tongue—"as though it would have kissed him," he said afterwards. He started back with a shout of disgust, for he had always had a great dislike to snakes, and snatching up a stone from the ground, threw it at the creature. But it glided away untouched; only, as it went, it gave, so Dietrich swore, such a horrible and piercing scream, that his ears rang with it, and when that dreadful sound died away, all other sounds, too, ceased for him, and he was deaf from that hour.

He went home a graver man than before, and since all attempts to cure his deafness failed, he told Alice that he would give her back her word. But the stout-hearted little woman would not hear of it; she had had many a talk with Johanna, and was persuaded that, since his adventure, Dietrich needed her more than ever. "No such small matter," she said, "would keep her from the man she loved."

So these two, also, were wed; though there was but a poor prospect before them, for Dietrich soon saw that his infirmity would oblige him to give up his ferryman's calling, and that just when he most needed it, for there would before long, he knew, be another mouth to feed in the little hillside cottage.

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One spring evening, when the rain was falling and the wind swept the wet branches of the oak-tree right across the roof, Dietrich said to his wife: "I have a mind to cut down that oak-tree, and sell the timber, after I have used some to make a cradle for the little one that is coming. I never could abide the tree, and it now so overshadows the house that it grows damp for want of sun."

"I planted the tree when thy father was ill," said old Johanna from her nook by the fire, "and thought that its growth was a good omen for us."

"It hath brought us but scant luck, that I can see," rejoined Alice; "perhaps it will be a better omen dead than living."

So the oak-tree was cut down, and the timber lay for a while and became seasoned; and when Dietrich's little son, Dietrich the third, was a thriving, sturdy babe of a few months, his father one day brought in the new cradle that he had made him from the fallen oak-tree.

But Johanna's life seemed to have been cut down with the tree, for that winter she failed and died. And who knows but it was well for her; she was thus spared another grief, for when next spring's melting snows had swollen the waters of lake and river, Dietrich, whose deaf ears no longer heard the warning rush of the neighbouring waterfall, ventured too near the narrow part of the river, in his haste to get his boat over to the side where his passengers awaited him, and so both boat and man were swept down over the fall; nor was poor Dietrich's body found for many days.

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Now might it indeed have been thought that young Dietrich the third would avoid the fatal lake and river; but from the time he had lain, a rosy babe, in the oaken cradle, he had always been a merry, fearless little fellow, and the shadow that so long had darkened the cottage above the river seemed unable to touch him. He became a fisherman; and when the neighbours shook their heads meaningly, and reminded him that both his father and grandfather had perished in those waters, he would answer, with a cheery smile, that this was no reason why harm should befall him; the luck would turn the third time, he believed; and besides, he would know how to take care of himself, for his mother's sake. There was no denying that he loved the water, and was successful in his calling, for the fish flocked to his nets as though they had been driven into them. He was fond of the different creatures that dwelt among the reedy banks—the water-fowl, the

rats, and even the snakes—and many of them he tamed, so that they would come at his call. His delight was to sit idly rocking in his boat, as the twilight fell and the stars came out above the hill, and to listen to the rush of the river, and the mysterious sounds and calls that echoed across the lake. Then all sorts of strange fancies filled his mind, and amid the voices of the night, he thought he could hear one that called his name, in low, sweet tones, over and over again. This did not frighten him, but rather brought a throb of joy to his heart; and the voice at last grew familiar and dear to him, so that he missed it when storm and cold kept him away from the water for a while. The country-folk told tales, which his mother tried to keep from his ears, of how his grandfather had been driven distraught with terror by the voices that he had heard thus calling from the lake; and he wondered how this might be, and why such things should frighten one. At last he questioned his mother about it, and she replied quietly, for she was a cheery woman, and it was easy to see whence Dietrich got his sunny temper:

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“’Tis true thy grandfather was a prey to his fears and fancies, my son, but methinks these fears were all in his own mind, and that nothing from without need have terrified him, if his spirit had but been firm and cheerful within. Thy father had something of the same sad temper, and so men said he too was bewitched; but I have this notion, that the water-folk would hurt none that did not first hurt themselves by their own timid mind. And so I have never withheld thee from the water, for I think thou art of different stuff from thy father, my boy.”

Dietrich nodded his head. “Thou art right, mother,” he said; “and perhaps these beings that call us are but as ourselves, and need our pity and our love.”

A few evenings after this, as he came home through the woods overhanging the river, he was aware of a rustling among the reeds and willows beneath him, and a voice—a voice that sounded strangely familiar to his ear—called from the water: “Ah, Dietrich, Dietrich, save me!”

He dashed down to the river’s brink, and, parting the boughs, saw through the dusk a lovely face gazing up at him—a face with a bloom upon it like a rose, and surrounded by tresses of red-gold hair, that had escaped the comb and floated far out upon the water. Two white hands clung to the branches above, and in an instant Dietrich had waded into the stream, and clasping the hands in his own, had drawn to a safe place upon the bank a slender maiden, who stood leaning against a tree, as she panted for breath and wrung the water-drops from her long tresses.

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“Dietrich, I thank thee, for thou knowest no fear,” she presently said in the sweet, low tones that seemed so familiar.

“Fear!” rejoined the lad, with a laugh, though his voice trembled a little; “there was no time for that. What had to be done was to save thee from drowning.”

“Yet others have felt fear,” said the maiden, raising her deep, clear eyes to his. He could see them gleam through the deepening twilight, though he could but indistinctly make out her dress, which seemed rather different from that of the maidens he was wont to meet in the district.

“That is not the sort of fellow I am,” replied Dietrich, with a bold air; “it were strange if one should pause before giving a helping hand to any creature in need, let alone so fair a one as thou.”

He blushed as he spoke, and a strange fancy shot into his mind; but the maiden’s hapless plight, as she stood wringing the water from her garments, dismissed all other thoughts, and he continued: “Let me take thee quickly to my mother, who will dry thy garments and give thee shelter.”

“Nay, not to-night, Dietrich,” said the maiden. “I was on my way to some kinsfolk hard by, when I slipped from the path into the river, and theirs is the shelter I must seek out.”

He thought there was a mischievous gleam in her eyes as she spoke, but she continued more gravely: “Yet give thy mother greeting from me, and say I would gladly come and see her soon, for my kinsfolk have known thine this many a day, and I have often longed to climb to the cottage on the hill.”

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The lad leaned forward eagerly; “Oh! let me lead thee there to-night,” he pleaded; “it is surely nearer than any other dwelling, and I am loth to leave thee, alone—and so soon,” he added falteringly.

“Nay, not now, Dietrich,” she repeated, while the merry smile again played over her face; “I am wet, and it is late, and my kinsfolk await me. Only give thy mother my message.”

“And what name doth she know thee by,” he asked, “since thou knowest mine so well?”

“My name is Crystal,” replied the maiden, “but I doubt she will not know me by it—though I know thine so well,” she added, laughing.

“Thou art a strange creature,” said the lad, laughing too, for her gaiety was infectious, “yet a very fair one, and if I may not go with thee, at least I may ask one boon for having saved thee out of the river—the boon of a single kiss.”

But at this Crystal drew back and became grave. “Not from me,” she said softly; “but if thou wouldst yet do anything for my sake, Dietrich, or see me again, give thy kiss to the first dumb thing that shall ask for a caress. That is my last word.” And, turning, she glided so fast through the trees, that she was out of sight in a moment. Dietrich went home, a strange turmoil in his

heart, and told his mother of the adventure.

“And the oddest thing is,” he concluded, “that her face looks to me as though I had always known it, had always seen and loved those red-gold tresses coiled about that white brow—and her voice is as the voices that call to me at night-time over the lake. Dost thou know, indeed, who she may be, or what these kinsmen are to whom she is going?”

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“I know nothing of them, my son,” replied Alice, “and I do not think we shall ever know aught. Yet do as she bade thee, for it may bring thee good fortune.”

Dietrich spent a sleepless night, and in the morning went down early to the pool between lake and river, where his boat was moored, and sat down to mend his nets on the bank. Yet his hands often lay idle, and his eyes were fixed dreamily upon the reeds before him. Suddenly a rustling among them roused him with a start, and the next moment a water-snake glided forth, and paused beside him. He held out his hand, for the creature looked like one he had tried to tame a while before. The snake drew nearer across the grass, and presently wound itself about his leg, raising its head and shooting out its tongue, as though it would have touched his face. Like a flash, the remembrance of Crystal’s request came into his mind. The snake’s eyes were fixed upon his, and drew him with a strange fascination.

“This is more than I bargained for,” laughed Dietrich aloud, “but for Crystal’s sake I will do it, as I would do anything—wise or foolish—that she bade me. Here is a kiss for thee, then, thou cold, uncanny little creature;” and he kissed the glittering head.

But his lips had scarcely touched it, when a gleeful shout broke from the woods behind him, and the well-known sweet voice, ringing with merriment, cried out: “Dietrich, Dietrich, I am here!”

He started to his feet, and never knew what became of the snake, for in one bound he had cleared the bank, and was clasping Crystal by the hand. She looked fairer than ever in the daylight, which seemed to lend her form more strength and vitality than it had shown the evening before. Her red-gold tresses shone with dewdrops, like a flower in the meadow, and her eyes glowed with life and happiness.

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Dietrich’s wooing was short, for he had known from the first moment of beholding Crystal, that here was the only woman in the world for him. And Alice, too, directly she looked into the fair, laughing face, doubted not that luck, in however mysterious a fashion, had come to young Dietrich indeed. There was much talk among the country-folk over the mystery of the young bride’s parentage, and the dower of jewels that so simple a country lass had brought her husband.

Not that they were long in his possession, for Crystal could never bear the sight of them, and they were soon sold, all but one, an ornament of gold shaped like a little snake, with an emerald head, which Dietrich would have her keep. What she told him, in the secrecy of their lovers’ talk, concerning this, and her past existence, will never be known. What is certain is, that a stately farmhouse, with good store of cattle and sheep, rose up in place of the old cottage, on the meadow where the oak-tree had stood. Success followed Dietrich in all he undertook, and the fish thronged to his net more abundantly than before. But those voices of old cried to him no more across the lake, for now, as he turned homewards at evening, it was his dear wife’s voice that sent forth from the farm-yard upon the hill the soft, familiar call: “Dietrich!”

XIX THE LITTLE GLASS-MAN

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PART I. [THE SUNDAY-CHILD](#)

PART II. [THE COLD HEART](#)

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THE SUNDAY-CHILD

In the days before railroads were known or tourists ran to and fro over the face of the earth, the Black Forest was given up, one may say, to two races of men—the woodmen and the glass-blowers, who even yet hold their own among the remoter hills and valleys. They have always been fine fellows, tall and broad-shouldered, as though the strengthening breath of the mountain pines had given them, from their youth up, a healthier body, a clearer eye, and a braver spirit than the inhabitants of the valleys and plains below. The glass-blowers live on the Baden side of the hills, and theirs was of old the most picturesque dress—you may see it still in the more out-of-the-way parts of the forest. Their black jerkins, wide, closely pleated breeches, red stockings, and pointed hats give them a quaint, somewhat serious appearance, in keeping with the work which they carry on in the depths of the woods. There are watchmakers among them as well, who peddle their goods for sale, far and wide; but the glass-makers, as a rule, are stay-at-home folk. They are very different from their brethren the woodmen, who live on the other side of the forest, and spend their lives felling and hewing their great pine-trees, which they then float down the Nagold into the Neckar, and from the Neckar into the Rhine. Then down that mighty river they go, far away into Holland, where the men of the Black Forest and their long rafts are a familiar sight. They stop in every city along the banks of the Rhine, to see if any one will purchase their stout beams and planks; but the longest and stoutest they keep for the *Mynheers*, who buy them at a high price to build their ships with. Now these raftsmen are used to a rough and wandering life; it is joy to them to spin down the stream upon their tree-trunks, and sorrow to climb the bank homewards again. And their holiday dress, too, is quite different from that of the glass-makers. Their jerkins are of dark linen, with wide, green braces crossed over their broad chests; their breeches are of black leather, and from one pocket, as a sign of their calling, an inch-rule is always to be seen peeping forth. But their chief pride and joy are their boots, the highest, most likely, that are worn in any part of the world, for they can be drawn up two spans and more above the knee, and the raftsmen can wade through three or four feet of water without getting wet.

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Not so very long ago, the people of the forest still believed in spirits that haunted the woods, and the superstition died hard. Strangely enough, the legends clothe these supernatural inhabitants of the woods in just the same garments, varying with the district, that the men of flesh and blood wear. So they tell that the little Glass-man, a kindly spirit, only about four feet high, was never to be seen save in a broad-brimmed, pointed hat, with little black jerkin, wide breeches, and red stockings. But Dutch Michael, who haunted the other side of the forest, seems to have been a huge, broad-shouldered fellow, in the dress of the raftsmen; and many who are supposed to have seen him, swear that they would have been sorry to pay out of their own pockets, the price of the calf-skins that made his boots,—“for they were so big that an ordinary man could have stood up to his neck in them,” they say, “and this is the sober truth.”

There is a wonderful story of the dealings of these wood-spirits with a young fellow of the Black Forest, which I will tell just as I heard it.

There lived then, in the forest, a widow, Dame Barbara Munk, whose husband had been a charcoal-burner, and supplied the glass-makers with the fuel they needed for their work. After his death, she kept her son, a boy of sixteen, to the same calling as his father; and young Peter Munk, though a well-grown lad, at first made no objection, for he had always seen his father looking black and ugly, as he crouched, the whole week long, over his smoky kiln, or went abroad to sell his coals, an object of disgust to every one; so that it never came into his head to mind such a thing. But a charcoal-burner has a great deal of time for thought, about himself and others; and as Peter Munk sat by his kiln, the dark trees, and the deep silence of the forest round about him, often inclined his heart to tears and nameless yearnings. There was something—he knew not what—that both saddened and angered him. After thinking it over for a long time, he at last came to the conclusion that it was his calling.

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“A lonely, black-faced charcoal-burner!” he said to himself; “it is but a poor life. The glass-blowers, the watchmakers, even the musicians who play in the tavern on Sunday evenings, are all thought of some consequence. And yet if Peter Munk, washed and dressed in his best, with his father’s holiday jerkin and silver buttons, and a pair of new red stockings, were to make his appearance, and some one behind, seeing the new stockings and the upright gait, were to say: ‘Who is yon fine lad?’ I am sure that directly he passed me by and caught sight of my face, he would add: ‘Oh, it is but “Coal-Munk Peter”!’”

The raftsmen, too, from the other side of the forest, excited his envy. When these giants of the woods went by in their grand clothes, with half-a-hundredweight of silver buttons, clasps, and chains upon them; when they stood watching the dance, with widespread legs and important faces, and swore in Dutch, and smoked yard-long Cologne pipes, like the richest of the *Mynheers*, then he would think that the lot of such men must be the happiest on earth. But when these fortunate beings felt in their pockets and brought out handfuls of thaler-pieces, tossing up for sixpenny-bits, and staking five guildens here, and ten there, Peter would turn quite bewildered, and slink sadly away to his hut; for he saw many of these master wood-cutters play away more in one evening than poor father Munk had been wont to earn in a year. There were, in particular, three of these men whom he thought so wonderful; he did not know which of them to admire most. One was a big, stout, red-faced fellow, known as “fat Ezekiel,” and supposed to be the richest man in all the country round. He went twice a year to Amsterdam to sell wood for building, and was always lucky enough to sell it for a higher price than any one else, so that, whereas the others had to come home on foot, he always drove back in great style.

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The other was the tallest, thinnest man in the whole forest, nick-named "long Shuffler," and Peter envied him because of his extraordinary impudence. He contradicted the most important people, and always took up more room in the tavern, however crowded it was, than four of the stoutest among the other guests; for he must needs sit with both elbows on the table, or draw up one of his long legs before him on the bench; yet no one ever dared gainsay him, for he had endless sums of money.

But the third was a young, handsome fellow, and the best dancer for miles round, so that he was called the "king of the dancing-floor." He had been quite poor, and had worked for one of the master wood-cutters, but all at once he became as rich as any of them. Some said he had found a pot of gold under an ancient pine-tree; others that he had been spearing fish, as the raftsmen often do, and that, not far from Bingen on the Rhine, he had fished up on his spear a great roll of gold pieces, and that the roll belonged to the famous Nibelung-treasure, which, as every one knows, lies buried there. Be this as it may, he certainly grew rich all of a sudden, and was looked up to by young and old, as though he were a prince.

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Coal-Munk Peter often thought of these three men, as he sat alone in the pine-woods. All three, indeed, had one and the same ugly fault, which won them every man's hatred—and this was their inhuman avarice and hard-heartedness towards their debtors and the poor about them; yet the people of the Black Forest are kind-hearted as a rule. But so it goes in this world—if they were hated for their meanness, they were thought much of for their wealth, for who else could throw money about as though they shook it down from the fir-trees?

"I can't go on like this," said Peter sadly to himself one morning—the day before had been a holiday, and the ale-house full of people—"if the luck doesn't turn soon, I shall do myself a harm! If only I were rich and respected, like fat Ezekiel, or bold and powerful, like the long Shuffler, or famous, like the king of the dancing-floor, and could throw the musicians thalers instead of pence, as he does! Where can the fellow get all his money from?"

He thought over all the means he had heard of, whereby men make money, but could not seem to hit on any good ones. At last he remembered the tales about the folk who had been enriched, in old days, by Dutch Michael and the little Glass-man. In his father's lifetime their hut had often been visited by poor people like themselves; then the talk had always been of rich men, and of how they had come by their riches, and in these tales the little Glass-man often played a part. When he thought hard, he could almost remember the verse which had to be spoken in the "Pine-thicket" in the midst of the forest, to make him appear. It began thus:—

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"O Treasure-keeper in the forest green,
Thine age is many hundred years—this land
Is all thine own, wherever pine-trees stand——"

But however he cudgelled his memory, he could not remember another line. He was often on the point of asking some old man among the neighbours how the verse ended; but a certain timidity withheld him from betraying his thoughts to any one; and besides, he came to the conclusion that the legend of the little Glass-man could not be widely known, or the verse either, for there were not many rich people in the district, and why should not his own father, or any of the other poor men, have tried their luck? At last he led his mother to speak about the little man. She began by telling him nothing but what he already knew; nor could she remember any but the first line of the charm; but she wound up by saying that the spirit only appeared to persons who were born on a Sunday between eleven and two o'clock. He himself, she added, was one of the right people, as he had been born exactly at noon on a Sunday.

When Coal-Munk Peter heard this, he was beside himself with joy and eagerness to attempt the adventure. He thought it might, perhaps, be enough to have been born on a Sunday, and to know part of the charm; so one day, when he had sold his charcoal, he did not light the kiln again, but put on his father's holiday jerkin, his new red stockings and Sunday hat, took his five-foot staff of blackthorn in his hand, and bade his mother farewell.

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"I must go to the town," he said, "for they will soon be drawing the conscription, to see who is to serve his time in the army, and I want to remind the gentlemen in office that thou art a widow, and I thine only son."

His mother let him go, saying it was a wise step to take. But it was not to the town, but to the "Pine-thicket," that he took his way. The part of the woods so called lies on the highest slopes of the Black Forest hills, and there is not a single house, or even a hut, for the space of a two hours' journey all around; for the superstitious people believe that it is not a safe place, and though the pine-trees there stand high and splendid, they are very seldom cut down, for mishaps have often befallen the wood-cutters when they have been working there. Now it has been an axe that has flown from its handle and cut deep into a man's foot; or again, a tree they were felling has fallen over suddenly, and carried the workmen down with it, wounding, or even killing them. And one could only have used these fine trees for fire-wood, in any case; for the raftsmen would never put a trunk from the "thicket" into their rafts, because of the saying that men and wood came to grief together, if a "thicket-stem" were with them upon the water. So it came about that the trees in the "thicket" stood so high and so close together that even at noontide it was almost as dark as night there; and Peter Munk felt quite eerie as he entered that deep shadow, where he heard no voice, no sound of an axe, and no foot-fall save his own. Even the birds seemed to avoid that thick

darkness among the fir-trees.

Peter had now reached the highest point among the forest hills, and stood under a tree of mighty girth, for which a Dutch shipbuilder would have given many hundred guildens. "Surely it will be here the Treasure-keeper dwells," he thought, and taking off his broad Sunday hat, he made his best bow to the tree, cleared his throat, and said with a trembling voice: "I wish you a right good evening, Mr. Glass-man." But there was no answer, and everything around remained as silent as before. "Perhaps I must say the charm first," he thought, and stammered forth the words:

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"O Treasure-keeper in the forest green,
Thine age is many hundred years—this land
Is all thine own, wherever pine-trees stand——"

As he spoke these lines, he beheld, with much alarm, a strange, tiny figure peeping out from behind the tree; it looked just like the description he had heard of the Glass-man—the little black jerkin, red stockings, and pointed hat; he even thought he saw the pale, but wise and shrewd little face he had heard tell of. But, alas! no sooner had it shown itself than it disappeared again.

"Mr. Glass-man," called Peter, after some hesitation, "pray do not take me for a fool! If you think I didn't see you, you are much mistaken; I saw you peep from behind the tree, plain enough."

Still there was no answer; only he fancied he caught the sound of a faint, hoarse chuckle from behind the tree. At last impatience got the better of fear. "Wait a bit, thou little man," he cried, "I'll have thee yet!" And he sprang with one bound to the other side of the tree, but no "Treasure-keeper in the forest green" was there—only a little squirrel that dashed up the tree as he approached.

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Peter Munk shook his head; he saw well enough that he had partly succeeded with the spell, and that very likely he only lacked the last line of the verse, to be able to make the little Glass-man appear; but think as he might, he could not think of that.

The little squirrel ran down to the lower boughs of the tree, and seemed to look at him encouragingly—or mockingly? It cleaned its paws, whisked its bushy tail, and peered at him with shrewd eyes, till he felt quite afraid of being alone with the creature, for one minute it seemed to have a man's head, with a pointed hat on it, and the next it looked just like an ordinary squirrel, except that it wore red stockings and black shoes on its hind feet. In short, though it seemed a merry creature, it made Peter's flesh creep, for he felt there was something uncanny about it. He hurried away faster than he had come, for the darkness seemed to be growing deeper and deeper, and the trees to be standing thicker and thicker about him, so that at last he grew positively terrified, and broke into a run; nor did he feel easy until he heard a dog bark, and saw the smoke rising from a hut among the trees. But as he approached the hut and noticed the dress of its inmates, he found that, in his fright, he had run in the wrong direction, and come among the raftsmen instead of the glass-makers. The people in the hut were wood-cutters—an old man, his son—the master of the house—and some grandchildren of various ages. When Peter begged for shelter over night, they welcomed him kindly, without asking his name or that of his native place, and presently gave him a drink of cider, and served up for supper a fine grouse, which is the greatest of dainties among the Black Forest folk.

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After supper the family gathered round the great pine-torches, the women spinning, the men smoking, or carving spoons and forks out of spare bits of wood. Out in the forest a violent storm was howling and raging among the pines; and now and then heavy blows were heard, as though whole trees were being snapped off and hurled to the ground. The foolhardy youths of the party would have run out into the forest to witness this splendid and terrible sight, but the grandfather held them back with stern word and glance.

"I would not advise any one to go out at yon door to-night," said he. "By Heaven! he would never return, for Dutch Michael is busy hewing himself a new raft in the forest."

The children stared at him; though they had doubtless heard something of Dutch Michael before, yet they knew too little to satisfy them, and now begged their grandfather to tell them the whole tale about him for once. And Peter Munk, too, who had only heard of him vaguely on the other side of the hills, joined in, and asked the old man what the truth about him was.

"He is the master of these woods," returned the grandfather; "and if you, at your age, do not know this, it proves you must belong to the other side of the 'Pine-thicket,' or to some yet more distant place. But I will tell you the tale, as it goes in this district, of Dutch Michael.

"A hundred years ago—so my grandfather used to say—there were no worthier people on earth than those of the Black Forest. But now, since so much money has come into the land, men have grown bad and dishonest. The lads dance and sing on Sundays, and swear so, that 'tis dreadful to hear! In other days it was not thus; and though Dutch Michael should look in at the window this very minute, I say, as I often have already, that all this evil is his fault. A hundred years ago, then, and more, there was a rich master woodman, who employed many work-people, and sold his stuff far down the Rhine, and his trade was blessed with prosperity, for he was a pious man. One evening there came to his door a man whose like he had never seen before; he wore the dress of the Black Forest lads, but he was a good head taller than any of them; no one would have believed that such a giant could be. He asked the master for work, and the latter, seeing how

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strong he was, and fitted for heavy tasks, agreed with him for a price, and engaged him. Such a workman that master had never had before. For felling trees, Michael was as good as three men, and when it took six together to lift one end of a trunk, Michael could raise the other all by himself. But when he had cut down trees for half a year, he went one day to the master and said: 'I have had enough of hewing wood now, and should like to see whither my tree-trunks go. How would it be if thou shouldst let me travel with one of the rafts?'

"I will not stand in thy way, Michael, if thou art fain to see the world a bit," the woodman answered. "To be sure, I need strong fellows like thee for the tree-felling, and on the rafts it is rather skill that is needed; but let it be so for once."

"And so it was. The raft which he was to take down the river had eight divisions, and the last was made up of the stoutest roof-beams. But see what happened. The evening before they started, big Michael brought down eight more beams to the river, the thickest and longest that had ever been seen, and he bore each on his shoulder as lightly as though it had been a raftsman's pole, so that all who saw it were taken aback. Where he had hewn these beams no one knows to this day. The master woodman laughed in his heart when he saw them, for he knew what such beams were worth. But Michael only said: 'There, these are for me to stand upon, I could never manage upon yonder little chips.' His master would have given him a pair of raftsman's boots as a reward, but he threw them aside, and brought out a pair, such as none had ever seen before; my grandfather swore they were five feet long and weighed over a hundred pounds.

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"The raft started off, and if Michael had astonished the wood-cutters before, it was the raftsmen's turn to be amazed now. For the raft, instead of going more slowly, as they expected, because of the huge beams, flew along like an arrow as soon as they got into the Neckar; and when there was a bend in the river, where the men usually had trouble in keeping their rafts in mid-stream, and away from shoals and sand-banks, Michael would leap into the river and push them clear of every hindrance; then, when they reached an open stretch of water, he would spring on to the foremost raft, and bidding the others put their poles aside, would give one mighty shove into the gravel with his huge beam, and away sped the raft, so that trees, banks, and houses seemed to fly past on either hand. By this means, they came in half their usual time to Cologne upon the Rhine, where they had always been used to sell their cargo of wood; but now Michael spoke thus:

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"A nice set of traders ye are, and well ye understand your own interests! Do ye think the men of Cologne need all the wood for themselves that comes out of the Black Forest? Nay, but they buy it of us half-price, and then sell it for far more to Holland. Let us sell the small beams here, and go on to Holland with the big ones; and whatever we get over the usual price, we will pocket for ourselves."

"So spoke the crafty Michael, and the rest heard him gladly, some because they wished to see Holland, others because they were greedy for the money. Only one was honest, and warned his comrades against risking their master's goods, or deceiving him about their price; but they paid no heed to his words, only Dutch Michael did not forget them. So they went on down the Rhine with their wood, and Michael steered the raft, and brought it quickly to Rotterdam. There they were soon offered four times the usual price for the cargo, and Michael's huge beams, in particular, were sold for much money.

"When the Black Forest lads saw all that gold, they were beside themselves with joy. Michael divided it into four parts; one he kept for the master, and the other three were for the men. And now they went into the taverns, with sailors and other bad company, and guzzled or played away their money. But the honest man who had given them good counsel, Michael sold to a kidnapping shipowner, and nothing more was ever heard of him."

"From that time forth Holland was the paradise of all the Black Forest lads, and Dutch Michael their king. It was long before the master woodman found out the trick; and meanwhile money, swearing, bad customs, drunkenness and gambling came up into this land from Holland. When the story leaked out, Dutch Michael was nowhere to be found. Yet he is not dead. For more than a hundred years he has haunted this forest, and people say he has helped many men to get rich, but only at the cost of their own poor souls,—I will say no more. Yet this much is certain, that on these stormy nights he still picks out the finest trees from the 'Pine-thicket,' where no man may hew wood, and my father once saw him break off a stem four feet thick as if it had been a reed. These he gives to the misguided folk who turn away from righteous dealing, and go to him for help; then they take their raft down to the water at midnight, and float away with Dutch Michael to Holland. But if I were king there, I would have him shot to pieces, for all ships that have a single one of Dutch Michael's beams in them will go down some day. That is why we hear of all these shipwrecks; for how else should a fine, strong ship, as big as a church, come to harm upon the water? But every time that Dutch Michael hews a fresh tree during a stormy night in the 'Pine-thicket,' one of his old beams cracks, and the ship springs a leak, and goes to the bottom with all hands. That is the story of Dutch Michael, and true it is that all the evil in the Black Forest may be traced to him."

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"Oh, he can make one rich, sure enough," the old man added in a mysterious whisper, "but I would not take anything from him for the world. I would not be in the shoes of fat Ezekiel, or the long Shuffler—and they say the king of the dancing-floor, too, has sold himself to him."

The storm had died away while the old man told his tale, and now the maidens lit their lamps and went to bed. The men laid a sack full of leaves upon the bench near the stove, as a pillow for Peter Munk, and wished him good-night. But Peter had never had such restless dreams as upon

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this night. One moment he thought he saw the black-browed giant, Dutch Michael, tearing open the window and thrusting in his long arm to offer him a purse full of gold pieces, which he chinked with a pleasant sound; and the next, it was the kindly-faced little Glass-man who was riding about the room on a huge green bottle, and then Peter seemed to hear the same hoarse chuckle again, that he had heard in the forest. Presently some one muttered in his left ear:

"In Holland there is gold;
Ye can have it, an' ye will;
For a trifle it is sold—
Gold, gold!"

And again, in his right ear sounded the little song about the Treasure-keeper in the green woods; and a gentle voice added: "Foolish Coal-Peter, foolish Peter Munk, canst find no rhyme to 'green?' and yet art born at noon on a Sunday! Rhyme, silly Peter, rhyme!"

He moaned and groaned, and tried to think of a rhyme, but as he had never in his life made one waking, it was not likely he should find one in his sleep. But when he awoke at dawn, he could not help thinking his dream a very strange one, and sitting down at the table, with his head in his hands, he began to ponder over the whispers he had heard, and which still rang in his ears.

"Rhyme, foolish Peter, rhyme!" he kept saying to himself, and tapped his forehead with his finger, yet no rhyme came forth. But as he sat there, puzzling over a rhyme to "green," three lads went by the house, and one was singing:

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"I stood upon the hill-top green,
And gazed into the vale below,
For there it was I last had seen
Her——"

Peter Munk waited to hear no more, but springing from his chair and out at the door like an arrow, he caught the singer roughly by the arm.

"Stay, friend," he cried; "only tell me! what didst thou rhyme to 'green'?"

But the other was startled and angered, and shaking himself free, rejoined: "A plague on thee for a rude fellow! What business is it of thine? Take that!" And he gave him a stinging box on the ear, which his comrades followed up with more blows.

Poor Peter sank to his knees, quite stunned. "I pray you to forgive me," he moaned; "I meant no harm, and was but over anxious about a certain matter. But since I have got the blows now, will ye not also plainly tell me the words of your song?"

At this they began to laugh and mock at him; but at last the singer consented to repeat the words, after which they went on, laughing and singing, upon their way.

"'Seen,' then," said poor Peter, as he got up, feeling quite sore, "'seen' with 'green.' Now, Mr. Glass-man, we will have another word together."

He went back to the hut, fetched his hat and long staff, and bidding his hosts farewell, took his way homeward towards the "Pine-thicket." He went along slowly and thoughtfully, for he still had to compose his verse; but as he began to enter the "thicket," and the trees grew higher and thicker about him, he thought he had found it, and leapt into the air for joy. At that very moment a gigantic man in a raftsmen's dress, and with a staff as long as a mast in his hand, stepped from behind the trees. Peter Munk's knees shook beneath him as he saw this apparition walking slowly by his side, for he thought to himself: "This is no other than Dutch Michael." The dreadful being never said a word, and from time to time Peter shot a terrified glance up at him. He was a good head taller than any one he had ever seen; his face was no longer young, neither was it old, yet it was deeply seamed and wrinkled; he wore a linen jerkin, and Peter easily recognised the huge boots he had heard of in the story, which were drawn up over his leather breeches.

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"Peter Munk," said the King of the Forest at last, in a deep, hollow voice, "what art thou doing here in the 'Pine-thicket'?"

"Good morrow, countryman," answered Peter, who wished to appear undismayed, though he was trembling all over; "I am going homewards through the 'Pine-thicket.'"

"Peter Munk," rejoined the other, with a dreadful, piercing glance at him, "thy way home does not lie through this wood."

"Well, perhaps not exactly," stammered the youth, "but it is a hot day, and I thought it would be cooler here."

"No lies, thou Coal-Peter!" thundered Dutch Michael, "or I will fell thee to the earth with my staff. Dost think I did not see thee creep begging to yon little man?" he added more quietly. "Go to! that was a silly trick, and it is a good thing thou didst not know the charm. The little fellow is a niggard, and gives but scantily, and he to whom he gives is never merry all his life long. Peter, thou art a poor wight, and from my soul I pity thee; such a fine, jolly lad as thou, that mightest

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make something of thy life—and thou art to spend it in charcoal-burning! Where others can shake heavy thalers and ducats out of their sleeves, thou canst scarce spare a beggarly sixpence. 'Tis a wretched life!"

—"Thou art right, it is indeed—a wretched life!"

—"Well, I will not be hard on thee," the terrible Michael went on; "I have helped many a good fellow in his need—thou wouldst not be the first. Tell me, then, how many hundred thalers mightest thou want to begin with?"

As he spoke, he rattled the money in his huge pockets, so that it chinked as Peter had heard it in his dream. But the lad's heart fluttered painfully as he listened to the tempter's words, and he grew hot and cold all at once, for Dutch Michael did not look the sort of person who would give away money out of sheer kindness of heart and ask for nothing in return. The mysterious words of the old grandfather, about the men who had grown suddenly rich, returned to his mind, and urged by a strange uneasiness and fear, he cried out:

"My best thanks to you, sir; but I would rather have nothing to do with you, and I know well enough who you are;" and ran off as fast as his legs could carry him.

But the wood-spirit still kept alongside of him with mighty strides, muttering in hollow, threatening tones: "Thou wilt yet repent it, Peter. I see it written on thy brow—I read it in thine eyes—that thou art not to escape me. Do not run so fast; give heed to one more sensible word of advice, for yonder is my boundary-line." [Pg 290]

But when Peter heard this, and caught sight of a small ditch not far off, he hurried faster than ever towards it, so that Michael was obliged to go faster too, and pursued him with threats and curses. With a desperate leap Peter cleared the ditch, just as he saw his enemy raising the great staff to crush him. It fell with a crash, but Peter was already safe, and the staff broke into splinters, as upon an invisible wall, so that a long piece of it fell over close to the lad. He picked it up in triumph, to throw it back to its churlish owner, but as he did so, he felt it writhe in his hand, and saw, to his horror, that it had changed into a great snake, which was already shooting out its forked tongue, and with glittering eyes, prepared to dart up into his face. He let the creature go, but it had twisted about his arm, and he could scarcely have escaped being attacked by it, but that a large hawk suddenly swooped down from above, seized the serpent by the head, and rose with it into the air.

Dutch Michael, who was looking on from the other side of the ditch, raged and swore worse than ever, as he beheld his snake carried off by a more powerful enemy. Exhausted and trembling, Peter went on his way. The path grew steeper, the landscape wilder, and after a bit he found himself once more on the mountain-top, under the huge fir-tree. He again made his bow to the invisible Glass-man, and then began immediately: [Pg 291]

"O Treasure-keeper in the forest green,
Thine age is many hundred years—this land
Is all thine own, wherever pine-trees stand;
By none save Sunday children art thou seen."

"Thou hast not got it quite right; but since it is thou, Coal-Munk Peter, I will let it pass," said a gentle, low voice beside him.

He stared about him in amaze, and there, beneath a tall pine, sat a little old man, in black jerkin and red stockings, with the broad, pointed hat on his head. He had a kind, delicately cut face, and a little beard, as soft as a spider's web; he was smoking, strange to say, a blue glass pipe, and as Peter went nearer, he saw that all his clothes too, and his hat, and his shoes, were made of coloured glass, but it was pliable, as though it were still warm, and fitted like cloth to every turn and movement of the little man's body.

"Thou hast met that scoundrel, Dutch Michael, then?" said the little man, making an odd, hoarse sound in his throat between almost every word. "He tried to frighten thee badly, but I got his magic whip away from him, and he shall never have it back again!"

"Yea, Master Treasure-keeper," answered Peter, with a deep bow, "I was dreadfully frightened. But doubtless you were his lordship the hawk, who killed the snake for me. I am very much obliged to you. But I was coming to get some advice from you, for things are going very poorly with me. A charcoal-burner does not get on very well in life, and as I am still young, I thought I might manage to better myself. Specially when I look at others, who seem to have got on so easily. Take fat Ezekiel, or the 'dancers' king,' for instance; with them money is as plentiful as hay." [Pg 292]

"Peter," said the little man very gravely, and as he spoke he blew the smoke from his pipe far out before him—"Peter, never speak to me of them. What does it advantage them to *seem* happy here for a few years, and then to be all the more miserable afterwards? Thou must not despise thy calling. Thy father and grandfather were honest folk, and yet they followed the same. Peter Munk, I hope it is not love of idleness that has brought thee to me."

Peter was alarmed at the little man's serious tone, and reddened as he answered: "Nay, Master Treasure-keeper, idleness, I know full well, is the beginning of all evil; but you cannot blame me

if another calling pleases me better than my own. A charcoal-burner is so very low, you see, and glass-blowers, and raftsmen, and watchmakers are all of more consequence."

"Pride often goes before a fall," answered the little master of the forest, rather more kindly. "Ye are a strange race, ye sons of men. You are scarcely ever quite content with the state of life to which you are born and brought up! And what is the use of wishing? Wert thou a glass-maker, thou wouldst wish to be a master woodman; and if that were granted thee, thou wouldst covet the forester's place, or the Mayor's house! But let be; if thou wilt promise to work diligently, I will help thee to something better, Peter. I am wont to give every Sunday child that finds its way to me three wishes. The first two are granted without question; the third I can deny if it is a foolish one. So now thou mayst wish for something—but let it be something good and useful, Peter."

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"Hurrah! you are a capital little Glass-man!" shouted Peter, "rightly called the Treasure-keeper, for you have treasures indeed in your hand. And so I may wish for whatever my heart desires? Then I will begin by wishing to dance better than the 'king of the dancing-floor,' and always to have as much money in my pocket as fat Ezekiel."

"Thou fool!" exclaimed the little man angrily. "What a miserable wish is this! To dance well, and to have money for gambling! Art thou not ashamed, foolish Peter, of being so blind to thine own welfare? What use is it to thyself, or thy poor mother, that thou shouldst be able to dance? What use is money, when by thine own wish, it is but to be spent in the tavern, and will stay there, like that of the miserable 'dancers' king'? So all the week long thou wilt still have nought, and starve as before. I will give thee one more free wish, but be careful to choose something more sensible."

Peter scratched his head, and resumed after some hesitation: "Well, then, I will wish for the finest and richest glass-hut in all the Black Forest, with its belongings, and all the money that is needed to carry on the work."

"Nothing else?" said the little man anxiously. "Oh, Peter, nothing else?"

"Well, you might add a horse and a little cart."

"Oh thou foolish Coal-Munk Peter!" cried the little fellow, and threw his glass pipe in a rage against a neighbouring tree, so that it broke into a hundred pieces.

"Horses, carts!" he continued. "Wisdom, I tell thee, wisdom and plain common sense, and insight—these thou shouldst have wished for, not horses and carts! Well, do not look so downcast; we will try and see that thou dost not come to harm, even so, for the second wish was not altogether foolish. A good glass-hut keeps master and man alive; only thou shouldst have wished for knowledge and sense to carry it on, then horses and carts would have followed of themselves."

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"But, Master Treasure-keeper," said Peter, "I have still a wish left. I can wish for wisdom with that, if it is really as indispensable as you think."

—"Nay, stop there! Thou wilt find thyself in many a scrape yet, that will make thee glad thou hast a wish still left. Now go home; and here," continued the little spirit of the pine-wood, drawing a purse out of his pocket, "here are two thousand gulden, and let that suffice; do not come asking me for money again, or I should be obliged to hang thee from the highest fir-tree. That has been my rule since I have dwelt in this forest. Three days ago old Winkfritz died, who owned the large glass-hut in the lower forest. Go there to-morrow morning, and make a proper bid for the business. Look to thyself, be diligent, and I will pay thee a visit now and again, and give thee a helping hand, and wise counsel, since thou didst not ask for wisdom thyself. But I tell thee again, and I am in earnest, thy first wish was bad. Beware of the ale-house, Peter; it has never yet done any one good for long!"

As he spoke, the little man had drawn a new pipe of fine glass from his pocket, and stuffed it with dry pine-needles. He now put it between his little toothless gums, and producing a large burning-glass, he stepped into the sun and lit his pipe. Having done this, he shook Peter kindly by the hand, and after giving him a few more good counsels, as they went along, he began to puff and blow so rapidly at his pipe, that he ended by completely disappearing in a cloud of smoke, which smelt of real Dutch tobacco, and faded slowly away among the tops of the fir-trees.

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When Peter got home, he found his mother very anxious about him, for the good woman had quite made up her mind that her son had been drawn for a soldier, and already carried off. But he was in high spirits, and told her that he had met a kind friend in the forest, who had procured him money to start a new business, instead of the charcoal-burning. And though his mother had lived for thirty years in a charcoal-burner's hut, and had been as used to blackened faces as a miller's wife is to floury ones, still she was foolish and proud enough to despise her former condition as soon as Peter promised her a more prosperous one, and said "that now, as the mother of a man who owned a glass-hut, she was something above the neighbours, Betty and Grete, and should take a front seat in church, among the respectable people."

Peter soon struck a bargain with the inheritors of the glass-hut the little man had told him of; he kept on the workmen he found there, and let the glass-making go on night and day. At first the work pleased him. He went down to the workshop at his convenience, and walked about it with an important air, his hands in his pockets, looking to right and left, and making this and that remark, over which his work-people often laughed not a little. His greatest pleasure was to see the glass blown, and he would often set to work himself, and form the strangest figures out of the soft, warm mass. But after a while he tired of it, and went to the hut, first only an hour each day,

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then only every two days, and at last only once a week, while his workmen did as they pleased. Now his fondness for the tavern was to blame for all this. The Sunday after his return from the "Pine-thicket," he went there as usual, and there was the "king" already bounding about upon the dancing-floor; and there sat fat Ezekiel, too, his tankard before him, rattling the dice and casting for crown thalers. Peter's hands jumped to his pockets, that he might see if the little Glass-man had kept his word; and lo! they were bulging with silver and gold coins. His legs, too, twitched and itched, as though they were fain to jump and dance; and when the first dance was over, he stood up with his partner opposite the "dancing-king," and when the latter sprang three feet into the air, Peter leaped four, and when his opponent cut all sorts of nimble and dainty steps, Peter twisted and turned his feet about so much more rapidly, that the beholders could hardly contain themselves for wonder and admiration. But when people heard that Peter had bought a glass-hut, and saw how he scattered sixpences among the musicians whenever he went by, there was no end to the general astonishment. Some said he had found a treasure in the forest, others that he had come into an inheritance, but one and all honoured him, and looked up to him, only because he had money. He played away as much as twenty guldens that evening, and yet the coins rattled in his pocket, as though there were at least a hundred thalers left there. When Peter saw how much he was respected, he was beside himself with pride and joy. He threw his money about with both hands, and gave generously of it to the poor. Did he not know by experience how bitter is the sting of poverty? The "dancing king" was cast quite into the shade by Peter's superhuman talents, and Peter was now called "the dancers' emperor."

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The most reckless of the Sunday gamblers did not make such wagers as he did, but neither did they lose so much. But, then, the more he lost, the more he won, and this happened just as he had begged the little Glass-man that it might. He had wished "always to have as much money in his pocket as fat Ezekiel," and it was to this very man that he always lost his money; so when he lost twenty or thirty gulden at a stroke, there they were in his pocket again, the very moment Ezekiel swept them into his own. Presently he went further in betting and gambling than the most daring ne'er-do-weels in all the forest, and he was oftener called "gambling Peter" than "the dancers' emperor," for he played on most work-days as well as Sundays now. Hence his business began to go badly, and this was the fault of Peter's lack of wisdom. He had as much glass made as there possibly could be, but with the business, he had not bought the secret of disposing of his wares to the best advantage. At last he did not know what to do with all his unsold glass, and got rid of it half-price, to pedlars, only that he might have enough to pay his workmen their wage.

One evening, as he was coming home from the ale-house, and thinking with shame and distress—despite all the wine he had drunk to cheer himself up—of the failure of his fortunes, he perceived that some one was walking beside him, and when he looked round, behold, it was the little Glass-man!

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Then Peter broke out in anger against him, and with boastful, daring words, swore that the little man was to blame for all his troubles.

"What use are my horse and cart to me now?" he cried. "What use are my hut and all my glass? Even when I was only a poor charcoal-burner's lad, I had a happier life and fewer cares. Now I do not even know at what hour the sheriff will come and value my goods, and sell me up because of my debts!"

"So," answered the little man, "so! I am to blame if thou art unhappy? Are these the thanks I get for all my benefits? Was it I who told thee to make such foolish wishes? Thou wouldst be a glass-maker, and didst not even know whither to sell thy wares! Did I not warn thee to frame thy wishes carefully? Common sense, Peter, common sense and knowledge were lacking to thee."

"Sense and knowledge, indeed!" shouted Peter. "I am as sensible a lad as any, and I will prove it to thee, little Glass-man!" And with these words he seized the little man by the collar, and yelled: "I have thee now, have I not, thou Treasure-keeper! And now I will wish my third wish, and thou shalt grant it. I wish, then, this moment, for two hundred thousand hard thalers, and a house, and—ah!" he screamed, for the little man of the woods had changed into burning glass, and was scorching Peter's hand like a flaming fire. But of the little man himself no trace was to be seen.

For several days Peter's swollen hand reminded him unpleasantly of his ingratitude and folly. But after a time he stifled the voice of conscience, and said to himself: "What matter though they should sell my glass-hut, and all I have? I still have fat Ezekiel, and as long as he has money on Sundays, I cannot want for it."

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Yea, Peter, but if he should have none?

And so it happened one day, as a strange and wonderful judgment upon them both. For one Sunday he drove up to the inn, and the people stretched their heads out of window, and said: "There goes gambling Peter—there goes the 'dancers' emperor,' the rich glass-man!" And others rejoined: "Who knows about the riches? They do say his debts are many, and that it will not be long before the sheriff appears to seize his goods!"

But meanwhile Peter dismounted, and greeted them all pompously, and called out to the host: "Good-evening, mine host of the Sun Inn! Is fat Ezekiel here?" And a voice from within replied: "Here we are, Peter, at the cards already, and thy place is kept for thee."

So Peter Munk went in, feeling his pockets, and saw directly that Ezekiel must be well off that night, for they were brimming over with gold and silver. He sat down to the table, and played with one and another, and won and lost, and won again, till it grew late, and the steadier heads

among them said it was enough, and they must go home to wife and child. So one and another went, till gambling Peter and Ezekiel were left alone. Peter begged the latter to stop on a while, but he was loth, and resisted for a long time. At last he cried: "Well, I will count what I have left, and then we will play one last bout, five gulden a throw, for it is childish to keep on for less."

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He counted his money, and found he had just a hundred guldens; and now Peter did not need to count his, for he knew how much he had, too.

But if Ezekiel had won before, he lost now, one throw after another, swearing fearfully the while. At last he put his only remaining five gulden on the table, and said: "Now, even if I lose this time, I will yet not leave off, for thou wilt lend me some of thy winnings, Peter; one good fellow helps another."

"To be sure I will, and were it a hundred guldens!" cried the other, proud of his winnings; and fat Ezekiel threw the dice—fifteen. "Now let us see!" he cried.

Peter rattled the box, and threw—eighteen; and as he did so, a hoarse, well-known voice behind him said: "So, that was *the last!*"

He turned round, and saw the giant form of Dutch Michael. He let the money he had won fall in terror. But fat Ezekiel saw no one, and only begged Peter to lend him ten guldens, that he might go on playing. Half dreaming, Peter thrust his hand into one pocket—it was empty. He tried the other—it was the same. He turned his coat inside out, but not a penny-piece was to be found; and now he thought of his own wish—that he might always have as much money as fat Ezekiel. It had all disappeared like smoke.

The host and Ezekiel gazed at him in surprise as he went on hunting, and still found none of his money. They would not believe he had no more; but when they themselves felt in his pockets, and were obliged to confess it was the truth they became very wroth, and swore gambling Peter was a wicked conjurer and had "wished" all Ezekiel's money, and his own, away into his coffers at home. He defended himself as best he could, but appearances were against him. Ezekiel swore he would spread the shameful tale through all the Black Forest, and the host declared he would go to the town at dawn and denounce Peter as a sorcerer, adding that he believed he would come to be burnt as one yet. Then they set upon him in a rage, tore his jerkin from his back, and thrust him out of doors.

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No star lit up the dark sky as Peter slunk dejectedly homewards, yet he could make out a dusky form that strode along beside him, and at last spoke as follows:

"Thou art done for now, Peter Munk; all thy grandeur is at an end. And I could have told thee as much before, but thou wouldst have naught to do with me, and wert set upon running to that foolish little glass-dwarf. Now thou seest what happens to those who scorn my counsels. But try me again, for I have pity upon thy miserable plight. No one ever repented it yet who turned to me, and if thou dost not fear the way, I am to be found all day to-morrow in the 'Pine-thicket,' and will come forth to speak with thee, if thou dost but call."

Peter was well aware who it was that spoke thus to him, but a sense of dread crept over him. He made no answer, but hurried on upon his homeward way.

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THE COLD HEART

When Peter went down to his glass-hut on Monday morning, he found not only his workmen there, but other and more unwelcome occupants, namely, the sheriff and three of his officers. The former wished him good-day, asked how he had slept, and then drew out a long list of Peter's creditors.

"Canst thou pay—yes or no?" asked the sheriff, with a stern look. "Answer me quickly, for I have not much time to lose, and it will take me three hours to get back to the town."

Peter's heart sank; he was obliged to own that his last penny was gone, and to suffer the sheriff to begin valuing his goods.

As he and his officers went about, examining and valuing the house, the workshop, the stable, the horse, cart, and all, Peter said to himself that it was not far to the "Pine-thicket," and that, as the little man had not helped him, he would now try what the big one could do.

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He hurried to the "Pine-thicket" as fast as if the sheriff's officers had been at his heels; and though, as he ran by the spot where he had first spoken to the little Glass-man, he fancied that an invisible hand was laid upon him, trying to hold him back, still he broke away, and hastened on, till he came to the boundary-line, of which he had taken good care to note the position before.

He had scarcely had time to call out in a breathless voice: "Dutch Michael! Master Dutch Michael!" ere the giant raftsman, with his long pole, stood before him.

"So thou art come!" said he, with a laugh. "Would they fain have skinned thee and sold thee to thy creditors? Well, make thy mind easy. All thy troubles, as I said before, come from the little Glass-man, that canting bit of piety, who is too good to mix with other folk. If one gives at all, one should give freely, and not like yon miser. But come," he continued, turning toward the forest, "follow me to my house, and we will see whether we can strike a bargain."

"A bargain!" thought Peter. "What can he ask of me, or what have I to barter? Am I to be his servant, or what?"

They went for a bit down a steep woodland path, that led suddenly to the brink of a dark, deep, and precipitous ravine. Dutch Michael swung himself down the cliff as though it had been a flight of smooth marble steps; but Peter nearly lost his senses for terror when the giant, having reached the bottom, suddenly grew up as tall as a steeple, and reaching out an arm as long as a weaver's beam, with a hand at the end of it as big as the table at the tavern, called up in tones as deep and muffled as a funeral bell: "Sit thee down on my hand, and hold on by one of the fingers, that thou mayst not fall."

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Peter tremblingly did as he was told, and taking his seat upon the giant's hand, held firmly on by one of his thumbs. They went down a long way, deeper and deeper; yet to Peter's surprise it grew no darker, but rather the daylight brightened as they descended into the chasm, only his eyes could not endure that light for long together.

Dutch Michael's size decreased the farther Peter got down, until he had shrunk to his usual height, and they stood at the door of a house, that was neither better nor worse than that of any rich peasant in the forest. The sitting-room which Peter now entered was no different from other people's, except that it seemed very lonely; the tall wooden clock, the great earthenware stove, the broad benches, and the household utensils on the shelves, were just the same here as elsewhere. Michael motioned him to a seat by the centre table, and then went out, returning with a pitcher of wine and some glasses. He filled them up, and began chatting with his guest, telling him so much about the pleasures of the world, and the beauties of foreign countries, towns, and rivers, that Peter at last confessed to a great desire to see all these fine things.

"But," said Dutch Michael, "though thy body might be full of strength and courage, enough to venture upon any undertaking, yet one or two throbs of thy foolish heart would be enough to make thee tremble and grow weak! And then again, what you call sorrow, or wounded honour, what are these, that a sensible lad should trouble about them? Was it in thy head thou didst feel it, when a while ago some one called thee an impostor and a scoundrel? When the sheriff came to turn thee out of house and home, was it thy belly that pained thee? Nay, but where, tell me, where didst thou feel the pain?"

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"In my heart," said Peter, as he pressed his hand to his throbbing side, for he felt, indeed, as though his heart were leaping to and fro in alarm.

"Well, in past days—do not take it amiss—but in past days, I say, thou hast thrown away many hundred guildens to good-for-nothing beggars, and other ragamuffins, and what use has it been to thee? They wished thee health and every blessing—art thou any the healthier for it? For half that wasted money thou couldst have paid for a doctor all to thyself. Blessings! A fine blessing it is to be sold up and turned adrift, eh? And what was it that made thee thrust thy hand in thy pocket as often as a dirty beggar stretched out his ragged cap? Thy heart, always thy heart; not thine eye, thy tongue, or thy leg, but thy heart—thou didst always *take it*, as they rightly say, *too much to heart!*"

"But how can a man get to feel differently? I am taking a deal of trouble, this very moment, to keep my heart quiet, and yet it is throbbing and aching."

"*Thou!*" laughed the other. "Thou, poor wretch, canst do nothing to prevent it, I know. Yet only give *me* the feebly beating thing, and thou shalt see what ease will be thine."

"You?—my heart?" cried Peter in terror. "But then I should die on the spot? Never!"

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"Yes, if one of these gentlemen, the surgeons, were to try and cut the heart out of thy body, thou wouldst die, sure enough; but it is not so when I do it. Come hither and be convinced."

With these words, he opened a door and led Peter into an adjoining room.

The lad's heart sank, with a painful quiver, as he stepped over the threshold; but he did not notice it, so startling and amazing was the sight that met his eyes. On sundry wooden shelves stood glass jars, filled with a transparent fluid, and in every one of these jars lay a heart. Moreover, each jar was labelled and bore a name, which Peter read with eager curiosity. Here was the heart of the sheriff of F., and there the heart of fat Ezekiel, and the heart of the "dancers' king," and of the head-forester; there were six hearts belonging to corn-brokers, eight to recruiting officers, three to usurers—in fact, it was a collection of the most respectable hearts for

twenty miles round.

"See!" said Dutch Michael, "all these have cast away the cares and sorrows of life; not one of these hearts beats anxiously or heavily any more, and their former owners feel all the better for having got this restless guest out of their house."

"But what do they carry in their breasts instead?" asked Peter, who felt quite confused and giddy from all he had seen and heard.

"This," answered the other, and reached out to him, from a drawer which he had opened, a stone heart.

"This!" echoed Peter, and could not prevent a cold shiver from going over him. "A heart of marble. But surely, Master Dutch Michael, such a one must feel very cold in a man's breast?" [Pg 307]

"Certainly; but the coolness is really quite pleasant. Why should a heart be warm, after all? In winter, a good dram will warm thee better; and in summer, when all is sultry and hot, it's past belief how comfortably such a heart as this cools a fellow down. And, as I said before, neither fear nor care, neither foolish pity nor other men's sorrow, can knock at the door of such a heart."

"And is that all you can give me?" asked Peter angrily. "I hoped for money, and you offer me a stone."

"Well, I should think a hundred thousand guildens would be enough to begin with, would it not? If thou dost only manage it well, thou canst soon be a rich man."

"A hundred thousand!" cried the poor charcoal-burner joyfully. "Well, do not leap so wildly in my breast, unruly heart! we shall soon have done with one another! So be it, Michael, give me the money and the stone, and thou hast leave to take away the unrest from this dwelling-place."

"I was sure thou wert a sensible lad," replied the Dutchman, smiling pleasantly; "come, let us have one more drink together, and then I will count out the money."

They sat down to their wine again, and drank and drank, until Peter fell into a deep slumber.

Coal-Munk Peter was awakened by the cheery ring of a post-boy's horn, and found himself sitting in a fine carriage, rolling along a broad road; and as he leaned from the door and looked back, he could see the Black Forest lying far behind him in the distance. At first he could not believe that it was really himself sitting in this post-chaise, for even his clothes were not the same as he had worn yesterday, but he remembered everything that had happened so clearly, that at last he gave up puzzling, and cried: "Well, I am Coal-Munk Peter at any rate, and no other; that much is certain." [Pg 308]

He was surprised that he felt no melancholy, no home-sickness, on thus leaving his quiet village, and the silent woods where he had lived so long, for the first time. Even when he thought of his mother, whom he must have left behind in penury and distress, he could not squeeze a tear out of his eye, or even heave a sigh at the thought of her, for he felt indifferent to everything.

"But of course," he thought to himself, "tears and sighs, melancholy and home-sickness, all come from the heart, and, thanks to Dutch Michael, mine is cold and of stone." He laid his hand on his breast, and all was quiet and motionless within. "If he has kept his word as well about the hundred thousand, I may think myself lucky indeed," he said, and began to search the carriage.

At first he only found clothes, of every description that he could want, yet no money; but finally he hit on a bag filled with golden thalers, and bills upon various merchants in all the great cities. "Now everything is as I wish," he thought, and settling himself comfortably in a corner of the carriage, he journeyed forth into the world.

He travelled about for two years, gazing right and left out of his carriage at the houses and lands as he went by; and the first thing he looked for, when he stopped anywhere, was the sign of the tavern. Then he would wander about in the cities, and let all their rarest treasures and most beautiful sights be displayed to him. But nothing gave him pleasure—no picture, no house, no music, no merrymaking; his stone heart could take no interest in anything, and his eyes and ears were deadened to all that was lovely. He had nothing left but the pleasures of eating and drinking, and of sleep; and so he lived, wandering about the world without object, eating for his amusement, and sleeping because he was dull. Now and then he remembered, indeed, that he had been happier and merrier when he was still poor, and had to work for his livelihood. Then every beautiful outlook into the valley, all music and song, still delighted him, and he had even looked forward for hours to the simple meal that his mother was to bring up to the charcoal-kiln for him. It seemed quite strange, as he looked back over the past, and called to mind how he had been wont to laugh at the slightest jest, to think that he could no longer laugh now. When others did so, he drew his mouth, out of politeness, into a wry smile, but his heart had no smile within. Then he knew that, though he was very calm, he was not happy. It was not melancholy or home-sickness, but merely want of interest, and the weariness of his empty, joyless life, that at last sent him home again. [Pg 309]

When he drove from Strasbourg and caught sight of the dark woods of his home—when he saw again, for the first time, the powerful forms and the kind, honest faces of the Black Forest folk—

when the tones of that familiar speech, deep and loud, yet pleasant withal, fell upon his ear, he hastily put his hand to his heart, for he felt a stir in his blood, and thought that now he must surely both rejoice and weep—but how could he have been so foolish? Had he not a heart of stone? Stones are dead, and neither laugh nor weep.

His first visit was to Dutch Michael, who welcomed him with his old kindness.

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“Michael,” Peter said to him, “I have travelled and seen everything now, but it is all foolish stuff, and I only bored myself. This stone thing of yours, to be sure, saves me a great deal. I never get angry and am never sad, but then I am never merry either, and I seem to myself to be only half alive. Could you not make the stone heart a bit livelier? Or—why not give me back my old heart? I would rather have it back; I had got used to it in five-and-twenty years, and if it did sometimes play me a foolish trick, yet it was merry, and a blithe sort of heart.”

The wood-spirit laughed a bitter, grim laugh.

“When once thou art dead, Peter Munk,” he replied, “thou shalt have it fast enough. Yes, then thou shalt have thy soft, easily moved heart again, and be able to feel all that comes, whether joy or pain. But above ground it can never be thine again. Yet, Peter, if thou hast travelled, and reaped no pleasure from it, this was only because of thy foolish way of life. Now settle somewhere in the forest, build a house, marry, use thy money so as to increase thy wealth. Lack of work is all that is amiss with thee; thou wert only dull because thou wert idle, and now thou wouldst put all the blame on this innocent heart?”

Peter admitted that, as far as the idleness was concerned, Michael was right; and he made up his mind to set to work at getting richer and richer. Michael again made him a present of a hundred thousand guldens, and bade him farewell as the best of friends.

The story soon got spread about that Coal-Munk Peter, or “gambling Peter,” had returned, and far richer than before. And thereupon things went as they always do—at the time he had been reduced to beggary, they had turned him out of the Sun Inn, but now when he made his first appearance there on a Sunday afternoon, every one shook him by the hand, praised his horse, and asked about his travels; and when he began to play again for hard coin with fat Ezekiel, he stood as high as ever in the public esteem.

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He no longer made glass now, but took up the wood-business, and even that only as a pretence. His real business was that of a corn-broker and money-lender. By-and-by half the Black Forest was in debt to him, but he only lent out money at ten per cent., or sold corn at treble the usual price, to poor people who could not pay at once. He was now fast friends with the sheriff; and if any one failed to pay what he owed Master Peter Munk, punctually and to the very day, out would come the sheriff with his men, and having hastily valued the poor debtor’s goods, they would sell all he had, and turn him out, with wife and child, into the forest.

At first this caused the rich Peter some inconvenience, for the poor sold-up wretches would besiege his house in swarms, the men begging for a little respite, the women trying to soften the heart of stone, and the little children crying for a crust of bread. But he soon provided himself with a couple of fierce bloodhounds, and then the “cats’ music,” as he called it, stopped at once.

The person who gave him the most trouble was “the old wife,” as he called her, and who was she but Mistress Munk, his own mother. She had fallen into misery and want, at the time their house and goods had been sold up, and since her son had come home a rich man, he had never troubled himself about her. Now she would sometimes hobble up to the house, leaning on her stick, old, broken-down, and feeble. She did not dare go in, for he had once driven her away; but it cut her to the heart to be obliged to live on the charity of others, when her own son could have made her old age comfortable and free from care. But the cold heart was never moved by the sight of the well-known form and features, now so pale and wasted, or of the outstretched hand and imploring gaze. When she knocked at the door on Saturday evenings, he grudgingly drew forth a sixpenny-piece, wrapped it in paper, and sent it out to her by a serving-man. He could hear her trembling voice uttering thanks, and wishes for his prosperity—he could hear her cough as she crept from the door, but he thought no more of it, except that he had been obliged to spend another sixpence uselessly.

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At last he bethought himself of marrying. He knew that any father in the district would gladly give him his daughter, but he was particular in his choice, for he desired men to praise his luck and his wisdom in this matter too. So he rode about through all the forest, looking here and there, yet none of the handsome Black Forest girls seemed handsome enough for him. At last, after having sought in vain among all the pretty girls at the various dances and meeting-places, he heard that the fairest and best girl in the whole country was the daughter of a poor wood-cutter. She was said to live very quietly, in the strictest seclusion, managing her father’s house diligently and well, and never showing herself at a dance, not even on the greatest holidays. When Peter heard of this wonder of the forest, he determined to woo her, and rode off to the hut that had been pointed out to him.

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The father of beautiful Lisbeth received this fine gentleman with much surprise, and was even more surprised to learn that he was the rich Master Peter Munk, and was anxious to become his son-in-law. The old man was not long in making up his mind, for he fancied all his care and poverty would now be at an end; he even gave his consent without consulting Lisbeth, and the good child was so obedient that she made no objection to becoming Mistress Peter Munk.

But the poor girl was far from having as pleasant a life as she had expected. She had thought she understood housekeeping, but she could never please Master Peter; she had compassion on the poor and suffering, and as her husband was so rich, she thought it no sin to give a penny to a poor beggar-woman, or a dram to an old man; but when Master Peter one day discovered this, he growled out with rough voice and angry looks:

“What is this thou art after, wasting my substance on vagabonds and ragamuffins? Didst thou bring anything into the house, that thou shouldst have the right to give anything away? Thy father’s beggar’s staff will warm no soup, and yet thou canst throw money about like a queen. Let me catch thee at it again, and thou shalt feel my hand!”

Beautiful Lisbeth wept alone in her room over her husband’s hard heart, and often wished herself home again in her father’s poor hut, rather than in the house of rich, but niggardly, stony-hearted Peter. Ah! if she had only known that he had a heart of marble, that could neither love her nor any one else, she would no longer have wondered at him. [Pg 314]

Now, when she sat at her door, and a beggar came up, and took off his hat and began his little speech, she would close her eyes, so as not to see his misery, and clench her hand tightly, lest it should slip into her pocket and fetch out a coin.

Therefore it came to pass that beautiful Lisbeth fell into bad repute through all the forest, and people said she was even more of a miser than her husband.

But one day she was sitting at her door, spinning and singing a little song, for she was light of heart, because the weather was fine, and Master Peter had ridden far afield; and presently a little man came down the road, carrying a large, heavy sack; she could hear him a long way off, panting for breath. Mistress Lisbeth looked at him pityingly, and thought to herself that such an old man should not be so heavily laden.

Now the little man staggered up, gasping, and when he got opposite Mistress Lisbeth’s door, he broke down altogether beneath his load.

“Oh, have pity on me, and give me a drink of water, mistress!” he panted. “I can go no farther, and am fainting for misery.”

“But you should not carry such heavy loads at your age,” said Mistress Lisbeth.

“Ay, ’tis all very well, but what if I must do errands, because I am poor and have to earn my bread?” he answered. “Ah! a rich woman like you does not know how bitter poverty is, or how welcome a cool drink in such hot weather.”

When Lisbeth heard this, she hurried into the house and filled a glass with water, but as she was coming back, and saw how wretched and careworn he looked, crouching upon his sack, a deeper compassion welled up within her; she remembered her husband was not at home, and turning again, she put the water aside, and brought out a beaker full of wine, with a good loaf of rye-bread, to the old man. [Pg 315]

“There, a draught of wine will do thee more good than water, as thou art so old,” she said; “but do not drink so hastily, and eat some bread with it.”

The old man gazed at her in astonishment, till great tears gathered in his eyes. He drank again, and then said:

“I am old, but I have met with few people so compassionate as thou, or who gave their gifts with so sweet and heartfelt a grace, Mistress Lisbeth. But thou wilt surely have a happy life in return, for such a heart does not go unrewarded.”

“Nay, and she shall reap the reward this very moment!” shouted a furious voice—and looking round, they saw Master Peter, crimson with anger, standing behind them. “And I see thou dost give my choicest wine, too, to beggars, and my own tankard to the lips of vagabonds! There is thy reward!”

Mistress Lisbeth fell at his feet and begged for forgiveness, but the stone heart knew no pity; he turned the whip he held in his hand, and brought down its ebony handle with such force upon her fair forehead, that she sank lifeless into the old man’s arms.

When he saw this, Peter at once seemed to feel remorseful, for he bent down to see if there were any life left in her; but the little old man said, in well-known tones:

“Trouble thyself no further, Coal-Peter; here was the fairest and sweetest blossom in all the forest, but thou hast trodden it under foot, and it will never bloom again.”

Every drop of blood left Peter’s cheeks, and he stammered: “It is you, then, Master Treasure-keeper? Well, what is done is done, and doubtless it had to be. But I trust you will not denounce me to justice as a murderer?” [Pg 316]

“Miserable wretch!” said the little Glass-man sternly. “What good would it do me to bring thy perishable body to the gallows? Not earthly judgments hast thou to fear, but other and more terrible ones; for thou hast sold thy soul to the Evil One.”

“And if I have sold my heart,” screamed Peter, “it is thou who art to blame, thou and thy deceitful treasures! Thou, malicious spirit, hast been my undoing—’tis thou hast driven me to ask help

from another—thou hast to answer for it all!”

But hardly had he spoken these words, when the little Glass-man began to grow larger and taller, till he towered above him, and his eyes, they declare, were as large as soup-plates, and his mouth was like a heated oven, and breathed forth fiery flames. Peter fell on his knees, and his stone heart did not prevent him from trembling like an aspen leaf. The wood-spirit seized him by the neck with its hawk-like talons, whirled him round as the storm-wind does a dry leaf, and then cast him to the ground again, so that all his bones rattled.

“Earth-worm!” he cried with a voice of thunder, “I could shatter thee to atoms if I would, for thou hast blasphemed against the Lord of the Forest. But, for this dead woman’s sake, who gave me food and drink, I will grant thee eight days’ respite. If thou dost not turn and repent thee in that time, I will come and grind thy bones to powder, and thou shalt go hence in thy sins!”

It was already evening, when some men who were going by saw rich Peter Munk lying on the ground. They turned him this way and that, and sought if there was still any breath in him, but for a time they sought in vain. Presently one fetched water from the house and sprinkled some over him, and at that Peter gave a deep sigh, moaned, and opened his eyes. He looked about him, and asked where Mistress Lisbeth was, but no one had seen her. Then he thanked the men for their help, and crawled into his house, where he began seeking in every corner from roof to cellar, but Mistress Lisbeth was nowhere to be found. So he knew that what he had taken for a hideous dream was the awful reality.

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Now that he was quite alone, strange thoughts visited him; not that he was afraid of anything, for was not his heart of stone? But when he thought of his wife’s death, pictures of his own end came unbidden into his mind, and he saw himself going hence, so heavily laden with the tears of the poor and their curses—which had alike been unavailing to soften his heart—with the misery of all the wretched folk on whom he had set his dogs, with the silent despair of his mother, and with the blood of good and beautiful Lisbeth. What account should he give to the old man, her father, when he came and asked, “Where is my daughter, whom I gave thee to wife?” How could he answer the questions of that Being, to whom belong all the forests, the seas, the mountains, and the lives of men?

These thoughts even tormented him at night in his dreams, and he kept on being awakened by a sweet voice that called to him, “Peter, get thee a warmer heart.” But when he was awake, he made haste to shut his eyes again, for the voice that spoke this warning sounded like that of Mistress Lisbeth.

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One day he went to the ale-house to distract his thoughts, and there he fell in with fat Ezekiel. They sat down together and talked of this and that, the weather, the taxes, the war, and lastly of death, and of how many people here and there had died suddenly. Then Peter asked the fat man what he thought about death, and what was to come after it. Ezekiel replied that the body was buried, but that the soul would go to its appointed place.

“And the heart?” asked Peter anxiously, “do they bury that too?”

“To be sure,” answered Ezekiel.

“But if one has no heart?” Peter went on.

Ezekiel looked at him with a dreadful expression. “What dost thou mean by that?” he asked. “Art thou mocking me? Dost mean to say I have no heart?”

“Yes, a heart sure enough, as hard as a stone,” replied Peter.

Ezekiel stared at him in amazement, looked cautiously round to see if he could be overheard, and then said: “How comest thou to know that? Or does thine own heart beat no longer, perhaps?”

“It beats no longer,” rejoined Peter, “at least not here in my breast. But tell me, since now thou hast taken my meaning, what will happen to *our* hearts?”

“Why trouble about that, comrade?” asked Ezekiel, laughing. “Hast thou not all thou canst need for a jolly life on earth, and is not that enough? That is just the comfort of having these cold hearts, that such thoughts cannot terrify us.”

“True; yet we think such thoughts, and though I may no longer feel any dread now, yet I remember how I felt when I was still an innocent boy.”

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“Well, I don’t suppose our lot will be of the best,” said Ezekiel. “I asked a schoolmaster once, and he told me that after death all hearts were weighed, to see how heavily they were laden with sins. The lightest rise up, but the heavy ones sink down, and methinks our stones will be of tolerable weight.”

“Yes, truly,” replied Peter; “and even now it often makes me uneasy to feel my heart so careless and indifferent when I think of such matters.”

So they talked; but on the following night Peter heard the well-known voice whisper in his ear, five or six times: “Peter, get thee a warmer heart.”

Still he felt no remorse at the thought of having killed Lisbeth; but when he replied, in answer to the servants’ inquiries, that his wife was away on a journey, he thought within himself: “What may that journey be?”

He went on thus for six days, always hearing the voice by night, and by day always thinking of the wood-spirit and his terrible threat; but on the seventh morning he sprang from his bed, crying, "So be it, then; I will try whether I can get me a warmer heart, for this unfeeling stone in my breast makes life weary and desolate to me." He hastily put on his Sunday clothes, mounted his horse, and rode to the "Pine-thicket."

On reaching the spot where the trees begin to stand closer together, he dismounted, made fast his horse, and began, with a rapid step, to ascend the hill. When he reached the top, and stood beneath the great pine, he raised his voice and repeated:—

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"O Treasure-Keeper in the forest green,
Thine age is many hundred years—this land
Is all thine own, wherever pine-trees stand;
By Sunday-children only art thou seen."

Then the little Glass-man came forth, looking, not genial and friendly as before, but sad and gloomy; he wore a coat all of black glass, and a long mourning-band fluttered from his hat. Peter knew full well for whom he was mourning.

"What wilt thou of me, Peter Munk?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"I have yet one wish left, Master Treasure-keeper," said Peter, with downcast eyes.

"Can hearts of stone still wish?" asked the other. "Thou hast all that thy wicked mind can require, and it can hardly be that I may fulfil any wish of thine."

"Yet you promised me three wishes, and I still have one left."

"But I can deny it, if it is a foolish one," said the wood-spirit. "However, let be; I will hear what it is."

"Then take away this dead stone, and give me back my living heart," said Peter.

"Did I make the bargain with thee?" asked the little Glass-man. "Am I Dutch Michael, who gives riches and cold hearts? Yonder, with him, must thou go seek for thy heart."

"Alas! he will never give it me back," replied Peter sorrowfully.

"I pity thee, wicked though thou art," said the little man after some thought. "And since thy wish was not a foolish one, I cannot, at least, deny thee my help. Listen, then. Thou canst never get back thy heart by force, yet by cunning thou mayst, and without much difficulty either, perhaps; for Michael is still only foolish Michael, after all, though he thinks himself very clever. Therefore go straight to him, and do as I bid thee." And now he gave Peter full instructions, and handed him a little cross of pure glass. "He cannot endanger thy life," he concluded, "and he will let thee go free directly thou shalt hold this before him, if thou dost only pray the while. Then, if thou hast got thy desire, come back to me here."

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Peter Munk took the cross, made sure that all the little man's words were thoroughly fixed in his mind, and went his way to Dutch Michael's dwelling-place. He called his name three times, and the giant stood before him directly.

"Thou hast killed thy wife," said he, with a dreadful laugh. "Well, I should have done as much; she was giving all thy wealth away to beggars. But thou wilt have to leave the country for a while, for there will be a stir made when she is not to be found; and thou wilt need money for the journey, and art come to fetch it?"

"Thou hast guessed rightly," answered Peter; "only it must be a large sum this time, for it is a long way to America."

Michael went first, and brought him down to his house; there he opened a chest full of gold, and took out roll after roll of it. While he was counting it out on the table, Peter began:—

"Thou art a cunning trickster, Michael, to have taken me in with that tale of my having a stone in my breast, and of thy having got my heart!"

"And is it not the truth?" asked Michael in surprise; "dost thou feel thy heart, then? Is it not like ice? Dost thou know fear, or sorrow, or remorse?"

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—"Thou hast stopped the beating of my heart, perhaps, but I have it just as usual in my breast. And Ezekiel too; he told me that thou hadst taken us both in. Thou art not the fellow to be able to tear a man's heart out of his breast like that, unnoticed and without danger. It would take a sorcerer to do that."

"I swear to thee," cried Michael angrily, "that thou, and Ezekiel, and all the rich folk who have made a bargain with me, have just such cold hearts as I showed thee, and your real hearts are here in my closet."

"Dear, dear! how the lies do slip from thy tongue, to be sure!" laughed Peter. "Go and tell that tale elsewhere. Dost think I have not seen dozens of such conjuring tricks on my travels? Those hearts in thy chamber there are sham ones, made of wax. Thou art a rich fellow, I allow; but thou art no sorcerer."

Then the giant grew enraged, and threw open the chamber door.

"Come in and read all these labels—that one yonder, see, is Peter Munk's heart. Dost thou mark how it quivers? Can *that*, too, be done with wax?"

"And yet it is of wax," answered Peter. "A real heart does not throb like that, and besides, I have mine still in my breast. Nay, thou art no sorcerer!"

"But I will prove it to thee," cried the other, more angrily still; "thou shalt feel for thyself that it is thine own heart."

He lifted it from the jar, tore open Peter's jerkin, pulled the stone from his breast, and held it before him. Then taking the real heart, he breathed upon it, and put it carefully into its place—and immediately Peter felt how it beat, and could rejoice that he had it once more. [Pg 323]



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He lifted it from the jar, tore open Peter's jerkin, pulled the stone from his breast, and held it before him.

"How dost thou feel now?" asked Michael, smiling.

"In truth, thou wert right," answered Peter, beginning carefully to draw the cross from his pocket. "I would never have believed that any one could do such a thing."

—"No, indeed! And so thou seest that I am a sorcerer after all. But come now, I will put the stone back again."

"Gently, Master Michael," cried Peter, stepping back and holding out the cross towards him. "Mice are caught with lard, and this time 'tis thou art the dupe." And he straightway took to repeating all the prayers he could think of.

Then Michael began to grow smaller and smaller, and dropped to the ground, where he writhed to and fro like a worm, moaning and groaning. And all the hearts round about began to quiver and to throb, so that it sounded like a watchmaker's workshop. But Peter was filled with dread, and an awe-struck feeling crept over him; he ran as fast as he could from the room and from the house, and, urged by fear, climbed rapidly up the face of the cliff, for he could hear that Michael had risen again, and was stamping and raging after him, sending out terrible curses the while. As soon as he reached the top of the cliff, he hurried towards the "Pine-thicket." As he went, a fearful storm arose, and the bolts of lightning fell to right and left of him, shattering the trees; but he held on his way, and came in safety to the domain of the little Glass-man.

His heart was beating joyfully, and that merely *because* it beat. But now he looked back with horror upon his past life—it seemed to him as terrible as the thunderstorm, that had laid bare the noble woods behind him. He thought of Mistress Lisbeth, his good and lovely wife, whom he had murdered out of avarice, and he appeared to himself as the very scum and offscouring of mankind. He was weeping bitterly when he reached the little Glass-man's mountain-top. [Pg 325]

The Treasure-keeper was sitting under the fir-tree smoking a little pipe, yet he looked more cheerful than before.

"Why art thou weeping, Coal-Peter?" he asked. "Hast thou not got thy heart back again? Is the cold one still in thy breast?"

"Alas, sir!" sighed Peter, "while I yet carried the cold heart within me, I never wept—mine eyes were as dry as the fields in August; but now my own, old heart is like to break, because of what I have done. I have driven out my debtors into want and misery—I have set my dogs upon the sick and the poor—and you know yourself how my whip fell upon *her* fair forehead!"

"Thou hast been a great sinner, Peter," said the little man. "Riches and idleness corrupted thee, till thy heart turned to stone, and could no longer be touched by joy or sorrow, pity or remorse. But repentance makes amends, and if I could only be sure that thou dost truly grieve over thy past life, I might very likely still be able to do something for thee."

"I want nothing more," answered Peter, and his head sank sorrowfully upon his breast. "It is all over with me; I can never be happy again as long as I live. What shall I do all alone in the world? My mother will never forgive me the great wrong I have done her, and perhaps, indeed, I have already brought her to her grave, monster that I am! And Lisbeth, my wife! Do thou rather strike me dead, too, Master Treasure-keeper, and let my wretched life end at once."

"So be it," answered the little man; "if thou wilt not have it otherwise, it shall be done. I have my axe here at hand." He took his pipe quietly from his mouth, knocked the ashes from it, and put it by. Then he stood slowly up, and went behind the pine-trees. But Peter flung himself down weeping upon the grass, and awaited the death-stroke patiently, for his life was worth nothing more to him.

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After a while he heard light footsteps behind him, and thought: "Now he is coming."

"Look up once more, Peter Munk," called the little man.

He wiped the tears from his face, and turned round, and see! there were his mother and Lisbeth, his wife, looking at him with kind and loving eyes. Peter sprang to his feet, bewildered with joy.

"Art thou not dead, then, Lisbeth?" he gasped. "And thou art here too, mother, and hast forgiven me?"

"They will both forgive thee," said the little Glass-man, "because thou dost truly repent—and all shall be forgotten. Go home now to thy father's hut, and be a charcoal-burner as before; if thou art kind and honest, thou wilt honour thy calling, and thy neighbours will love and respect thee more than if thou hadst ten coffers full of gold."

So spoke the little Glass-man, and bade them farewell; and with thanks and praise upon their lips, the three went home together.

The rich Peter's fine house was no longer standing; the lightning had struck it and burnt it to the ground, with all its treasures; but the hut that had been his father's was not far off. Thither they turned their steps, and even this heavy loss did not trouble them much. But what was their amazement when they reached the hut, and found in its stead a comfortable peasant's house! Everything in it was simple, but good and clean.

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"Our kind little Glass-man has done this!" cried Peter.

"How beautiful!" said Mistress Lisbeth; "and I feel much more at home here than in that large house with all those servants."

From this time forth Peter Munk became a worthy and industrious man. He was content with what he had, and followed his calling cheerfully, and so it came about that he gathered some wealth together by his own efforts, and was respected and beloved throughout the forest. He no longer found fault with his wife, he honoured his mother, and gave to the needy who came to his door. When, after a year and a day, Mistress Lisbeth became the mother of a fine little boy, Peter went once more to the "Pine-thicket," and repeated his charm. But no little Glass-man appeared.

"Master Treasure-keeper," cried Peter, "do but hear me! I have only come to beg you to be my little son's godfather. I want nothing else."

There was no answer, only a puff of wind stirred the pine-trees above, and cast one or two fir-cones down upon the grass.

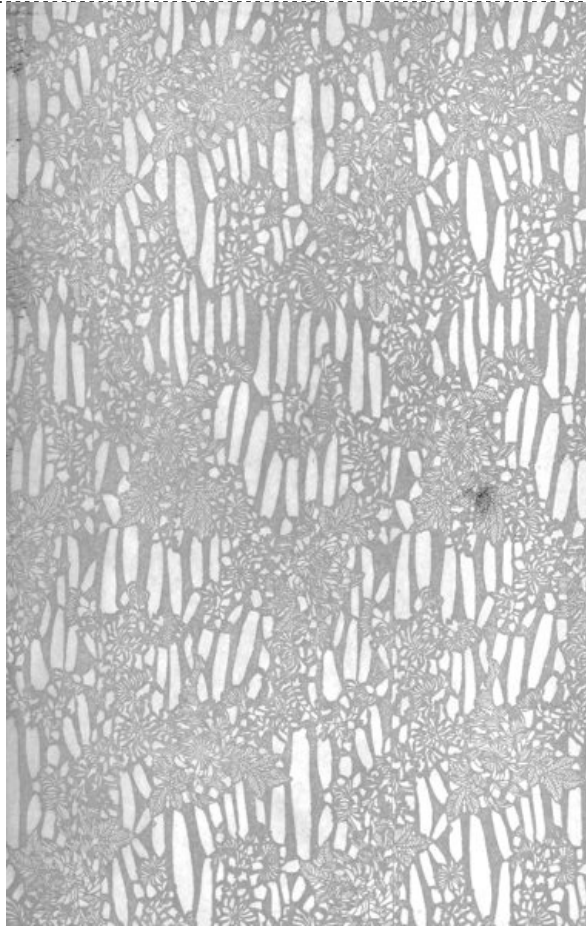
"Well," cried Peter again, "I will take these with me as a remembrance, since thou wilt not show thyself." And he put the fir-cones in his pocket and went home; but when he took off his Sunday jerkin, and his mother turned the pockets out before putting it away in the chest, there fell from them four great rolls of money, which proved to be good, new thalers of the realm, and there was not a single false one among them. And this was baby Peter's christening-gift from the little man in the pine-forest.

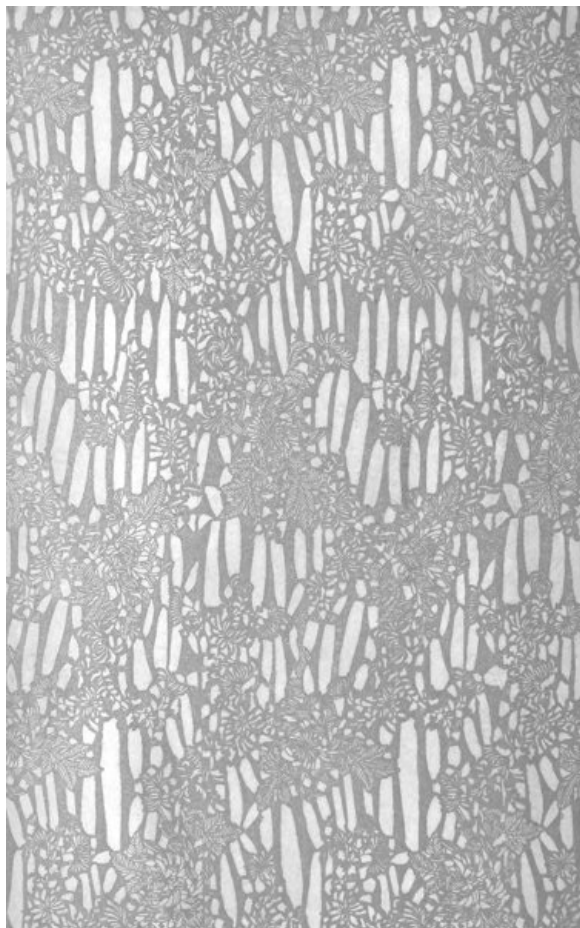
[Pg 328]

So they lived on, quiet and contented; and many a time, when Peter Munk's hair was already turning white, he would be heard to say: "It is better, after all, to be happy with little, than to have money and goods, and a cold heart."

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] No Rhine legends have been introduced, as they were considered to be already so widely known.
- [2] The *hora* is a Roumanian dance, the dancers forming into circles or rounds.
- [3] Little sheep.
- [4] *Vijelia* means "the storm-wind."
- [5] The hurricane.
- [6] The bridal veil of Roumanian girls is composed of a shower of loose golden threads.
- [7] It was believed in Germany that children born on a Sunday were more likely than others to see fairies and supernatural beings.
- [8] Most of the supernatural apparitions in this part of the Hartz district are called in the legends "Venetians."





Transcriber's Note:

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible. Some minor corrections of spelling and punctuation have been made.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LEGENDS FROM RIVER & MOUNTAIN ***

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