

THE MAGIC RING AND OTHER STORIES

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MAGIC RING AND
OTHER STORIES ***

Produced by Al Haines.

[image]

ILONKA LEFT WITH THE SWINEHERD

THE MAGIC RING
AND OTHER STORIES
FROM THE YELLOW AND CRIMSON FAIRY BOOKS

EDITED BY
ANDREW LANG

WITH A COLOURED FRONTISPIECE AND
NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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THE MAGIC RING

Once upon a time there lived an old couple who had one son called Martin. Now when the old man's time had come, he stretched himself out on his bed and died. Though all his life long he had toiled and moiled, he only left his widow and son two hundred florins. The old woman determined to put by the money for a rainy day; but alas! the rainy day was close at hand, for their meal was all consumed, and who is prepared to face starvation with two hundred florins at their disposal? So the old woman counted out a hundred of her florins, and giving them to Martin told him to go into the town and lay in a store of meal for a year.

So Martin started off for the town. When he reached the meat-market he found the whole place in turmoil, and a great noise of angry voices and barking of dogs. Mixing in the crowd, he noticed a stag-hound which the butchers had caught and tied to a post, and which was being flogged in a merciless manner. Overcome with pity, Martin spoke to the butchers, saying:

'Friends, why are you beating the poor dog so cruelly?'

'We have every right to beat him,' they replied; 'he has just devoured a newly-killed pig.'

'Leave off beating him,' said Martin, 'and sell him to me instead.'

'If you choose to buy him,' answered the butchers derisively; 'but for such a treasure we won't take a penny less than a hundred florins.'

'A hundred!' exclaimed Martin. 'Well, so be it, if you will not take less'; and, taking the money out of his pocket, he handed it over in exchange for the dog, whose name was Schurka.

When Martin got home, his mother met him with the question:

'Well, what have you bought?

'Schurka, the dog,' replied Martin, pointing to his new possession. Whereupon his mother became very angry, and abused him roundly. He ought to be ashamed of himself, when there was scarcely a handful of meal in the house, to have spent the money on a useless brute like that. On the following day she sent him back to the town, saying, 'Here, take our last hundred florins, and buy provisions with them. I have just emptied the last grains of meal out of the chest, and baked a bannock; but it won't last over to-morrow.'

Just as Martin was entering the town he met a rough-looking peasant who was dragging a cat after him by a string which was fastened round the poor beast's neck.

'Stop,' cried Martin; 'where are you dragging that poor cat?'

'I mean to drown him,' was the answer.

'What harm has the poor beast done?'

'It has just killed a goose,' replied the peasant.

'Don't drown him, sell him to me instead,' begged Martin.

'Not for a hundred florins,' was the answer.

'Surely for a hundred florins you'll sell it?'

'See! here is the money'; and, so saying, he handed him the hundred florins, which the peasant pocketed, and Martin took possession of the cat, which was called Waska.

When he reached his home his mother greeted him with the question:

'Well, what have you brought back?'

'I have brought this cat, Waska,' answered Martin.

'And what besides?'

'I had no money over to buy anything else with,' replied Martin.

'You useless ne'er-do-weel!' exclaimed his mother in a great passion. 'Leave the house at once, and go and beg your bread among strangers'; and as Martin did not dare contradict her, he called Schurka and Waska and started off with them to the nearest village in search of work. On the way he met a rich peasant who asked him where he was going.

'I want to get work as a day labourer,' he answered.

'Come along with me, then. But I must tell you I engage my labourers without wages. If you serve me faithfully for a year, I promise you it shall be for

your advantage.’

So Martin consented, and for a year he worked diligently, and served his master faithfully, not sparing himself in any way. When the day of reckoning had come the peasant led him into a barn, and pointing to two full sacks, said: ‘Take whichever of these you choose.’

Martin examined the contents of the sacks, and seeing that one was full of silver and the other of sand, he said to himself:

‘There must be some trick about this; I had better take the sand.’ And throwing the sack over his shoulders he started out into the world, in search of fresh work. On and on he walked, and at last he reached a great gloomy wood. In the middle of the wood he came upon a meadow, where a fire was burning, and in the midst of the fire, surrounded by flames, was a lovely damsel, more beautiful than anything that Martin had ever seen, and when she saw him she called to him:

‘Martin, if you would win happiness, save my life. Extinguish the flames with the sand that you earned in payment of your faithful service.’

‘Truly,’ thought Martin to himself, ‘it would be more sensible to save a fellow-being’s life with this sand than to drag it about on one’s back, seeing what a weight it is.’ And forthwith he lowered the sack from his shoulders and emptied its contents on the flames, and instantly the fire was extinguished; but at the same moment lo! and behold the lovely damsel turned into a Serpent, and, darting upon him, coiled itself round his neck, and whispered lovingly in his ear:

‘Do not be afraid of me, Martin; I love you, and will go with you through the world. But first you must follow me boldly into my Father’s Kingdom, underneath the earth; and when we get there, remember this—he will offer you gold and silver, and dazzling gems, but do not touch them. Ask him, instead, for the ring which he wears on his little finger, for in that ring lies a magic power; you have only to throw it from one hand to the other, and at once twelve young men will appear, who will do your bidding, no matter how difficult, in a single night.’

[image]

Martin extinguishes the flames.

So they started on their way, and after much wandering they reached a spot where a great rock rose straight up in the middle of the road. Instantly the Serpent uncoiled itself from his neck, and, as it touched the damp earth, it resumed the shape of the lovely damsel. Pointing to the rock, she showed him an opening just big enough for a man to wriggle through. Passing into it, they

entered a long underground passage, which led out on to a wide field, above which spread a blue sky. In the middle of the field stood a magnificent castle, built out of porphyry, with a roof of gold and with glittering battlements. And his beautiful guide told him that this was the palace in which her father lived and reigned over his kingdom in the Underworld.

Together they entered the palace, and were received by the King with great kindness. Turning to his daughter, he said:

'My child, I had almost given up the hope of ever seeing you again. Where have you been all these years?'

'My father,' she replied, 'I owe my life to this youth, who saved me from a terrible death.'

Upon which the King turned to Martin with a gracious smile, saying: 'I will reward your courage by granting you whatever your heart desires. Take as much gold, silver, and precious stones as you choose.'

'I thank you, mighty King, for your gracious offer,' answered Martin, 'but I do not covet either gold, silver, or precious stones; yet if you will grant me a favour, give me, I beg, the ring from off the little finger of your royal hand. Every time my eye falls on it I shall think of your gracious Majesty, and when I marry I shall present it to my bride.'

So the King took the ring from his finger and gave it to Martin, saying: 'Take it, good youth; but with it I make one condition—you are never to confide to anyone that this is a magic ring. If you do, you will straightway bring misfortune on yourself.'

Martin took the ring, and, having thanked the King, he set out on the same road by which he had come down into the Under-world. When he had regained the upper air he started for his old home, and having found his mother still living in the old house where he had left her, they settled down together very happily. So uneventful was their life that it almost seemed as if it would go on in this way always, without let or hindrance. But one day it suddenly came into his mind that he would like to get married, and, moreover, that he would choose a very grand wife—a King's daughter, in short. But as he did not trust himself as a wooer, he determined to send his old mother on the mission.

'You must go to the King,' he said to her, 'and demand the hand of his lovely daughter in marriage for me.'

'What are you thinking of, my son?' answered the old woman, aghast at the idea. 'Why cannot you marry someone in your own rank? That would be far more fitting than to send a poor old woman like me a-wooing to the King's Court for the hand of a Princess. Why, it is as much as our heads are worth. Neither my life nor yours would be worth anything if I went on such a fool's errand.'

'Never fear, little mother,' answered Martin. 'Trust me; all will be well. But

see that you do not come back without an answer of some kind.'

And so, obedient to her son's behest, the old woman hobbled off to the palace, and, without being hindered, reached the courtyard, and began to mount the flight of steps leading to the royal presence chamber. At the head of the landing rows of courtiers were collected in magnificent attire, who stared at the queer old figure, and called to her, and explained to her, with every kind of sign, that it was strictly forbidden to mount those steps. But their stern words and forbidding gestures made no impression whatever on the old woman, and, she resolutely continued to climb the stairs, bent on carrying out her son's orders. Upon this some of the courtiers seized her by the arms, and held her back by sheer force, at which she set up such a yell that the King himself heard it, and stepped out on to the balcony to see what was the matter. When he beheld the old woman flinging her arms wildly about, and heard her scream that she would not leave the place till she had laid her case before the King, he ordered that she should be brought into his presence. And forthwith she was conducted into the golden presence chamber, where, leaning back amongst cushions of royal purple, the King sat, surrounded by his counsellors and courtiers. Courtesying low, the old woman stood silent before him. 'Well, my good old dame, what can I do for you?' asked the King.

'I have come,' replied Martin's mother—'and your Majesty must not be angry with me—I have come a-wooing.'

'Is the woman out of her mind?' said the King, with an angry frown.

But Martin's mother answered boldly: 'If the King will only listen patiently to me, and give me a straightforward answer, he will see that I am not out of my mind. You, O King, have a lovely daughter to give in marriage. I have a son—a wooer—as clever a youth and as good a son-in-law as you will find in your whole kingdom. There is nothing that he cannot do. Now tell me, O King, plump and plain, will you give your daughter to my son as wife?' The King listened to the end of the old woman's strange request, but every moment his face grew blacker, and his features sterner; till all at once he thought to himself, 'Is it worth while that I, the King, should be angry with this poor old fool?' And all the courtiers and counsellors were amazed when they saw the hard lines round his mouth and the frown on his brow grow smooth, and heard the mild but mocking tones in which he answered the old woman, saying:

'If your son is as wonderfully clever as you say, and if there is nothing in the world that he cannot do, let him build a magnificent castle, just opposite my palace windows, in four and twenty hours. The palace must be joined together by a bridge of pure crystal. On each side of the bridge there must be growing trees, having golden and silver apples, and with birds of paradise among the branches. At the right of the bridge there must be a church, with five golden cupolas; in this

church your son shall be wedded to my daughter, and we will keep the wedding festivities in the new castle. But if he fails to execute this my royal command, then, as a just but mild monarch, I shall give orders that you and he are taken, and first dipped in tar and then in feathers, and you shall be executed in the market-place for the entertainment of my courtiers.'

And a smile played round the King's lips as he finished speaking, and his courtiers and counsellors shook with laughter when they thought of the old woman's folly, and praised the King's wise device, and said to each other, 'What a joke it will be when we see the pair of them tarred and feathered! The son is just as able to grow a beard on the palm of his hand as to execute such a task in twenty-four hours.'

Now the poor old woman was mortally afraid, and in a trembling voice she asked:

'Is that really your royal will, O King? Must I take this order to my poor son?'

'Yes, old dame; such is my command. If your son carries out my order, he shall be rewarded with my daughter; but if he fails, away to the tar-barrel and the stake with you both!'

On her way home the poor old woman shed bitter tears, and when she saw Martin she told him what the King had said, and sobbed out:

'Didn't I tell you, my son, that you should marry someone of your own rank? It would have been better for us this day if you had. As I told you, my going to Court has been as much as our lives are worth, and now we will both be tarred and feathered, and burnt in the public market-place. It is terrible!' and she moaned and cried.

'Never fear, little mother,' answered Martin; 'trust me, and you will see all will be well. You may go to sleep with a quiet mind.'

And, stepping to the front of the hut, Martin threw his ring from the palm of one hand into the other, upon which twelve youths instantly appeared, and demanded what he wanted them to do. Then he told them the King's commands, and they answered that by the next morning all should be accomplished exactly as the King had ordered.

Next morning when the King awoke, and looked out of his window, to his amazement he beheld a magnificent castle, just opposite his own palace, and joined to it a bridge of pure crystal.

At each side of the bridge trees were growing, from whose branches hung golden and silver apples, among which birds of paradise perched. At the right, gleaming in the sun, were the five golden cupolas of a splendid church, whose bells rang out, as if they would summon people from all corners of the earth to come and behold the wonder. Now, though the King would much rather have

seen his future son-in-law tarred, feathered, and burnt at the stake, he remembered his royal oath, and had to make the best of a bad business. So he took heart of grace, and made Martin a Duke, and gave his daughter a rich dowry, and prepared the grandest wedding-feast that had ever been seen, so that to this day the old people in the country still talk of it.

After the wedding Martin and his royal bride went to dwell in the magnificent new palace, and here Martin lived in the greatest comfort and luxury, such luxury as he had never imagined. But though he was as happy as the day was long, and as merry as a grig, the King's daughter fretted all day, thinking of the indignity that had been done her in making her marry Martin, the poor widow's son, instead of a rich young Prince from a foreign country. So unhappy was she that she spent all her time wondering how she should get rid of her undesirable husband. And first she determined to learn the secret of his power, and, with flattering, caressing words, she tried to coax him to tell her how he was so clever that there was nothing in the world that he could not do. At first he would tell her nothing; but once, when he was in a yielding mood, she approached him with a winning smile on her lovely face, and, speaking flattering words to him, she gave him a potion to drink, with a sweet, strong taste. And when he had drunk it Martin's lips were unsealed, and he told her that all his power lay in the magic ring that he wore on his finger, and he described to her how to use it, and, still speaking, he fell into a deep sleep. And when she saw that the potion had worked, and that he was sound asleep, the Princess took the magic ring from his finger, and, going into the courtyard, she threw it from the palm of one hand into the other. On the instant the twelve youths appeared, and asked her what she commanded them to do. Then she told them that by the next morning they were to do away with the castle, and the bridge, and the church, and put in their stead the humble hut in which Martin used to live with his mother, and that while he slept her husband was to be carried to his old lowly room; and that they were to bear her away to the utmost ends of the earth, where an old King lived who would make her welcome in his palace, and surround her with the state that befitted a royal Princess.

[image]

The Princess summons the Twelve Young Men

'You shall be obeyed,' answered the twelve youths at the same moment. And lo and behold! the following morning, when the King awoke and looked out of his window, he beheld to his amazement that the palace, bridge, church, and

trees had all vanished, and there was nothing in their place but a bare, miserable-looking hut.

Immediately the King sent for his son-in-law, and commanded him to explain what had happened. But Martin looked at his royal father-in-law, and answered never a word. Then the King was very angry, and, calling a council together, he charged Martin with having been guilty of witchcraft, and of having deceived the King, and having made away with the Princess; and he was condemned to imprisonment in a high stone tower, with neither meat nor drink, till he should die of starvation.

[image]

Schurka upsets the baker.

Then, in the hour of his dire necessity, his old friends Schurka (the dog) and Waska (the cat) remembered how Martin had once saved them from a cruel death; and they took counsel together as to how they should help him. And Schurka growled, and was of opinion that he would like to tear everyone in pieces; but Waska purred meditatively, and scratched the back of her ear with a velvet paw, and remained lost in thought. At the end of a few minutes she had made up her mind, and, turning to Schurka, said: 'Let us go together into the town, and the moment we meet a baker you must make a rush between his legs and upset the tray from off his head; I will lay hold of the rolls, and will carry them off to our master.' No sooner said than done. Together the two faithful creatures trotted off into the town, and very soon they met a baker bearing a tray on his head, and looking round on all sides, while he cried:

'Fresh rolls, sweet cake,
 Fancy bread of every kind.
 Come and buy, come and take.
 Sure you'll find it to your mind.'

At that moment Schurka made a rush between his legs—the baker stumbled, the tray was upset, the rolls fell to the ground, and, while the man angrily pursued Schurka, Waska managed to drag the rolls out of sight behind a bush. And when a moment later Schurka joined her, they set off at full tilt to the stone tower where Martin was a prisoner, taking the rolls with them.

Waska, being very agile, climbed up by the outside to the grated window, and called in an anxious voice:

'Are you alive, master?'

'Scarcely alive—almost starved to death,' answered Martin in a weak voice. 'I little thought it would come to this, that I should die of hunger.'

'Never fear, dear master. Schurka and I will look after you,' said Waska. And in another moment she had climbed down and brought him back a roll, and then another, and another, till she had brought him the whole tray-load. Upon which she said: 'Dear master, Schurka and I are going off to a distant kingdom at the utmost ends of the earth to fetch you back your magic ring. You must be careful that the rolls last till our return.'

And Waska took leave of her beloved master, and set off with Schurka on their journey. On and on they travelled, looking always to right and left for traces of the Princess, following up every track, making inquiries of every cat and dog they met, listening to the talk of every wayfarer they passed; and at last they heard that the kingdom at the utmost ends of the earth where the twelve youths had borne the Princess was not very far off. And at last one day they reached that distant kingdom, and, going at once to the palace, they began to make friends with all the dogs and cats in the place, and to question them about the Princess and the magic ring; but no one could tell them much about either. Now one day it chanced that Waska had gone down to the palace cellar to hunt for mice and rats, and seeing an especially fat, well-fed mouse, she pounced upon it, buried her claws in its soft fur, and was just going to gobble it up, when she was stopped by the pleading tones of the little creature, saying, 'If you will only spare my life I may be of great service to you. I will do everything in my power for you; for I am the King of the Mice, and if I perish the whole race will die out.'

'So be it,' said Waska. 'I will spare your life; but in return you must do something for me. In this castle there lives a Princess, the wicked wife of my dear master. She has stolen away his magic ring. You must get it away from her at whatever cost; do you hear? Till you have done this I won't take my claws out of your fur.'

'Good!' replied the mouse; 'I will do what you ask.' And, so saying, he summoned all the mice in his kingdom together. A countless number of mice, small and big, brown and grey, assembled, and formed a circle round their king, who was a prisoner under Waska's claws. Turning to them he said: 'Dear and faithful subjects, whoever among you will steal the magic ring from the strange Princess will release me from a cruel death; and I shall honour him above all the other mice in the kingdom.'

Instantly a tiny mouse stepped forward and said: 'I often creep about the Princess's bedroom at night, and I have noticed that she has a ring which she treasures as the apple of her eye. All day she wears it on her finger, and at night she keeps it in her mouth. I will undertake, sire, to steal away the ring for you.'

[image]

The Mouse steals the Ring from the Princess

And the tiny mouse tripped away into the bedroom of the Princess, and waited for night-fall; then, when the Princess had fallen asleep, it crept up on to her bed, and gnawed a hole in the pillow, through which it dragged one by one little down feathers, and threw them under the Princess's nose. And the fluff flew into the Princess's nose, and into her mouth, and starting up she sneezed and coughed, and the ring fell out of her mouth on to the coverlet. In a flash the tiny mouse had seized it and brought it to Waska as a ransom for the King of the Mice. Thereupon Waska and Schurka started off, and travelled night and day till they reached the stone tower where Martin was imprisoned; and the cat climbed up the window, and called out to him:

'Martin, dear master, are you still alive?'

'Ah! Waska, my faithful little cat, is that you?' replied a weak voice. 'I am dying of hunger. For three days I have not tasted food.'

'Be of good heart, dear master,' replied Waska; 'from this day forth you will know nothing but happiness and prosperity. If this were a moment to trouble you with riddles, I would make you guess what Schurka and I have brought you back. Only think, we have got you your ring!'

At these words Martin's joy knew no bounds, and he stroked her fondly, and she rubbed up against him and purred happily, while below Schurka bounded in the air, and barked joyfully. Then Martin took the ring, and threw it from one hand into the other, and instantly the twelve youths appeared and asked what they were to do.

'Fetch me first something to eat and drink, as quickly as possible; and after that bring musicians hither, and let us have music all day long.'

Now when the people in the town and palace heard music coming from the tower they were filled with amazement, and came to the King with the news that witchcraft must be going on in Martin's Tower, for, instead of dying of starvation, he was seemingly making merry to the sound of music, and to the clatter of plates, and glass, and knives and forks; and the music was so enchantingly sweet that all the passers-by stood still to listen to it. On this the King sent at once a messenger to the Starvation Tower, and he was so astonished with what he saw that he remained rooted to the spot. Then the King sent his chief counsellors, and they too were transfixed with wonder. At last the King came himself, and he likewise was spellbound by the beauty of the music.

Then Martin summoned the twelve youths, spoke to them, saying, 'Build up my castle again, and join it to the King's palace with a crystal bridge; do not forget the trees with the golden and silver apples, and with the birds of paradise in the branches; and put back the church with the five cupolas, and let the bells ring out, summoning the people from the four corners of the kingdom. And one thing more: bring back my faithless wife, and lead her into the women's chamber.'

And it was all done as he commanded, and, leaving the Starvation Tower, he took the King, his father-in-law, by the arm, and led him into the new palace, where the Princess sat in fear and trembling, awaiting her death. And Martin spoke to the King, saying, 'King and royal father, I have suffered much at the hands of your daughter. What punishment shall be dealt to her?'

Then the mild King answered: 'Beloved Prince and son-in-law, if you love me, let your anger be turned to grace—forgive my daughter, and restore her to your heart and favour.'

And Martin's heart was softened and he forgave his wife, and they lived happily together ever after. And his old mother came and lived with him, and he never parted with Schurka and Waska; and I need hardly tell you that he never again let the ring out of his possession.

THE WHITE DUCK

Once upon a time a great and powerful King married a lovely Princess. No couple were ever so happy; but before their honeymoon was over they were forced to part, for the King had to go on a warlike expedition to a far country, and leave his young wife alone at home. Bitter were the tears she shed, while her husband sought in vain to soothe her with words of comfort and counsel, warning her, above all things, never to leave the castle, to hold no intercourse with strangers, to beware of evil counsellors, and especially to be on her guard against strange women. And the Queen promised faithfully to obey her royal lord and master in these four matters.

[image]

The witch persuades the Queen to bathe.

So when the King set out on his expedition she shut herself up with her ladies in her own apartments, and spent her time in spinning and weaving, and in thinking of her royal husband. Often she was very sad and lonely, and it happened that one day while she was seated at the window, letting salt tears drop on her work, an old woman, a kind, homely-looking old body, stepped up to the window, and, leaning upon her crutch, addressed the Queen in friendly, flattering tones, saying:

'Why are you sad and cast down, fair Queen? You should not mope all day in your rooms, but should come out into the green garden, and hear the birds sing with joy among the trees, and see the butterflies fluttering above the flowers, and hear the bees and insects hum, and watch the sunbeams chase the dew-drops through the rose-leaves and in the lily-cups. All the brightness outside would help to drive away your cares, O Queen.'

For long the Queen resisted her coaxing words, remembering the promise she had given the King, her husband; but at last she thought to herself: After all, what harm would it do if I were to go into the garden for a short time and enjoy myself among the trees and flowers, and the singing birds and fluttering butterflies and humming insects, and look at the dew-drops hiding from the sunbeams in the hearts of the roses and lilies, and wander about in the sunshine instead of remaining all day in this room? For she had no idea that the kind-looking old woman leaning on her crutch was in reality a wicked witch, who envied the Queen her good fortune, and was determined to ruin her. And so, in all ignorance, the Queen followed her out into the garden and listened to her smooth, flattering words. Now, in the middle of the garden there was a pond of water, clear as crystal, and the old woman said to the Queen:

'The day is so warm, and the sun's rays so scorching, that the water in the pond looks very cool and inviting. Would you not like to bathe in it, fair Queen?'

'No, I think not,' answered the Queen; but the next moment she regretted her words, and thought to herself: Why shouldn't I bathe in that cool, fresh water? No harm could come of it. And, so saying, she slipped off her robes and stepped into the water. But scarcely had her tender feet touched the cool ripples when she felt a great shove on her shoulders, and the wicked witch had pushed her into the deep water, exclaiming:

'Swim henceforth, White Duck!'

And the witch herself assumed the form of the Queen, and decked herself out in the royal robes, and sat among the Court ladies, awaiting the King's return. And suddenly the tramp of horses' hoofs was heard, and the barking of dogs, and the witch hastened forward to meet the royal carriages, and throwing her arms round the King's neck, kissed him. And in his great joy the King did not know that the woman he held in his arms was not his own dear wife, but a wicked

witch.

In the meantime, outside the palace walls, the poor White Duck swam up and down the pond; and near it laid three eggs, out of which there came one morning two little fluffy ducklings and a little ugly drake. And the White Duck brought the little creatures up, and they paddled after her in the pond, and caught gold-fish, and hopped upon the bank and waddled about, ruffling their feathers and saying 'Quack, quack' as they strutted about on the green banks of the pond. But their mother used to warn them not to stray too far, telling them that a wicked witch lived in the castle beyond the garden, adding, 'She has ruined me, and she will do her best to ruin you.' But the young ones did not listen to their mother, and playing about the garden one day, they strayed close up to the castle windows. The witch at once recognised them by their smell, and ground her teeth with anger; but she hid her feelings, and, pretending to be very kind, she called them to her and joked with them, and led them into a beautiful room, where she gave them food to eat, and showed them a soft cushion on which they might sleep. Then she left them and went down into the palace kitchens, where she told the servants to sharpen the knives, and to make a great fire ready, and hang a large kettleful of water over it.

In the meantime the two little ducklings had fallen asleep, and the little drake lay between them, covered up by their wings, to be kept warm under their feathers. But the little drake could not go to sleep, and as he lay there wide awake in the night he heard the witch come to the door and say:

'Little ones, are you asleep?'

And the little drake answered for the other two:

'We cannot sleep, we wake and weep.
Sharp is the knife, to take our life;
The fire is hot, now boils the pot,
And so we wake, and lie and quake.'

'They are not asleep yet,' muttered the witch to herself; and she walked up and down in the passage, and then came back to the door, and said:

'Little ones, are you asleep?'

And again the little drake answered for his sisters:

'We cannot sleep, we wake and weep,
Sharp is the knife, to take our life;
The fire is hot, now boils the pot,
And so we wake, and lie and quake.'

'Just the same answer,' muttered the witch; 'I think I'll go in and see.' So she opened the door gently, and seeing the two little ducklings sound asleep, she there and then killed them.

The next morning the White Duck wandered round the pond in a distracted manner, looking for her little ones; she called and she searched, but could find no trace of them. And in her heart she had a foreboding that evil had befallen them, and she fluttered up out of the water and flew to the palace. And there, laid out on the marble floor of the court, dead and stone cold, were her three children. The White Duck threw herself upon them, and, covering up their little bodies with her wings, she cried:

'Quack, quack—my little loves!
 Quack, quack—my turtle doves!
 I brought you up with grief and pain,
 And now before my eyes you're slain.
 I gave you always of the best;
 I kept you warm in my soft nest.
 I loved and watched you day and night—
 You were my joy, my one delight.'

The King heard the sad complaint of the White Duck, and called to the witch: 'Wife, what a wonder is this? Listen to that White Duck.'

But the witch answered, 'My dear husband, what do you mean? There is nothing wonderful in a duck's quacking. Here, servants! Chase that duck out of the courtyard.' But though the servants chased and chevied, they could not get rid of the duck; for she circled round and round, and always came back to the spot where her children lay, crying:

'Quack, quack—my little loves!
 Quack, quack—my turtle-doves!
 The wicked witch your lives did take—
 The wicked witch, the cunning snake.
 First she stole my King away,
 Then my children did she slay.
 Changed me, from a happy wife,
 To a duck for all my life.
 Would I were the Queen again;
 Would that you had ne'er been slain.'

And as the King heard her words he began to suspect that he had been deceived,

and he called out to the servants, 'Catch that duck, and bring it here.' But, though they ran to and fro, the duck always fled past them, and would not let herself be caught. So the King himself stepped down amongst them, and instantly the duck fluttered down into his hands. And as he stroked her wings she was changed into a beautiful woman, and he recognised his dear wife. And she told him that a bottle would be found in her nest in the garden, containing some drops from the spring of healing. And it was brought to her; and the ducklings and little drake were sprinkled with the water, and from the little dead bodies three lovely children arose. And the King and Queen were overjoyed when they saw the children, and they all lived happily together in the beautiful palace. But the wicked witch was taken by the King's command, and she came to no good end.

[image]

The King catches the White Duck.

LOVELY ILONKA

There was once a King's son who told his father that he wished to marry.

'No, no!' said the King; 'you must not be in such a hurry. Wait till you have done some great deed. My father did not let me marry till I had won the golden sword you see me wear.'

The Prince was much disappointed, but he never dreamed of disobeying his father, and he began to think with all his might what he could do. It was no use staying at home, so one day he wandered out into the world to try his luck, and as he walked along he came to a little hut in which he found an old woman crouching over the fire.

'Good evening, mother. I see you have lived long in this world; do you know anything about the three bulrushes?'

'Yes, indeed, I've lived long and been much about in the world, but I have never seen or heard anything of what you ask. Still, if you will wait till to-morrow I may be able to tell you something.'

Well, he waited till the morning, and quite early the old woman appeared and took out a little pipe and blew in it, and in a moment all the crows in the

world were flying about her. Not one was missing. Then she asked if they knew anything about the three bulrushes, but not one of them did.

The Prince went on his way, and a little further on he found another hut in which lived an old man. On being questioned the old man said he knew nothing, but begged the Prince to stay overnight, and the next morning the old man called all the ravens together, but they too had nothing to tell.

The Prince bade him farewell and set out. He wandered so far that he crossed seven kingdoms, and at last, one evening, he came to a little house in which was an old woman.

'Good evening, dear mother,' said he politely.

'Good evening to you, my dear son,' answered the old woman. 'It is lucky for you that you spoke to me or you would have met with a horrible death. But may I ask where are you going?'

'I am seeking the three bulrushes. Do you know anything about them?'

'I don't know anything myself, but wait till to-morrow. Perhaps I can tell you then.' So the next morning she blew on her pipe, and lo! and behold every magpie in the world flew up. That is to say, all the magpies except one who had broken a leg and a wing. The old woman sent after it at once, and when she questioned the magpies the crippled one was the only one who knew where the three bulrushes were.

Then the Prince started off with the lame magpie. They went on and on till they reached a great stone wall, many, many feet high.

'Now, Prince,' said the Magpie, 'the three bulrushes are behind that wall.'

[image]

THE FIRST BULRUSH MAIDEN FLIES AWAY

The Prince wasted no time. He set his horse at the wall and leaped over it. Then he looked about for the three bulrushes, pulled them up and set off with them on his way home. As he rode along one of the bulrushes happened to knock against something. It split open and, only think! out sprang a lovely girl, who said: 'My heart's love, you are mine and I am yours; do give me a glass of water.'

But how could the Prince give it her when there was no water at hand? So the lovely maiden flew away. He split the second bulrush as an experiment and just the same thing happened.

How careful he was of the third bulrush! He waited till he came to a well, and there he split it open, and out sprang a maiden seven times lovelier than either of the others, and she too said: 'My heart's love, I am yours and you are

mine; do give me a glass of water.'

This time the water was ready and the girl did not fly away, but she and the Prince promised to love each other always. Then they set out for home.

They soon reached the Prince's country, and as he wished to bring his promised bride back in a fine coach he went on to the town to fetch one. In the field where the well was, the King's swineherds and cowherds were feeding their droves, and the Prince left Ilonka (for that was her name) in their care.

Unluckily the chief swineherd had an ugly old daughter, and whilst the Prince was away he dressed her up in fine clothes, and threw Ilonka into the well.

The Prince returned before long, bringing with him his father and mother and a great train of courtiers to escort Ilonka home. But how they all stared when they saw the swineherd's ugly daughter! However, there was nothing for it but to take her home; and, two days later, the Prince married her, and his father gave up the crown to him.

But he had no peace! He knew very well he had been cheated, though he could not think how. Once he desired to have some water brought him from the well into which Ilonka had been thrown. The coachman went for it and, in the bucket he pulled up, a pretty little duck was swimming. He looked wonderingly at it, and all of a sudden it disappeared and he found a dirty-looking girl standing near him. The girl returned with him and managed to get a place as housemaid in the palace.

Of course she was very busy all day long, but whenever she had a little spare time she sat down to spin. Her distaff turned of itself and her spindle span by itself and the flax wound itself off; and however much she might use there was always plenty left.

When the Queen—or, rather, the swineherd's daughter—heard of this, she very much wished to have the distaff, but the girl flatly refused to give it to her. However, at last she consented on condition that she might sleep one night in the King's room. The Queen was very angry, and scolded her well; but as she longed to have the distaff she consented, though she gave the King a sleeping draught at supper.

Then the girl went to the King's room looking seven times lovelier than ever. She bent over the sleeper and said: 'My heart's love, I am yours and you are mine. Speak to me but once; I am your Ilonka.' But the King was so sound asleep he neither heard nor spoke, and Ilonka left the room, sadly thinking he was ashamed to own her.

Soon after the Queen again sent to say that she wanted to buy the spindle. The girl agreed to let her have it on the same conditions as before; but this time, also, the Queen took care to give the King a sleeping draught. And once more

Ilonka went to the King's room and spoke to him; whisper as sweetly as she might she could get no answer.

Now some of the King's servants had taken note of the matter, and warned their master not to eat and drink anything that the Queen offered him, as for two nights running she had given him a sleeping draught. The Queen had no idea that her doings had been discovered; and when, a few days later, she wanted the flax, and had to pay the same price for it, she felt no fears at all.

At supper that night the Queen offered the King all sorts of nice things to eat and drink, but he declared he was not hungry, and went early to bed.

The Queen repented bitterly her promise to the girl, but it was too late to recall it; for Ilonka had already entered the King's room, where he lay anxiously waiting for something, he knew not what. All of a sudden he saw a lovely maiden who bent over him and said: 'My dearest love, I am yours and you are mine. Speak to me, for I am your Ilonka.'

At these words the King's heart bounded within him. He sprang up and embraced and kissed her, and she told him all her adventures since the moment he had left her. And when he heard all that Ilonka had suffered, and how he had been deceived, he vowed he would be revenged; so he gave orders that the swineherd, his wife and daughter should all be hanged; and so they were.

The next day the King was married, with great rejoicings, to the fair Ilonka; and if they are not yet dead—why, they are still living.

CLEVER MARIA

There was once a merchant who lived close to the royal palace, and had three daughters. They were all pretty, but Maria, the youngest, was the prettiest of the three. One day the King sent for the merchant, who was a widower, to give him directions about a journey he wished the good man to take. The merchant would rather not have gone, as he did not like leaving his daughters at home, but he could not refuse to obey the King's commands, and with a heavy heart he returned home to say farewell to them. Before he left, he took three pots of basil, and gave one to each girl, saying, 'I am going a journey, but I leave these pots. You must let nobody into the house. When I come back, they will tell me what has happened.' 'Nothing will have happened,' said the girls.

The father went away, and the following day the King, accompanied by

[image]

CLEVER MARIA

two friends, paid a visit to the three girls, who were sitting at supper. When they saw who was there, Maria said, 'Let us go and get a bottle of wine from the cellar. I will carry the key, my eldest sister can take the light, while the other brings the bottle.' But the King replied, 'Oh, do not trouble; we are not thirsty.' 'Very well, we will not go,' answered the two elder girls; but Maria merely said, 'I shall go, anyhow.' She left the room, and went to the hall where she put out the light, and putting down the key and the bottle, ran to the house of a neighbour, and knocked at the door. 'Who is there so late?' asked the old woman, thrusting her head out of the window.

'Oh, let me in,' answered Maria. 'I have quarrelled with my eldest sister, and as I do not want to fight any more, I have come to beg you to allow me to sleep with you.'

So the old woman opened the door and Maria slept in her house. The King was very angry at her for playing truant, but when she returned home the next day, she found the plants of her sisters withered away, because they had disobeyed their father. Now the window in the room of the eldest overlooked the gardens of the King, and when she saw how fine and ripe the medlars were on the trees, she longed to eat some, and begged Maria to scramble down by a rope and pick her a few, and she would draw her up again. Maria, who was good-natured, swung herself into the garden by the rope, and got the medlars, and was just making the rope fast under her arms so as to be hauled up, when her sister cried: 'Oh, there are such delicious lemons a little farther on. You might bring me one or two.' Maria turned round to pluck them, and found herself face to face with the gardener, who caught hold of her, exclaiming, 'What are you doing here, you little thief?' 'Don't call me names,' she said, 'or you will get the worst of it,' giving him as she spoke such a violent push that he fell panting into the lemon bushes. Then she seized the cord and clambered up to the window.

The next day the second sister had a fancy for bananas and begged so hard, that, though Maria had declared she would never do such a thing again, at last she consented, and went down the rope into the King's garden. This time she met the King, who said to her, 'Ah, here you are again, cunning one! Now you shall pay for your misdeeds.'

And he began to cross-question her about what she had done. Maria denied nothing, and when she had finished, the King said again, 'Follow me to the house,

and there you shall pay the penalty.' As he spoke, he started for the house, looking back from time to time to make sure that Maria had not run away. All of a sudden, when he glanced round, he found she had vanished completely, without leaving a trace of where she had gone. Search was made all through the town, and there was not a hole or corner which was not ransacked, but there was no sign of her anywhere. This so enraged the King that he became quite ill, and for many months his life was despaired of.

Meanwhile the two elder sisters had married the two friends of the King, and were the mothers of little daughters. Now one day Maria stole secretly to the house where her elder sister lived, and snatching up the children put them into a beautiful basket she had with her, covered with flowers inside and out, so that no one would ever guess it held two babies. Then she dressed herself as a boy, and placing the basket on her head she walked slowly past the palace, crying as she went:

'Who will carry these flowers to the King, who lies sick of love?'

And the King in his bed heard what she said, and ordered one of his attendants to go out and buy the basket. It was brought to his bedside, and as he raised the lid cries were heard, and peeping in he saw two little children. He was furious at this new trick which he felt had been played on him by Maria, and was still looking at them, wondering how he should pay her out, when he was told that the merchant, Maria's father, had finished the business on which he had been sent and returned home. Then the King remembered how Maria had refused to receive his visit, and how she had stolen his fruit, and he determined to be revenged on her. So he sent a message by one of his pages that the merchant was to come to see him the next day, and bring with him a coat made of stone, or else he would be punished. Now the poor man had been very sad since he got home the evening before, for though his daughters had promised that nothing should happen while he was away, he had found the two elder ones married without asking his leave. And now there was this fresh misfortune, for how was he to make a coat of stone? He wrung his hands and declared that the King would be the ruin of him, when Maria suddenly entered. 'Do not grieve about the coat of stone, dear father; but take this bit of chalk, and go to the palace and say you have come to measure the King.' The old man did not see the use of this, but Maria had so often helped him before that he had confidence in her, so he put the chalk in his pocket and went to the palace.

'That is no good,' said the King when the merchant had told him what he had come for.

'Well, I can't make the coat you want,' replied he.

'Then if you would save your head, hand over to me your daughter Maria.' The merchant did not reply, but went sorrowfully back to his house, where

Maria sat waiting for him.

'Oh, my dear child, why was I born? The King says that, instead of the coat, I must deliver you up to him.'

'Do not be unhappy, dear father, but get a doll made, exactly like me, with a string attached to its head, which I can pull for "Yes" and "No."

So the old man went out at once to see about it.

The King remained patiently in his palace, feeling sure that this time Maria could not escape him; and he said to his pages, 'If a gentleman should come here with his daughter and ask to be allowed to speak with me, put the young lady in my room and see she does not leave it.'

When the door was shut on Maria, who had concealed the doll under her cloak, she hid herself under the couch, keeping fast hold of the string which was fastened to its head.

[image]

MARIA & THE KING

'Senhora Maria, I hope you are well,' said the King when he entered the room. The doll nodded. 'Now we will reckon up accounts,' continued he, and he began at the beginning, and ended up with the flower-basket, and at each fresh misdeed Maria pulled the string, so that the doll's head nodded assent. 'Whoso mocks at me merits death,' declared the King when he had ended, and drawing his sword, cut off the doll's head. It fell towards him, and as he felt the touch of a kiss, he exclaimed, 'Ah, Maria, Maria, so sweet in death, so hard to me in life! The man who could kill you deserves to die!' And he was about to turn his sword on himself, when the true Maria sprang out from under the bed, and flung herself into his arms. And the next day they were married and lived happily for many years.

THE LANGUAGE OF BEASTS

Once upon a time a man had a shepherd who served him many years faithfully and honestly. One day, whilst herding his flock, this shepherd heard a hissing sound, coming out of a forest near by, which he could not account for. So he

went into the wood in the direction of the noise to try to discover the cause. When he approached the place he found that the dry grass and leaves were on fire, and on a tree, surrounded by flames, a snake was coiled, hissing with terror.

The shepherd stood wondering how the poor snake could escape, for the wind was blowing the flames that way, and soon that tree would be burning like the rest. Suddenly the snake cried: 'O shepherd! for the love of heaven save me from this fire!'

[image]

THE SHEPHERD COMES TO THE ARCH OF SNAKES

Then the shepherd stretched his staff out over the flames and the snake wound itself round the staff and up to his hand, and from his hand it crept up his arm, and twined itself about his neck. The shepherd trembled with fright, expecting every instant to be stung to death, and said: 'What an unlucky man I am! Did I rescue you only to be destroyed myself?' But the snake answered: 'Have no fear; only carry me home to my father who is the King of the Snakes.' The shepherd, however, was much too frightened to listen, and said that he could not go away and leave his flock alone; but the snake said: 'You need not be afraid to leave your flock, no evil shall befall them; but make all the haste you can.'

So he set off through the wood carrying the snake, and after a time he came to a great gateway, made entirely of snakes intertwined one with another. The shepherd stood still with surprise, but the snake round his neck whistled, and immediately all the arch unwound itself.

'When we are come to my father's house,' said his own snake to him, 'he will reward you with anything you like to ask—silver, gold, jewels, or whatever on this earth is most precious: but take none of all these things, ask rather to understand the language of beasts. He will refuse it to you a long time, but in the end he will grant it to you.'

Soon after that they arrived at the house of the King of the Snakes, who burst into tears of joy at the sight of his daughter, as he had given her up for dead. 'Where have you been all this time?' he asked, directly he could speak, and she told him that she had been caught in a forest fire, and had been rescued from the flames by the shepherd. The King of the Snakes, then turning to the shepherd, said to him: 'What reward will you choose for saving my child?'

'Make me to know the language of beasts,' answered the shepherd, 'that is all I desire.'

The king replied: 'Such knowledge would be of no benefit to you, for if I

granted it to you and you told anyone of it, you would immediately die; ask me rather for whatever else you would most like to possess, and it shall be yours.'

But the shepherd answered him: 'Sir, if you wish to reward me for saving your daughter, grant me, I pray you, to know the language of beasts. I desire nothing else'; and he turned as if to depart.

Then the king called him back, saying: 'If nothing else will satisfy you, open your mouth.' The man obeyed, and the king spat into it, and said: 'Now spit into my mouth.' The shepherd did as he was told, then the King of the Snakes spat again into the shepherd's mouth. When they had spat into each other's mouths three times, the king said:

'Now you know the language of beasts, go in peace; but, if you value your life, beware lest you tell anyone of it, else you will immediately die.'

So the shepherd set out for home, and on his way through the wood he heard and understood all that was said by the birds, and by every living creature. When he got back to his sheep he found the flock grazing peacefully, and as he was very tired he laid himself down by them to rest a little. Hardly had he done so when two ravens flew down and perched on a tree near by, and began to talk to each other in their own language: 'If that shepherd only knew that there is a vault full of gold and silver beneath where that lamb is lying, what would he not do?' When the shepherd heard these words he went straight to his master and told him, and the master at once took a waggon, and broke open the door of the vault, and they carried off the treasure. But instead of keeping it for himself, the master, who was an honourable man, gave it all up to the shepherd, saying: 'Take it, it is yours. The gods have given it to you.' So the shepherd took the treasure and built himself a house. He married a wife, and they lived in great peace and happiness, and he was acknowledged to be the richest man, not only of his native village, but of all the country-side. He had flocks of sheep, and cattle, and horses without end, as well as beautiful clothes and jewels.

One day, just before Christmas, he said to his wife: 'Prepare everything for a great feast, to-morrow we will take things with us to the farm that the shepherds there may make merry.' The wife obeyed, and all was prepared as he desired. Next day they both went to the farm, and in the evening the master said to the shepherds: 'Now come, all of you, eat, drink, and make merry. I will watch the flocks myself to-night in your stead.' Then he went out to spend the night with the flocks.

When midnight struck the wolves howled and the dogs barked, and the wolves spoke in their own tongue, saying:

'Shall we come in and work havoc, and you too shall eat flesh?' And the dogs answered in their tongue: 'Come in, and for once we shall have enough to eat.'

Now amongst the dogs there was one so old that he had only two teeth left in his head, and he spoke to the wolves, saying: 'So long as I have my two teeth still in my head, I will let no harm be done to my master.'

All this the master heard and understood, and as soon as morning dawned he ordered all the dogs to be killed excepting the old dog. The farm servants wondered at this order, and exclaimed: 'But surely, sir, that would be a pity.'

The master answered: 'Do as I bid you'; and made ready to return home with his wife, and they mounted their horses, her steed being a mare. As they went on their way, it happened that the husband rode on ahead, while the wife was a little way behind. The husband's horse, seeing this, neighed, and said to the mare: 'Come along, make haste; why are you so slow?' And the mare answered: 'It is very easy for you, you carry only your master, who is a thin man, but I carry my mistress, who is so fat that she weighs as much as three.' When the husband heard that he looked back and laughed, which the wife perceiving, she urged on the mare till she caught up with her husband, and asked him why he laughed. 'For nothing at all,' he answered; 'just because it came into my head.' She would not be satisfied with this answer, and urged him more and more to tell her why he had laughed. But he controlled himself and said: 'Let me be, wife; what ails you? I do not know myself why I laughed.' But the more he put her off, the more she tormented him to tell her the cause of his laughter. At length he said to her: 'Know, then, that if I tell it you I shall immediately and surely die.' But even this did not quiet her; she only besought him the more to tell her. Meanwhile they had reached home, and before getting down from his horse the man called for a coffin to be brought; and when it was there he placed it in front of the house, and said to his wife:

'See, I will lay myself down in this coffin, and will then tell you why I laughed, for as soon as I have told you I shall surely die.' So he lay down in the coffin, and while he took a last look around him, his old dog came out from the farm and sat down by him, and whined. When the master saw this, he called to his wife: 'Bring a piece of bread to give to the dog.' The wife brought some bread and threw it to the dog, but he would not look at it. Then the farm cock came and pecked at the bread; but the dog said to it: 'Wretched glutton, you can eat like that when you see that your master is dying?' The cock answered: 'Let him die, if he is so stupid. I have a hundred wives, which I call together when I find a grain of corn, and as soon as they are there I swallow it myself; should one of them dare to be angry, I would give her a lesson with my beak. He has only one wife, and he cannot keep her in order.'

As soon as the man understood this, he got up out of the coffin, seized a stick, and called his wife into the room, saying: 'Come, and I will tell you what you so much want to know'; and then he began to beat her with the stick, saying

with each blow: 'It is that, wife, it is that!' And in this way he taught her never again to ask why he had laughed.

THE CAT AND THE MOUSE IN PARTNERSHIP

[image]

THE PARTNERSHIP

A cat had made acquaintance with a Mouse, and had spoken so much of the great love and friendship she felt for her, that at last the Mouse consented to live in the same house with her, and to go shares in the housekeeping. 'But we must provide for the winter or else we shall suffer hunger,' said the Cat. 'You, little Mouse, cannot venture everywhere in case you run at last into a trap.' This good counsel was followed, and a little pot of fat was bought. But they did not know where to put it. At length, after long consultation, the Cat said, 'I know of no place where it could be better put than in the church. No one will trouble to take it away from there. We will hide it in a corner, and we won't touch it till we are in want.' So the little pot was placed in safety; but it was not long before the Cat had a great longing for it, and said to the Mouse, 'I wanted to tell you, little Mouse, that my cousin has a little son, white with brown spots, and she wants me to be godmother to it. Let me go out to-day, and do you take care of the house alone.'

[image]

AT HOME IN THE CHURCH

'Yes, go, certainly,' replied the Mouse, 'and when you eat anything good, think of me; I should very much like a drop of the red christening wine.'

But it was all untrue. The Cat had no cousin, and had not been asked to be godmother. She went straight to the church, slunk to the little pot of fat, began to lick it, and licked the top off. Then she took a walk on the roofs of the town,

looked at the view, stretched herself out in the sun, and licked her lips whenever she thought of the little pot of fat. As soon as it was evening she went home again.

'Ah, here you are again!' said the Mouse; 'you must certainly have had an enjoyable day.'

'It went off very well,' answered the Cat.

'What was the child's name?' asked the Mouse.

'Top Off,' said the Cat drily.

'Topoff!' echoed the Mouse; 'it is indeed a wonderful and curious name. Is it in your family?'

'What is there odd about it?' said the Cat. 'It is not worse than Breadthief, as your god-child is called.'

Not long after this another great longing came over the Cat. She said to the Mouse, 'You must again be kind enough to look after the house alone, for I have been asked a second time to stand godmother, and as this child has a white ring round its neck, I cannot refuse.'

The kind Mouse agreed, but the Cat slunk under the town wall to the church, and ate up half of the pot of fat. 'Nothing tastes better,' said she, 'than what one eats by oneself,' and she was very much pleased with her day's work. When she came home the Mouse asked, 'What was this child called?'

'Half Gone,' answered the Cat.

'Halfgone! what a name! I have never heard it in my life. I don't believe it is in the calendar.'

Soon the Cat's mouth began to water once more after her licking business. 'All good things in threes,' she said to the Mouse; 'I have again to stand godmother. The child is quite black, and has very white paws, but not a single white hair on its body. This only happens once in two years, so you will let me go out!'

'Topoff! Halfgone!' repeated the Mouse; 'they are such curious names; they make me very thoughtful.'

'Oh, you sit at home in your dark grey coat and your long tail,' said the Cat, 'and you get fanciful. That comes of not going out in the day.'

The Mouse had a good cleaning out while the Cat was gone, and made the house tidy; but the greedy Cat ate the fat every bit up. 'When it is all gone one can be at rest,' she said to herself, and at night she came home sleek and satisfied. The Mouse asked at once after the third child's name.

'It won't please you any better,' said the Cat; 'he was called Clean Gone.'

'Cleangone!' repeated the Mouse. 'I do not believe that name has been printed any more than the others. Cleangone! What can it mean?' She shook her head, curled herself up, and went to sleep.

From this time on no one asked the Cat to stand godmother; but when the

winter came and there was nothing to be got outside, the Mouse remembered their provision and said: 'Come, Cat, we will go to our pot of fat which we have stored away; it will taste very good.'

'Yes, indeed,' answered the Cat; 'it will taste as good to you as if you stretched your thin tongue out of the window.'

They started off, and when they reached it they found the pot in its place, but quite empty!

'Ah,' said the Mouse, 'now I know what has happened! It has all come out! You are a true friend to me! You have eaten it all when you stood godmother; first the top off, then half of it gone, then—'

[image]

PROTESTATION. The Way of the World

'Will you be quiet?' screamed the Cat. 'Another word and I will eat you up.'

'Cleangone' was already on the poor Mouse's tongue, and scarcely was it out than the Cat made a spring at her, seized and swallowed her.

You see that is the way of the world.

THE SIX SWANS

A king was once hunting in a great wood, and he hunted the game so eagerly that none of his courtiers could follow him. When evening came on he stood still and looked round him, and he saw that he had quite lost himself. He sought a way out, but could find none. Then he saw an old woman with a shaking head coming towards him; but she was a witch.

'Good woman,' he said to her, 'can you not show me the way out of the wood?'

'Oh, certainly, Sir King,' she replied, 'I can quite well do that, but on one condition, which if you do not fulfil you will never get out of the wood, and will die of hunger.'

'What is the condition?' asked the King.

'I have a daughter,' said the old woman, 'who is so beautiful that she has

not her equal in the world, and is well fitted to be your wife; if you will make her lady-queen I will show you the way out of the wood.'

The King in his anguish of mind consented, and the old woman led him to her little house where her daughter was sitting by the fire. She received the King as if she were expecting him, and he saw that she was certainly very beautiful; but she did not please him, and he could not look at her without a secret feeling of horror. As soon as he had lifted the maiden on to his horse the old woman showed him the way, and the King reached his palace, where the wedding was celebrated.

The King had already been married once, and had by his first wife seven children, six boys and one girl, whom he loved more than anything in the world. And now, because he was afraid that their stepmother might not treat them well and might do them harm, he put them in a lonely castle that stood in the middle of a wood. It lay so hidden, and the way to it was so hard to find, that he himself could not have found it out had not a wise-woman given him a reel of thread which possessed a marvellous property: when he threw it before him it unwound itself and showed him the way. But the King went so often to his dear children that the Queen was offended at his absence. She grew curious, and wanted to know what he had to do quite alone in the wood. She gave his servants a great deal of money, and they betrayed the secret to her, and also told her of the reel which alone could point out the way. She had no rest now till she had found out where the King guarded the reel, and then she made some little white shirts, and, as she had learnt from her witch-mother, sewed an enchantment in each of them.

And when the King had ridden off she took the little shirts and went into the wood, and the reel showed her the way. The children, who saw someone coming in the distance, thought it was their dear father coming to them, and sprang to meet him very joyfully. Then she threw over each one a little shirt, which when it had touched their bodies changed them into swans, and they flew away over the forest. The Queen went home quite satisfied, and thought she had got rid of her step-children; but the girl had not run to meet her with her brothers, and she knew nothing of her.

The next day the King came to visit his children, but he found no one but the girl.

[image]

The Six Brothers Changed Into Swans by Their Stepmother

'Where are your brothers?' asked the King.

'Alas! dear father,' she answered, 'they have gone away and left me all alone.' And she told him that looking out of her little window she had seen her brothers flying over the wood in the shape of swans, and she showed him the feathers which they had let fall in the yard, and which she had collected. The King mourned, but he did not think that the Queen had done the wicked deed, and as he was afraid the maiden would also be taken from him, he wanted to take her with him. But she was afraid of the stepmother, and begged the King to let her stay just one night more in the castle in the wood. The poor maiden thought, 'My home is no longer here; I will go and seek my brothers.' And when night came she fled away into the forest. She ran all through the night and the next day, till she could go no farther for weariness. Then she saw a little hut, went in, and found a room with six little beds. She was afraid to lie down on one, so she crept under one of them, lay on the hard floor, and was going to spend the night there. But when the sun had set she heard a noise, and saw six swans flying in at the window. They stood on the floor and blew at one another, and blew all their feathers off, and their swan-skin came off like a shirt. Then the maiden recognised her brothers, and overjoyed she crept out from under the bed. Her brothers were not less delighted than she to see their little sister again, but their joy did not last long.

'You cannot stay here,' they said to her. 'This is a den of robbers; if they were to come here and find you they would kill you.'

Could you not protect me?' asked the little sister.

'No,' they answered, 'for we can only lay aside our swan-skins for a quarter of an hour every evening. For this time we regain our human forms, but then we are changed into swans again.'

Then the little sister cried and said, 'Can you not be freed?'

'Oh, no,' they said, 'the conditions are too hard. You must not speak or laugh for six years, and must make in that time six shirts for us out of star-flowers. If a single word comes out of your mouth, all your labour is vain.' And when the brothers had said this the quarter of an hour came to an end, and they flew away out of the window as swans.

But the maiden had determined to free her brothers even if it should cost her her life. She left the hut, went into the forest, climbed a tree, and spent the night there. The next morning she went out, collected star-flowers, and began to sew. She could speak to no one, and she had no wish to laugh, so she sat there, looking only at her work.

When she had lived there some time, it happened that the King of that country was hunting in the forest, and his hunters came to the tree on which the maiden sat. They called to her and said, 'Who are you?'

But she gave no answer.

'Come down to us,' they said, 'we will do you no harm.'

But she shook her head silently. As they pressed her further with questions, she threw them the golden chain from her neck. But they did not leave off, and she threw them her girdle, and when this was no use, her garters, and then her dress. The huntsmen would not leave her alone, but climbed the tree, lifted the maiden down, and led her to the King. The King asked, 'Who are you? What are you doing up that tree?'

[image]

'And then her dress.'

But she answered nothing.

He asked her in all the languages he knew, but she remained as dumb as a fish. Because she was so beautiful, however, the King's heart was touched, and he was seized with a great love for her. He wrapped her up in his cloak, placed her before him on his horse, and brought her to his castle. There he had her dressed in rich clothes, and her beauty shone out as bright as day, but not a word could be drawn from her. He set her at table by his side, and her modest ways and behaviour pleased him so much that he said, 'I will marry this maiden and none other in the world,' and after some days he married her. But the King had a wicked mother who was displeased with the marriage, and said wicked things of the young Queen. 'Who knows who this girl is?' she said; 'she cannot speak, and is not worthy of a king.'

After a year, when the Queen had her first child, the old mother took it away from her. Then she went to the King and said that the Queen had killed it. The King would not believe it, and would not allow any harm to be done her. But she sat quietly sewing at the shirts and troubling herself about nothing. The next time she had a child the wicked mother did the same thing, but the King could not make up his mind to believe her. He said, 'She is too sweet and good to do such a thing as that. If she were not dumb and could defend herself, her innocence would be proved.' But when the third child was taken away, and the Queen was again accused, and could not utter a word in her own defence, the King was obliged to give her over to the law, which decreed that she must be burnt to death. When the day came on which the sentence was to be executed, it was the last day of the six years in which she must not speak or laugh, and now she had freed her dear brothers from the power of the enchantment. The six shirts were done; there was only the left sleeve wanting to the last.

When she was led to the stake, she laid the shirts on her arm, and as she

stood on the pile and the fire was about to be lighted, she looked around her and saw six swans flying through the air. Then she knew that her release was at hand and her heart danced for joy. The swans fluttered round her, and hovered low so that she could throw the shirts over them. When they had touched them the swan-skins fell off, and her brothers stood before her living, well and beautiful. Only the youngest had a swan's wing instead of his left arm. They embraced and kissed each other, and the Queen went to the King, who was standing by in great astonishment, and began to speak to him saying, 'Dearest husband, now I can speak and tell you openly that I am innocent and have been falsely accused.'

She told him of the old woman's deceit, and how she had taken the three children away and hidden them. Then they were fetched, to the great joy of the King, and the wicked mother came to no good end.

But the King and the Queen with their six brothers lived many years in happiness and peace.

STORY OF THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

Many years ago there lived an Emperor who was so fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on them in order to be beautifully dressed. He did not care about his soldiers, he did not care about the theatre; he only liked to go out walking to show off his new clothes. He had a coat for every hour of the day; and just as they say of a king, 'He is in the council-chamber,' they always said here, 'The Emperor is in the wardrobe.'

In the great city in which he lived there was always something going on; every day many strangers came there. One day two impostors arrived who gave themselves out as weavers, and said that they knew how to manufacture the most beautiful cloth imaginable. Not only were the texture and pattern uncommonly beautiful, but clothes which were made of the stuff possessed this wonderful property that they were invisible to anyone who was not fit for his office, or who was unardonably stupid.

'Those must indeed be splendid clothes,' thought the Emperor. 'If I had them on I could find out which men in my kingdom are unfit for the offices they hold; I could distinguish the wise from the stupid! Yes, this cloth must be woven for me at once.' And he gave both the impostors much money, so that they might begin their work.

They placed two weaving-looms, and began to do as if they were working, but they had not the least thing on the looms. They also demanded the finest silk and the best gold, which they put in their pockets, and worked at the empty looms till late into the night.

'I should like very much to know how far they have got on with the cloth,' thought the Emperor. But he remembered when he thought about it that whoever was stupid or not fit for his office would not be able to see it. Now he certainly believed that he had nothing to fear for himself, but he wanted first to send somebody else in order to see how he stood with regard to his office. Everybody in the whole town knew what a wonderful power the cloth had, and they were all curious to see how bad or how stupid their neighbour was.

'I will send my old and honoured minister to the weavers,' thought the Emperor. 'He can judge best what the cloth is like, for he has intellect, and no one understands his office better than he.'

Now the good old minister went into the hall where the two impostors sat working at the empty weaving-looms. 'Dear me!' thought the old minister, opening his eyes wide, 'I can see nothing!' But he did not say so.

Both the impostors begged him to be so kind as to step closer, and asked him if it were not a beautiful texture and lovely colours. They pointed to the empty loom, and the poor old minister went forward rubbing his eyes; but he could see nothing, for there was nothing there.

'Dear, dear!' thought he, 'can I be stupid? I have never thought that, and nobody must know it! Can I be not fit for my office? No, I must certainly not say that I cannot see the cloth!'

'Have you nothing to say about it?' asked one of the men who was weaving.

'Oh, it is lovely, most lovely!' answered the old minister, looking through his spectacles. 'What a texture! What colours! Yes, I will tell the Emperor that it pleases me very much.'

'Now we are delighted at that,' said both the weavers, and thereupon they named the colours and explained the make of the texture.

The old minister paid great attention, so that he could tell the same to the Emperor when he came back to him, which he did.

The impostors now wanted more money, more silk, and more gold to use in their weaving. They put it all in their own pockets, and there came no threads on the loom, but they went on as they had done before, working at the empty loom. The Emperor soon sent another worthy statesman to see how the weaving was getting on, and whether the cloth would soon be finished. It was the same with him as the first one; he looked and looked, but because there was nothing on the empty loom he could see nothing.

'Is it not a beautiful piece of cloth?' asked the two impostors, and they

pointed to and described the splendid material which was not there.

'Stupid I am not!' thought the man, 'so it must be my good office for which I am not fitted. It is strange, certainly, but no one must be allowed to notice it.' And so he praised the cloth which he did not see, and expressed to them his delight at the beautiful colours and the splendid texture. 'Yes, it is quite beautiful,' he said to the Emperor.

Everybody in the town was talking of the magnificent cloth.

Now the Emperor wanted to see it himself while it was still on the loom. With a great crowd of select followers, amongst whom were both the worthy statesmen who had already been there before, he went to the cunning impostors, who were now weaving with all their might, but without fibre or thread.

'Is it not splendid!' said both the old statesmen who had already been there. 'See, your Majesty, what a texture! What colours!' And then they pointed to the empty loom, for they believed that the others could see the cloth quite well.

'What!' thought the Emperor. 'I can see nothing! This is indeed horrible! Am I stupid? Am I not fit to be Emperor? That were the most dreadful thing that could happen to me. Oh, it is very beautiful,' he said. 'It has my gracious approval.' And then he nodded pleasantly, and examined the empty loom, for he would not say that he could see nothing.

His whole Court round him looked and looked, and saw no more than the others; but they said like the Emperor, 'Oh! it is beautiful!' And they advised him to wear these new and magnificent clothes for the first time at the great procession which was soon to take place. 'Splendid! Lovely! Most beautiful!' went from mouth to mouth; everyone seemed delighted over them, and the Emperor gave to the impostors the title of Court weavers to the Emperor.

Throughout the whole of the night before the morning on which the procession was to take place, the impostors were up and were working by the light of over sixteen candles. The people could see that they were very busy making the Emperor's new clothes ready. They pretended they were taking the cloth from the loom, cut with huge scissors in the air, sewed with needles without thread, and then said at last, 'Now the clothes are finished!'

The Emperor came himself with his most distinguished knights, and each impostor held up his arm just as if he were holding something, and said, 'See! here are the breeches! Here is the coat! Here the cloak!' and so on.

'Spun clothes are so comfortable that one would imagine one had nothing on at all; but that is the beauty of it!'

'Yes,' said all the knights, but they could see nothing, for there was nothing there.

'Will it please your Majesty graciously to take off your clothes,' said the impostors, 'then we will put on the new clothes, here before the mirror.'

The Emperor took off all his clothes, and the impostors placed themselves before him as if they were putting on each part of his new clothes which was ready, and the Emperor turned and bent himself in front of the mirror.

'How beautifully they fit! How well they sit!' said everybody. 'What material! What colours! It is a gorgeous suit!'

[image]

The Emperor comes to see his new clothes.

'They are waiting outside with the canopy which your Majesty is wont to have borne over you in the procession,' announced the Master of the Ceremonies.

'Look, I am ready,' said the Emperor. 'Doesn't it sit well!' And he turned himself again to the mirror to see if his finery was on all right.

The chamberlains who were used to carry the train put their hands near the floor as if they were lifting up the train; then they did as if they were holding something in the air. They would not have it noticed that they could see nothing.

So the Emperor went along in the procession under the splendid canopy, and all the people in the streets and at the windows said, 'How matchless are the Emperor's new clothes! That train fastened to his dress, how beautifully it hangs!'

No one wished it to be noticed that he could see nothing, for then he would have been unfit for his office, or else very stupid. None of the Emperor's clothes had met with such approval as these had.

'But he has nothing on!' said a little child at last.

'Just listen to the innocent child!' said the father, and each one whispered to his neighbour what the child had said.

'But he has nothing on!' the whole of the people called out at last.

This struck the Emperor, for it seemed to him as if they were right; but he thought to himself, 'I must go on with the procession now.' And the chamberlains walked along still more uprightly, holding up the train which was not there at all.

THE GOLDEN CRAB

Once upon a time there was a fisherman who had a wife and three children. Every morning he used to go out fishing, and whatever fish he caught he sold to the King. One day, among the other fishes, he caught a golden crab. When he came home he put all the fishes together into a great dish, but he kept the Crab separate because it shone so beautifully, and placed it upon a high shelf in the cupboard. Now while the old woman, his wife, was cleaning the fish, and had tucked up her gown so that her feet were visible, she suddenly heard a voice, which said:

'Let down, let down thy petticoat
That lets thy feet be seen.'

She turned round in surprise, and then she saw the little creature, the Golden Crab.

[image]

"Let down thy petticoat that lets thy feet be seen"

'What! You can speak, can you, you ridiculous crab?' she said, for she was not quite pleased at the Crab's remarks. Then she took him up and placed him on a dish.

When her husband came home and they sat down to dinner, they presently heard the Crab's little voice saying, 'Give me some too.' They were all very much surprised, but they gave him something to eat. When the old man came to take away the plate which had contained the Crab's dinner, he found it full of gold, and as the same thing happened every day he soon became very fond of the Crab.

One day the Crab said to the fisherman's wife, 'Go to the King and tell him I wish to marry his younger daughter.'

The old woman went accordingly, and laid the matter before the King, who laughed a little at the notion of his daughter marrying a crab, but did not decline the proposal altogether, because he was a prudent monarch, and knew that the Crab was likely to be a prince in disguise. He said, therefore, to the fisherman's wife, 'Go, old woman, and tell the Crab I will give him my daughter if by to-morrow morning he can build a wall in front of my castle much higher than my tower, upon which all the flowers of the world must grow and bloom.'

The fisherman's wife went home and gave this message.

Then the Crab gave her a golden rod, and said, 'Go and strike with this rod three times upon the ground on the place which the King showed you, and

to-morrow morning the wall will be there.'

The old woman did so and went away again.

The next morning, when the King awoke, what do you think he saw? The wall stood there before his eyes, exactly as he had bespoken it!

Then the old woman went back to the King and said to him, 'Your Majesty's orders have been fulfilled.'

'That is all very well,' said the King, 'but I cannot give away my daughter until there stands in front of my palace a garden in which there are three fountains, of which the first must play gold, the second diamonds, and the third brilliants.'

So the old woman had to strike again three times upon the ground with the rod, and the next morning the garden was there. The King now gave his consent, and the wedding was fixed for the very next day.

Then the Crab said to the old fisherman, 'Now take this rod; go and knock with it on a certain mountain; then a black man will come out and ask you what you wish for. Answer him thus: "Your master, the King, has sent me to tell you that you must send him his golden garment that is like the sun." Make him give you, besides, the queenly robes of gold and precious stones which are like the flowery meadows and bring them both to me. And bring me also the golden cushion.'

[image]

The fisherman brings the crab on the golden cushion.

The old man went and did his errand. When he had brought the precious robes, the Crab put on the golden garment and then crept upon the golden cushion, and in this way the fisherman carried him to the castle, where the Crab presented the other garment to his bride. Now the ceremony took place, and when the married pair were alone together the Crab made himself known to his young wife, and told her how he was the son of the greatest king in the world, and how he was enchanted, so that he became a crab by day and was a man only at night; and he could also change himself into an eagle as often as he wished. No sooner had he said this than he shook himself, and immediately became a handsome youth, but the next morning he was forced to creep back again into his crab-shell. And the same thing happened every day. But the Princess's affection for the Crab, and the polite attention with which she behaved to him, surprised the royal family very much. They suspected some secret, but though they spied and spied, they could not discover it. Thus a year passed away, and

the Princess had a son, whom she called Benjamin. But her mother still thought the whole matter very strange. At last she said to the King that he ought to ask his daughter whether she would not like to have another husband instead of the Crab. But when the daughter was questioned she only answered:

'I am married to the Crab, and him only will I have.'

Then the King said to her, 'I will appoint a tournament in your honour, and I will invite all the princes in the world to it, and if any one of them pleases you, you shall marry him.'

In the evening the Princess told this to the Crab, who said to her, 'Take this rod, go to the garden gate and knock with it, then a black man will come out and say to you, "Why have you called me, and what do you require of me?" Answer him thus: "Your master the King has sent me hither to tell you to send him his golden armour and his steed and the silver apple." And bring them to me.'

The Princess did so, and brought him what he desired.

The following evening the Prince dressed himself for the tournament. Before he went he said to his wife, 'Now mind you do not say when you see me that I am the Crab. For if you do this evil will come of it. Place yourself at the window with your sisters; I will ride by and throw you the silver apple. Take it in your hand, but if they ask you who I am, say that you do not know.' So saying, he kissed her, repeated his warning once more, and went away.

The Princess went with her sisters to the window and looked on at the tournament. Presently her husband rode by and threw the apple up to her. She caught it in her hand and went with it to her room, and by-and-by her husband came back to her. But her father was much surprised that she did not seem to care about any of the princes; he therefore appointed a second tournament.

The Crab then gave his wife the same directions as before, only this time the apple which she received from the black man was of gold. But before the Prince went to the tournament he said to his wife, 'Now I know you will betray me to-day.'

But she swore to him that she would not tell who he was. He then repeated his warning and went away.

[image]

The Prince throws the apple to the Princess

In the evening, while the Princess, with her mother and sisters, was standing at the window, the Prince suddenly galloped past on his steed and threw her the golden apple.

Then her mother flew into a passion, gave her a box on the ear, and cried out, 'Does not even that prince please you, you fool?'

The Princess in her fright exclaimed, 'That is the Crab himself!'

Her mother was still more angry because she had not been told sooner, ran into her daughter's room where the crab-shell was still lying, took it up and threw it into the fire. Then the poor Princess cried bitterly, but it was of no use; her husband did not come back.

Now we must leave the Princess and turn to the other persons in the story. One day an old man went to a stream to dip in a crust of bread which he was going to eat, when a dog came out of the water, snatched the bread from his hand, and ran away. The old man ran after him, but the dog reached a door, pushed it open, and ran in, the old man following him. He did not overtake the dog, but found himself above a staircase, which he descended. Then he saw before him a stately palace, and, entering, he found in a large hall a table set for twelve persons. He hid himself in the hall behind a great picture, that he might see what would happen. At noon he heard a great noise, so that he trembled with fear. When he took courage to look out from behind the picture, he saw twelve eagles flying in. At this sight his fear became still greater. The eagles flew to the basin of a fountain that was there and bathed themselves, when suddenly they were changed into twelve handsome youths. Now they seated themselves at the table, and one of them took up a goblet filled with wine, and said, 'A health to my father!' And another said, 'A health to my mother!' and so the healths went round. Then one of them said:

'A health to my dearest lady,
 Long may she live and well!
 But a curse on the cruel mother
 That burnt my golden shell!'

And so saying he wept bitterly. Then the youths rose from the table, went back to the great stone fountain, turned themselves into eagles again, and flew away.

Then the old man went away too, returned to the light of day, and went home. Soon after he heard that the Princess was ill, and that the only thing that did her good was having stories told to her. He therefore went to the royal castle, obtained an audience of the Princess, and told her about the strange things he had seen in the underground palace. No sooner had he finished than the Princess asked him whether he could find the way to that palace.

'Yes,' he answered, 'certainly.'

And now she desired him to guide her thither at once. The old man did so, and when they came to the palace he hid her behind the great picture and advised

her to keep quite still, and he placed himself behind the picture also. Presently the eagles came flying in, and changed themselves into young men, and in a moment the Princess recognised her husband amongst them all, and tried to come out of her hiding-place; but the old man held her back. The youths seated themselves at the table; and now the Prince said again, while he took up the cup of wine:

'A health to my dearest lady,
 Long may she live and well!
 But a curse on the cruel mother
 That burnt my golden shell!'

Then the Princess could restrain herself no longer, but ran forward and threw her arms round her husband. And immediately he knew her again, and said:

'Do you remember how I told you that day that you would betray me? Now you see that I spoke the truth. But all that bad time is past. Now listen to me: I must still remain enchanted for three months. Will you stay here with me till that time is over?'

So the Princess stayed with him, and said to the old man, 'Go back to the castle and tell my parents that I am staying here.'

Her parents were very much vexed when the old man came back and told them this, but as soon as the three months of the Prince's enchantment were over, he ceased to be an eagle and became once more a man, and they returned home together. And then they lived happily, and we who hear the story are happier still.

THE IRON STOVE

Once upon a time when wishes came true there was a King's son who was enchanted by an old witch, so that he was obliged to sit in a large iron stove in a wood. There he lived for many years, and no one could free him. At last a King's daughter came into the wood; she had lost her way, and could not find her father's kingdom again. She had been wandering round and round for nine days, and came at last to the iron case. A voice came from within and asked her, 'Where do you come from, and where do you want to go?' She answered, 'I have lost my way to my father's kingdom, and I shall never get home again.' Then

the voice from the iron stove said, 'I will help you to find your home again, and that in a very short time, if you will promise to do what I ask you. I am a greater prince than you are a princess, and I will marry you.' Then she grew frightened, and thought, 'What can a young lassie do with an iron stove?' But as she wanted very much to go home to her father, she promised to do what he wished. He said, 'You must come again, and bring a knife with you to scrape a hole in the iron.'

Then he gave her someone for a guide, who walked near her and said nothing, but he brought her in two hours to her house. There was great joy in the castle when the Princess came back, and the old King fell on her neck and kissed her. But she was very much troubled, and said, 'Dear father, listen to what has befallen me! I should never have come home again out of the great wild wood if I had not come to an iron stove, to whom I have had to promise that I will go back to free him and marry him!' The old King was so frightened that he nearly fainted, for she was his only daughter. So they consulted together, and determined that the miller's daughter, who was very beautiful, should take her place. They took her there, gave her a knife, and said she must scrape at the iron stove. She scraped for twenty-four hours, but did not make the least impression. When the day broke, a voice called from the iron stove, 'It seems to me that it is day outside.' Then she answered, 'It seems so to me; I think I hear my father's mill rattling.'

'So you are a miller's daughter! Then go away at once, and tell the King's daughter to come.'

[image]

The iron stove

Then she went away, and told the old King that the thing inside the iron stove would not have her, but wanted the Princess. The old King was frightened, and his daughter wept. But they had a swineherd's daughter who was even more beautiful than the miller's daughter, and they gave her a piece of gold to go to the iron stove instead of the Princess. Then she was taken out, and had to scrape for four-and-twenty hours, but she could make no impression. As soon as the day broke the voice from the stove called out 'It seems to be daylight outside.' Then she answered, 'It seems so to me too; I think I hear my father blowing his horn.' 'So you are a swineherd's daughter! Go away at once, and let the King's daughter come. And say to her that what I foretell shall come to pass, and if she does not come everything in the kingdom shall fall into ruin, and not one stone shall be left upon another.' When the Princess heard this she began to cry, but it

was no good; she had to keep her word. She took leave of her father, put a knife in her belt, and went to the iron stove in the wood. As soon as she reached it she began to scrape, and the iron gave way and before two hours had passed she had made a little hole. Then she peeped in and saw such a beautiful youth all shining with gold and precious stones that she fell in love with him on the spot. So she scraped away harder than ever, and made the hole so large that he could get out. Then he said, 'You are mine, and I am thine; you are my bride and have set me free!' He wanted to take her with him to his kingdom, but she begged him just to let her go once more to her father; and the Prince let her go, but told her not to say more than three words to her father, then to come back again. So she went home, but alas! she said *more than three words*; and immediately the iron stove vanished and went away over a mountain of glass and sharp swords. But the Prince was free, and was no longer shut up in it. Then she said good-bye to her father, and took a little money with her, and went again into the great wood to look for the iron stove; but she could not find it. She sought it for nine days, and then her hunger became so great that she did not know how she could live any longer. And when it was evening she climbed a little tree and wished that the night would not come, because she was afraid of the wild beasts. When midnight came she saw afar off a little light, and thought, 'Ah! if only I could reach that!' Then she got down from the tree and went towards the light. She came to a little old house with a great deal of grass growing round, and stood in front of a little heap of wood. She thought, 'Alas! what am I coming to?' and peeped through the window; but she saw nothing inside except big and little toads, and a table beautifully spread with roast meats and wine, and all the dishes and drinking-cups were of silver. Then she took heart and knocked. Then a fat toad called out:

'Little green toad with leg like crook,
Open wide the door, and look
Who it was the latch that shook.'

And a little toad came forward and let her in. When she entered they all bid her welcome, and made her sit down. They asked her how she came there and what she wanted. Then she told everything that had happened to her, and how, because she had exceeded her permission only to speak three words, the stove had disappeared with the Prince; and how she had searched a very long time, and must wander over mountain and valley till she found him.

Then the old toad said:

'Little green toad whose leg doth twist,

Go to the corner of which you wist,
And bring to me the large old kist.'

And the little toad went and brought out a great chest. Then they gave her food and drink, and led her to a beautifully made bed of silk and samite, on which she lay down and slept soundly. When the day dawned she arose, and the old toad gave her three things out of the huge chest to take with her. She would have need of them, for she had to cross a high glass mountain, three cutting swords, and a great lake. When she had passed these she would find her lover again. So she was given three large needles, a plough-wheel, and three nuts, which she was to take great care of. She set out with these things, and when she came to the glass mountain which was so slippery she stuck the three needles behind her feet and then in front, and so got over it, and when she was on the other side put them carefully away.

Then she reached the three cutting swords, and got on her plough-wheel and rolled over them. At last she came to a great lake, and, when she had crossed that, arrived at a beautiful castle. She went in and gave herself out as a servant, a poor maid who would gladly be engaged. But she knew that the Prince whom she had freed from the iron stove in the great wood was in the castle. So she was taken on as kitchen-maid for very small wages. Now the Prince was about to marry another princess, for he thought she was dead long ago.

In the evening, when she had washed up and was ready, she felt in her pocket and found the three nuts which the old toad had given her. She cracked one and was going to eat the kernel, when behold! there was a beautiful royal dress inside it! When the bride heard of this, she came and begged for the dress, and wanted to buy it, saying it was not a dress for a serving-maid. Then she said she would not sell it unless she was granted one favour—namely, to sleep by the Prince's door. The bride granted her this, because the dress was so beautiful and she had so few like it. When it was evening she said to her bridegroom, 'That stupid maid wants to sleep by your door.'

[image]

'Then she reached the three cutting swords, and got on her plough-wheel and rolled over them.'

'If you are contented, I am,' he said. But she gave him a glass of wine in which she had poured a sleeping-draught. Then they both went into his room, but he slept so soundly that she could not wake him. The maid wept all night

long, and said, 'I freed you in the wild wood out of the iron stove; I have sought you, and have crossed a glassy mountain, three sharp swords, and a great lake before I found you, and will you not hear me now?' The servants outside heard how she cried the whole night, and they told their master in the morning.

When she had washed up the next evening she bit the second nut, and there was a still more beautiful dress inside. When the bride saw it she wanted to buy it also. But the maid did not want money, and asked that she should sleep again by the Prince's door. The bride, however, gave him a sleeping-draught, and he slept so soundly that he heard nothing. But the kitchen-maid wept the whole night long, and said, 'I have freed you in a wood and from an iron stove; I sought you and have crossed a glassy mountain, three sharp swords, and a great lake to find you, and now you will not hear me!' The servants outside heard how she cried the whole night, and in the morning they told their master. And when she had washed up on the third night she bit the third nut, and there was a still more beautiful dress inside that was made of pure gold. When the bride saw it she wanted to have it, but the maid would only give it her on condition that she should sleep for the third time by the Prince's door. But the Prince took care not to drink the sleeping-draught. When she began to weep and to say, 'Dearest sweetheart, I freed you in the horrible wild wood, and from an iron stove,' he jumped up and said, 'You are right. You are mine, and I am thine.' Though it was still night, he got into a carriage with her and they took the false bride's clothes away, so that she could not follow them. When they came to the great lake they rowed across, and when they reached the three sharp swords they sat on the plough-wheel, and on the glassy mountain they stuck the three needles in. So they arrived at last at the little old house, but when they stepped inside it turned into a large castle. The toads were all freed, and were beautiful King's children, running about for joy. There they were married, and they remained in the castle, which was much larger than that of the Princess's father. But because the old man did not like being left alone, they went and fetched him. So they had two kingdoms and lived in great wealth.

A mouse has run,
My story's done.

THE DRAGON AND HIS GRANDMOTHER

There was once a great war, and the King had a great many soldiers, but he gave them so little pay that they could not live upon it. Then three of them took counsel together and determined to desert.

One of them said to the others, 'If we are caught, we shall be hanged on the gallows; how shall we set about it?' The other said, 'Do you see that large cornfield there? If we were to hide ourselves in that, no one could find us. The army cannot come into it, and to-morrow it is to march on.'

They crept into the corn, but the army did not march on, but remained encamped close around them. They sat for two days and two nights in the corn, and grew so hungry that they nearly died; but if they were to venture out, it was certain death.

They said at last, 'What use was it our deserting? We must perish here miserably.'

Whilst they were speaking a fiery dragon came flying through the air. It hovered near them, and asked why they were hidden there. They answered, 'We are three soldiers, and have deserted because our pay was so small. Now if we remain here we shall die of hunger, and if we move out we shall be strung up on the gallows.' 'If you will serve me for seven years,' said the Dragon, 'I will lead you through the midst of the army so that no one shall catch you.' 'We have no choice, and must take your offer,' said they. Then the dragon seized them in his claws, took them through the air over the army, and set them down on the earth a long way from it.

He gave them a little whip, saying, 'Whip and slash with this, and as much money as you want will jump up before you. You can then live as great lords, keep horses, and drive about in carriages. But after seven years you are mine.' Then he put a book before them, which he made all three of them sign. 'I will then give you a riddle,' he said; 'if you guess it, you shall be free and out of my power.' The Dragon then flew away, and they journeyed on with their little whip. They had as much money as they wanted, wore grand clothes, and made their way into the world. Wherever they went they lived in merrymaking and splendour, drove about with horses and carriages, ate and drank, but did nothing wrong.

[image]

The Dragon carries off the three soldiers.

The time passed quickly away, and when the seven years were nearly ended two of them grew terribly anxious and frightened, but the third made light of it, saying, 'Don't be afraid, brothers, I wasn't born yesterday; I will guess the riddle.'

They went into a field, sat down, and the two pulled long faces. An old woman passed by, and asked them why they were so sad. 'Alas! what have you to do with it? You cannot help us.' 'Who knows?' she answered. 'Only confide your trouble in me.'

Then they told her that they had become the servants of the Dragon for seven long years, and how he had given them money as plentifully as blackberries; but as they had signed their names they were his, unless when the seven years had passed they could guess a riddle. The old woman said, 'If you would help yourselves, one of you must go into the wood, and there he will come upon a tumble-down building of rocks which looks like a little house. He must go in, and there he will find help.'

The two melancholy ones thought, 'That won't save us!' and they remained where they were. But the third and merry one jumped up and went into the wood till he found the rock hut. In the hut sat a very old woman, who was the Dragon's grandmother. She asked him how he came, and what was his business there. He told her all that had happened, and because she was pleased with him she took compassion on him, and said she would help him.

She lifted up a large stone which lay over the cellar, saying, 'Hide yourself there; you can hear all that is spoken in this room. Only sit still and don't stir. When the dragon comes, I will ask him what the riddle is, for he tells me everything; then listen carefully what he answers.'

At midnight the Dragon flew in, and asked for his supper. His grandmother laid the table, and brought out food and drink till he was satisfied, and they ate and drank together. Then in the course of the conversation she asked him what he had done in the day, and how many souls he had conquered.

'I haven't had much luck to-day,' he said, 'but I have a tight hold on three soldiers.'

'Indeed! three soldiers!' said she. 'Who cannot escape you?'

'They are mine,' answered the Dragon scornfully, 'for I shall only give them one riddle which they will never be able to guess.'

'What sort of a riddle is it?' she asked.

'I will tell you this. In the North Sea lies a dead sea-cat—that shall be their roast meat; and the rib of a whale—that shall be their silver spoon; and the hollow foot of a dead horse—that shall be their wineglass.'

When the Dragon had gone to bed, his old grandmother pulled up the stone and let out the soldier.

'Did you pay attention to everything?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I know enough, and can help myself splendidly.'

Then he went by another way through the window secretly, and in all haste back to his comrades. He told them how the Dragon had been outwitted by his

grandmother, and how he had heard from his own lips the answer to the riddle.

Then they were all delighted and in high spirits, took out their whip, and cracked so much money that it came jumping up from the ground. When the seven years had quite gone, the Fiend came with his book, and, pointing at the signatures, said, 'I will take you underground with me; you shall have a meal there. If you can tell me what you will get for your roast meat, you shall be free, and shall also keep the whip.'

Then said the first soldier, 'In the North Sea lies a dead sea-cat; that shall be the roast meat.'

[image]

The Fiend defeated.

The Dragon was much annoyed, and hummed and hawed a good deal, and asked the second, 'But what shall be your spoon?'

'The rib of a whale shall be our silver spoon.'

The Dragon made a face, and growled again three times, 'Hum, hum, hum,' and said to the third, 'Do you know what your wineglass shall be?'

'An old horse's hoof shall be our wineglass.'

Then the Dragon flew away with a loud shriek, and had no more power over them. But the three soldiers took the little whip, whipped as much money as they wanted, and lived happily to their lives' end.

THE DONKEY CABBAGE

There was once a young Hunter who went boldly into the forest. He had a merry and light heart, and as he went whistling along there came an ugly old woman, who said to him, 'Good-day, dear hunter! You are very merry and contented, but I suffer hunger and thirst, so give me a trifle.' The Hunter was sorry for the poor old woman, and he felt in his pocket and gave her all he could spare. He was going on then, but the old woman stopped him and said, 'Listen, dear hunter, to what I say. Because of your kind heart I will make you a present. Go on your way, and in a short time you will come to a tree on which sit nine birds who have a cloak in their claws and are quarrelling over it. Then take aim with your gun

and shoot in the middle of them; they will let the cloak fall, but one of the birds will be hit and will drop down dead. Take the cloak with you; it is a wishing-cloak, and when you throw it on your shoulders you have only to wish yourself at a certain place, and in the twinkling of an eye you are there. Take the heart out of the dead bird and swallow it whole, and early every morning when you get up you will find a gold piece under your pillow.'

The Hunter thanked the wise woman, and thought to himself, 'These are splendid things she has promised me, if only they come to pass!' So he walked on about a hundred yards, and then he heard above him in the branches such a screaming and chirping that he looked up, and there he saw a heap of birds tearing a cloth with their beaks and feet, shrieking, tugging, and fighting, as if each wanted it for himself. 'Well,' said the Hunter, 'this is wonderful! It is just as the old woman said'; and he took his gun on his shoulder, pulled the trigger, and shot into the midst of them, so that their feathers flew about. Then the flock took flight with much screaming, but one fell dead, and the cloak fluttered down. Then the Hunter did as the old woman had told him: he cut open the bird, found its heart, swallowed it, and took the cloak home with him. The next morning when he awoke he remembered the promise, and wanted to see if it had come true. But when he lifted up his pillow, there sparkled the gold piece, and the next morning he found another, and so on every time he got up. He collected a heap of gold, but at last he thought to himself, 'What good is all my gold to me if I stay at home? I will travel and look a bit about me in the world.' So he took leave of his parents, slung his hunting knapsack and his gun round him, and journeyed into the world.

It happened that one day he went through a thick wood, and when he came to the end of it there lay in the plain before him a large castle. At one of the windows in it stood an old woman with a most beautiful maiden by her side, looking out. But the old woman was a witch, and she said to the girl, 'There comes one out of the wood who has a wonderful treasure in his body which we must manage to possess ourselves of, darling daughter; we have more right to it than he. He has a bird's heart in him, and so every morning there lies a gold piece under his pillow.'

She told her how they could get hold of it, and how she was to coax it from him, and at last threatened her angrily, saying, 'And if you do not obey me, you shall repent it!'

When the Hunter came nearer he saw the maiden, and said to himself, 'I have travelled so far now that I will rest, and turn into this beautiful castle; money I have in plenty.' But the real reason was that he had caught sight of the lovely face.

He went into the house, and was kindly received and hospitably enter-

tained. It was not long before he was so much in love with the witch-maiden that he thought of nothing else, and only looked in her eyes, and whatever she wanted, that he gladly did. Then the old witch said, 'Now we must have the bird-heart; he will not feel when it is gone.' She prepared a drink, and when it was ready she poured it in a goblet and gave it to the maiden, who had to hand it to the Hunter.

'Drink to me now, my dearest,' she said. Then he took the goblet, and when he had swallowed the drink the bird-heart came out of his mouth. The maiden had to get hold of it secretly and then swallow it herself, for the old witch wanted to have it. Thenceforward he found no more gold under his pillow, and it lay under the maiden's; but he was so much in love and so much bewitched that he thought of nothing except spending all his time with the maiden.

[image]

THE MAIDEN OBTAINS THE BIRD-HEART

Then the old witch said, 'We have the bird-heart, but we must also get the wishing-cloak from him.'

The maiden answered, 'We will leave him that; he has already lost his wealth!'

The old witch grew angry, and said, 'Such a cloak is a wonderful thing, it is seldom to be had in the world, and have it I must and will.' She beat the maiden, and said that if she did not obey it would go ill with her.

So she did her mother's bidding, and, standing one day by the window, she looked away into the far distance as if she were very sad.

'Why are you standing there looking so sad?' asked the Hunter.

'Alas, my love,' she replied, 'over there lies the granite mountain where the costly precious stones grow. I have a great longing to go there, so that when I think of it I am very sad. For who can fetch them? Only the birds who fly; a man, never.'

'If you have no other trouble,' said the Hunter, 'that one I can easily remove from your heart.'

So he wrapped her round in his cloak and wished themselves to the granite mountain, and in an instant there they were, sitting on it! The precious stones sparkled so brightly on all sides that it was a pleasure to see them, and they collected the most beautiful and costly together. But now the old witch had through her witchcraft caused the Hunter's eyes to become heavy.

He said to the maiden, 'We will sit down for a little while and rest; I am so

tired that I can hardly stand on my feet.'

So they sat down, and he laid his head on her lap and fell asleep. As soon as he was sound asleep she unfastened the cloak from his shoulders, threw it on her own, left the granite and stones, and wished herself home again.

But when the Hunter had finished his sleep and awoke, he found that his love had betrayed him and left him alone on the wild mountain. 'Oh,' said he, 'why is faithlessness so great in the world?' and he sat down in sorrow and trouble, not knowing what to do.

But the mountain belonged to fierce and huge giants, who lived on it and traded there, and he had not sat long before he saw three of them striding towards him. So he lay down as if he had fallen into a deep sleep.

The giants came up, and the first pushed him with his foot, and said, 'What sort of an earthworm is that?'

The second said, 'Crush him dead.'

But the third said contemptuously, 'It is not worth the trouble! Let him live; he cannot remain here, and if he goes higher up the mountain the clouds will take him and carry him off.'

Talking thus they went away. But the Hunter had listened to their talk, and as soon as they had gone he rose and climbed to the summit. When he had sat there a little while a cloud swept by, and, seizing him, carried him away. It travelled for a time in the sky. and then it sank down and hovered over a large vegetable garden surrounded by walls, so that he came safely to the ground amidst cabbage and vegetables. The Hunter then looked about him, saying, 'If only I had something to eat! I am so hungry, and it will go badly with me in the future, for I see here not an apple or pear or fruit of any kind—nothing but vegetables everywhere.' At last he thought, 'At a pinch I can eat a salad; it does not taste particularly nice, but it will refresh me.' So he looked about for a good head and ate it, but no sooner had he swallowed a couple of mouthfuls than he felt very strange, and found himself wonderfully changed. Four legs began to grow on him, a thick head, and two long ears, and he saw with horror that he had changed into a donkey. But as he was still very hungry and this juicy salad tasted very good to his present nature, he went on eating with a still greater appetite. At last he got hold of another kind of cabbage, but scarcely had swallowed it when he felt another change, and he once more regained his human form.

[image]

The hunter is transformed into a donkey.

The Hunter now lay down and slept off his weariness. When he awoke the next morning he broke off a head of the bad and a head of the good cabbage, thinking, 'This will help me to regain my own, and to punish faithlessness.' Then he put the heads in his pockets, climbed the wall, and started off to seek the castle of his love. When he had wandered about for a couple of days he found it quite easily. He then browned his face quickly, so that his own mother would not have known him, and went into the castle, where he begged for a lodging.

'I am so tired,' he said, 'I can go no farther.'

The witch asked, 'Countryman, who are you, and what is your business?'

He answered, 'I am a messenger of the King, and have been sent to seek the finest salad that grows under the sun. I have been so lucky as to find it, and am bringing it with me; but the heat of the sun is so great that the tender cabbage threatens to grow soft, and I do not know if I shall be able to bring it any farther.'

When the old witch heard of the fine salad she wanted to eat it, and said, 'Dear countryman, just let me taste the wonderful salad.'

'Why not?' he answered; 'I have brought two heads with me, and will give you one.'

So saying, he opened his sack and gave her the bad one. The witch suspected no evil, and her mouth watered to taste the new dish, so that she went into the kitchen to prepare it herself. When it was ready she could not wait till it was served at the table, but she immediately took a couple of leaves and put them in her mouth. No sooner, however, had she swallowed them than she lost human form, and ran into the courtyard in the shape of a donkey.

Now the servant came into the kitchen, and when she saw the salad standing there ready cooked she was about to carry it up, but on the way, according to her old habit, she tasted it and ate a couple of leaves. Immediately the charm worked, and she became a donkey, and ran out to join the old witch, and the dish with the salad in it fell to the ground. In the meantime, the messenger was sitting with the lovely maiden, and as no one came with the salad, and she wanted very much to taste it, she said, 'I don't know where the salad is.'

Then thought the Hunter, 'The cabbage must have already begun to work.' And he said, 'I will go to the kitchen and fetch it myself.'

When he came there he saw the two donkeys running about in the courtyard, but the salad was lying on the ground.

'That's all right,' said he; 'two have had their share!' And lifting the remaining leaves up, he laid them on the dish and brought them to the maiden.

'I am bringing you the delicious food my own self,' he said, 'so that you need not wait any longer.'

Then she ate, and as the others had done, she at once lost her human form, and ran as a donkey into the yard.

When the Hunter had washed his face, so that the changed ones might know him, he went into the yard saying, 'Now you shall receive a reward for your faithlessness.'

He tied them all three with a rope, and drove them away till he came to a mill. He knocked at the window, and the miller put his head out and asked what he wanted.

'I have three tiresome animals,' he answered, 'which I don't want to keep any longer. If you will take them, give them food and stabling, and do as I tell you with them, I will pay you as much as you want.'

The miller replied, 'Why not? What shall I do with them?'

[image]

THE YOUNG MAN GIVES THE DONKEYS TO THE MILLER

Then the Hunter said that to the old donkey which was the witch, three beatings and one meal; to the younger one, which was the servant, one beating and three meals; and to the youngest one, which was the maiden, no beating and three meals; for he could not find it in his heart to let the maiden be beaten.

Then he went back into the castle, and he found there all that he wanted. After a couple of days the miller came and said that he must tell him that the old donkey which was to have three beatings and only one meal had died. 'The two others,' he added, 'are certainly not dead, and get their three meals every day, but they are so sad that they cannot last much longer.'

Then the Hunter took pity on them, laid aside his anger, and told the miller to drive them back again. And when they came he gave them some of the good cabbage to eat, so that they became human again. Then the beautiful maiden fell on her knees before him saying, 'Oh, my dearest, forgive me the ill I have done you! My mother compelled me to do it; it was against my will, for I love you dearly. Your wishing-cloak is hanging in a cupboard, and as for the bird-heart I will make a drink and give it back to you.'

But he changed his mind, and said, 'Keep it; it makes no difference, for I will take you to be my own dear true wife.'

And the wedding was celebrated, and they lived happy together till death.

LUCKY LUCK

Once upon a time there was a King who had an only son. When the lad was about eighteen years old his father had to go to fight in a war against a neighbouring country, and the king led his troops in person. He bade his son act as Regent in his absence, but ordered him on no account to marry till his return.

Time went by. The Prince ruled the country and never even thought of marrying. But when he reached his twenty-fifth birthday he began to think that it might be rather nice to have a wife, and he thought so much that at last he got quite eager about it. He remembered, however, what his father had said, and waited some time longer, till at last it was ten years since the King went out to war. Then the Prince called his courtiers about him and set off with a great retinue to seek a bride. He hardly knew which way to go, so he wandered about for twenty days, when, suddenly, he found himself in his father's camp.

The King was delighted to see his son, and had a great many questions to ask and answer; but when he heard that instead of quietly waiting for him at home the Prince was starting off to seek a wife he was very angry, and said: 'You may go where you please, but I will not leave any of my people with you.'

Only one faithful servant stayed with the Prince and refused to part from him. They journeyed over hill and dale till they came to a place called Goldtown. The King of Goldtown had a lovely daughter, and the Prince, who soon heard about her beauty, could not rest till he saw her.

[image]

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT & THE THREE EAGLES

He was very kindly received, for he was extremely good-looking and had charming manners, so he lost no time in asking for her hand and her parents gave her to him with joy. The wedding took place at once, and the feasting and rejoicings went on for a whole month. At the end of the month they set off for home, but as the journey was a long one they spent the first evening at an inn. Everyone in the house slept, and only the faithful servant kept watch. About midnight he heard three crows, who had flown to the roof, talking together.

'That's a handsome couple which arrived here to-night. It seems quite a pity they should lose their lives so soon.'

'Truly,' said the second crow; 'for to-morrow, when midday strikes, the bridge over the Gold Stream will break just as they are driving over it. But, listen! whoever overhears and tells what we have said will be turned to stone up to his knees.'

The crows had hardly done speaking when away they flew. And close upon

them followed three pigeons.

'Even if the Prince and Princess get safe over the bridge they will perish,' said they; 'for the King is going to send a carriage to meet them which looks as new as paint. But when they are seated in it a raging wind will rise and whirl the carriage away into the clouds. Then it will fall suddenly to earth, and they will be killed. But anyone who hears and betrays what we have said will be turned to stone up to his waist.'

With that the pigeons flew off and three eagles took their places, and this is what they said:

'If the young couple does manage to escape the dangers of the bridge and the carriage, the King means to send them each a splendid gold-embroidered robe. When they put these on they will be burnt up at once. But whoever hears and repeats this will turn to stone from head to foot.'

Early next morning the travellers got up and breakfasted. They began to tell each other their dreams. At last the servant said:

'Gracious Prince, I dreamt that if your Royal Highness would grant all I asked we should get home safe and sound; but if you did not we should certainly be lost. My dreams never deceive me, so I entreat you to follow my advice during the rest of the journey.'

'Don't make such a fuss about a dream,' said the Prince; 'dreams are but clouds. Still, to prevent your being anxious I will promise to do as you wish.'

With that they set out on their journey.

At midday they reached the Gold Stream. When they got to the bridge the servant said: 'Let us leave the carriage here, my Prince, and walk a little way. The town is not far off and we can easily get another carriage there, for the wheels of this one are bad and will not hold out much longer.'

The Prince looked well at the carriage. He did not think it looked so unsafe as his servant said; but he had given his word and he held to it.

They got down and loaded the horses with the luggage. The Prince and his bride walked over the bridge, but the servant said he would ride the horses through the stream so as to water and bathe them.

They reached the other side without harm, and bought a new carriage in the town, which was quite near, and set off once more on their travels; but they had not gone far when they met a messenger from the King, who said to the Prince: 'His Majesty has sent your Royal Highness this beautiful carriage, so that you may make a fitting entry into your own country and amongst your own people.'

The Prince was so delighted that he could not speak. But the servant said: 'My lord, let me examine this carriage first and then you can get in if I find it is all right; otherwise we had better stay in our own.'

The Prince made no objections, and after looking the carriage well over the servant said: 'It is as bad as it is smart'; and with that he knocked it all to pieces, and they went on in the one that they had bought.

At last they reached the frontier; there another messenger was waiting for them, who said that the King had sent two splendid robes for the Prince and his bride, and begged that they would wear them for their state entry. But the servant implored the Prince to have nothing to do with them, and never gave him any peace till he had obtained leave to destroy the robes.

[image]

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT TURNS INTO STONE

The old King was furious when he found that all his arts had failed; that his son still lived and that he would have to give up the crown to him now he was married, for that was the law of the land. He longed to know how the Prince had escaped, and said: 'My dear son, I do indeed rejoice to have you safely back, but I cannot imagine why the beautiful carriage and the splendid robes I sent did not please you; why you had them destroyed.'

'Indeed, sire,' said the Prince, 'I was myself much annoyed at their destruction; but my servant had begged to direct everything on the journey and I had promised him that he should do so. He declared that we could not possibly get home safely unless I did as he told me.'

The old King fell into a tremendous rage. He called his Council together and condemned the servant to death.

The gallows was put up in the square in front of the palace. The servant was led out and his sentence read to him.

The rope was being placed round his neck, when he begged to be allowed a few last words. 'On our journey home,' he said, 'we spent the first night at an inn. I did not sleep, but kept watch all night.' And then he went on to tell what the crows had said, and as he spoke he turned to stone up to his knees. The Prince called to him to say no more as he had proved his innocence. But the servant paid no heed to him, and by the time his story was done he had turned to stone from head to foot.

Oh! how grieved the Prince was to lose his faithful servant! And what pained him most was the thought that he was lost through his very faithfulness, and he determined to travel all over the world and never rest till he found some means of restoring him to life.

Now there lived at Court an old woman who had been the Prince's nurse.

To her he confided all his plans, and left his wife, the Princess, in her care. 'You have a long way before you, my son,' said the old woman; 'you must never return till you have met with Lucky Luck. If he cannot help you no one on earth can.'

So the Prince set off to try to find Lucky Luck. He walked and walked till he got beyond his own country, and he wandered through a wood for three days, but did not meet a living being in it. At the end of the third day he came to a river near which stood a large mill. Here he spent the night. When he was leaving next morning the miller asked him: 'My gracious lord, where are you going all alone?'

And the Prince told him.

'Then I beg your Highness to ask Lucky Luck this question: Why is it that though I have an excellent mill, with all its machinery complete, and get plenty of grain to grind, I am so poor that I hardly know how to live from one day to another?'

The Prince promised to inquire, and went on his way. He wandered about for three days more, and at the end of the third day saw a little town. It was quite late when he reached it, but he could discover no light anywhere, and walked almost right through it without finding a house where he could turn in. But far away at the end of the town he saw a light in a window. He went straight to it and in the house were three girls playing a game together. The Prince asked for a night's lodging and they took him in, gave him some supper and got a room ready for him, where he slept.

Next morning when he was leaving they asked where he was going and he told them his story. 'Gracious Prince,' said the maidens, 'do ask Lucky Luck how it happens that here we are over thirty years old and no lover has come to woo us, though we are good, pretty, and very industrious.'

The Prince promised to inquire, and went on his way.

Then he came to a great forest and wandered about in it from morning to night and from night to morning before he got near the other end. Here he found a pretty stream which was different from other streams as, instead of flowing, it stood still and began to talk: 'Sir Prince, tell me what brings you into these wilds. I must have been flowing here a hundred years and more and no one has ever yet come by.'

'I will tell you,' answered the Prince, 'if you will divide yourself so that I may walk through.'

The stream parted at once, and the Prince walked through without wetting his feet; and directly he got to the other side he told his story as he had promised.

'Oh, do ask Lucky Luck,' cried the brook, 'why, though I am such a clear, bright, rapid stream, I never have a fish or any other living creature in my waters.'

The Prince said he would do so, and continued his journey.

When he got quite clear of the forest he walked on through a lovely valley till he reached a little house thatched with rushes, and he went in to rest, for he was very tired.

[image]

THE COMPLAINT OF THE THREE MAIDENS

Everything in the house was beautifully clean and tidy, and a cheerful honest-looking old woman was sitting by the fire.

'Good morning, mother,' said the Prince.

'May Luck be with you, my son. What brings you into these parts?'

'I am looking for Lucky Luck,' replied the Prince.

'Then you have come to the right place, my son, for I am his mother. He is not at home just now, he is out digging in the vineyard. Do you go too. Here are two spades. When you find him begin to dig, but don't speak a word to him. It is now eleven o'clock. When he sits down to eat his dinner sit beside him and eat with him. After dinner he will question you, and then tell him all your troubles freely. He will answer whatever you may ask.'

With that she showed him the way, and the Prince went and did just as she had told him. After dinner they lay down to rest.

All of a sudden Lucky Luck began to speak and said: 'Tell me, what sort of a man are you? for since you came here you have not spoken a word.'

'I am not dumb,' replied the young man, 'but I am that unhappy prince whose faithful servant has been turned to stone, and I want to know how to help him.'

'And you do well, for he deserves everything. Go back, and when you get home your wife will just have had a little boy. Take three drops of blood from the child's little finger, rub them on your servant's wrists with a blade of grass and he will return to life.'

'I have another thing to ask,' said the Prince, when he had thanked him. 'In the forest near here is a fine stream, but not a fish or other living creature in it. Why is this?'

'Because no one has ever been drowned in the stream. But take care, in crossing, to get as near the other side as you can before you say so, or you may be the first victim yourself.'

'Another question, please, before I go. On my way here I lodged one night in the house of three maidens. All were well-mannered, hard-working, and pretty, and yet none has had a wooer. Why was this?'

'Because they always throw out their sweepings in the face of the sun.'

'And why is it that a miller, who has a large mill with all the best machinery and gets plenty of corn to grind is so poor that he can hardly live from day to day?'

'Because the miller keeps everything for himself, and does not give to those who need it.'

The Prince wrote down the answers to his questions, took a friendly leave of Lucky Luck, and set off for home.

When he reached the stream it asked if he brought it any good news. 'When I get across I will tell you,' said he. So the stream parted; he walked through and on to the highest part of the bank. He stopped and shouted out:

'Listen, oh stream! Lucky Luck says you will never have any living creature in your waters until someone is drowned in you.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the stream swelled and overflowed till it reached the rock up which he had climbed, and dashed so far up it that the spray flew over him. But he clung on tight, and after failing to reach him three times the stream returned to its proper course. Then the Prince climbed down, dried himself in the sun, and set out on his march home.

He spent the night once more at the mill and gave the miller his answer, and by-and-by he told the three sisters not to throw out all their sweepings in the face of the sun.

The Prince had hardly arrived at home when some thieves tried to ford the stream with a fine horse they had stolen. When they were half-way across, the stream rose so suddenly that it swept them all away. From that time it became the best fishing stream in the countryside.

The miller, too, began to give alms and became a very good man, and in time grew so rich that he hardly knew how much he had.

And the three sisters, now that they no longer insulted the sun, had each a wooer within a week.

When the Prince got home he found that his wife had just got a fine little boy. He did not lose a moment in pricking the baby's finger till the blood ran, and he brushed it on the wrists of the stone figure, which shuddered all over and split with a loud noise in seven parts and there was the faithful servant alive and well.

When the old King saw this he foamed with rage, stared wildly about, flung himself on the ground and died.

The servant stayed on with his royal master and served him faithfully all

the rest of his life; and, if neither of them is dead, he is serving him still.

TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH!

Long, long ago there lived a King who was such a mighty monarch that whenever he sneezed everyone in the whole country had to say 'To your good health!' Everyone said it except the shepherd with the staring eyes, and he would not say it.

The King heard of this and was very angry, and sent for the shepherd to appear before him.

The shepherd came and stood before the throne, where the King sat looking very grand and powerful. But however grand or powerful he might be the shepherd did not feel a bit afraid of him.

'Say at once: "To my good health!"' cried the King.

'To my good health!' replied the shepherd.

'To mine—to *mine*, you rascal, you vagabond!' stormed the King.

'To mine, to *mine*, your Majesty,' was the answer.

'But to mine—to my own,' roared the King, and beat on his breast in a rage.

'Well, yes; to mine, of course, to my own,' cried the shepherd, and gently tapped his breast.

The King was beside himself with fury and did not know what to do, when the Lord Chamberlain interfered:

'Say at once—say this very moment: "To your health, your Majesty"; for if you don't say it you'll lose your life,' whispered he.

'No, I won't say it till I get the Princess for my wife,' was the shepherd's answer. Now the Princess was sitting on a little throne beside the King, her father, and she looked as sweet and lovely as a little golden dove. When she heard what the shepherd said she could not help laughing, for there is no denying the fact that this young shepherd with the staring eyes pleased her very much; indeed he pleased her better than any king's son she had yet seen.

But the King was not as pleasant as his daughter, and he gave orders to throw the shepherd into the white bear's pit.

The guards led him away and thrust him into the pit with the white bear, who had had nothing to eat for two days and was very hungry. The door of the pit was hardly closed when the bear rushed at the shepherd; but when it saw his

eyes it was so frightened that it was ready to eat itself. It shrank away into a corner and gazed at him from there, and, in spite of being so famished, did not dare to touch him, but sucked its own paws from sheer hunger. The shepherd felt that if he once removed his eyes off the beast he was a dead man, and in order to keep himself awake he made songs and sang them, and so the night went by.

Next morning the Lord Chamberlain came to see the shepherd's bones, and was amazed to find him alive and well. He led him to the King, who fell into a furious passion, and said: 'Well, you have learned what it is to be very near death, and *now* will you say: "To my good health"?'

But the shepherd answered: 'I am not afraid of ten deaths! I will only say it if I may have the Princess for my wife.'

[image]

STARING-EYES IN THE WHITE BEAR'S PIT

'Then go to your death,' cried the King; and ordered him to be thrown into the den with the wild boars. The wild boars had not been fed for a week, and when the shepherd was thrust into their den they rushed at him to tear him to pieces. But the shepherd took a little flute out of the sleeve of his jacket and began to play a merry tune, on which the wild boars first of all shrank shyly away, and then got up on their hind legs and danced gaily. The shepherd would have given anything to be able to laugh, they looked so funny; but he dared not stop playing, for he knew well enough that the moment he stopped they would fall upon him and tear him to pieces. His eyes were of no use to him here, for he could not have stared ten wild boars in the face at once; so he kept on playing and the wild boars danced very slowly, as if in a minuet, then by degrees he played faster and faster till they could hardly twist and turn quickly enough and ended by all falling over each other in a heap, quite exhausted and out of breath.

Then the shepherd ventured to laugh at last; and he laughed so long and so loud that when the Lord Chamberlain came early in the morning, expecting to find only his bones, the tears were still running down his cheeks from laughter.

As soon as the King was dressed the shepherd was again brought before him; but he was more angry than ever to think the wild boars had not torn the man to bits, and he said: 'Well, you have learned what it feels to be near ten deaths, now say: "To my good health!"'

But the shepherd broke in with, 'I do not fear a hundred deaths, and I will only say it if I may have the Princess for my wife.'

'Then go to a hundred deaths!' roared the King, and ordered the shepherd

to be thrown down the deep vault of scythes.

The guards dragged him away to a dark dungeon, in the middle of which was a deep well with sharp scythes all round it. At the bottom of the well was a little light by which one could see if anyone was thrown in whether he had fallen to the bottom.

When the shepherd was dragged to the dungeon he begged the guards to leave him alone a little while that he might look down in the pit of scythes; perhaps he might after all make up his mind to say 'To your good health' to the King. So the guards left him alone and he stuck up his long stick near the well, hung his cloak round the stick and put his hat on the top. He also hung his knapsack up inside the cloak so that it might seem to have somebody within it. When this was done he called out to the guards and said that he had considered the matter, but after all he could not make up his mind to say what the King wished. The guards came in, threw the hat and cloak, knapsack and stick all down the well together, watched to see how they put out the light at the bottom and came away, thinking that now there really was an end of the shepherd. But he had hidden in a dark corner and was laughing to himself all the time.

Quite early next morning came the Lord Chamberlain, carrying a lamp, and he nearly fell backwards with surprise when he saw the shepherd alive and well. He brought him to the King, whose fury was greater than ever, but who cried:

'Well, now you have been near a hundred deaths; will you say: "To your good health"?''

But the shepherd only gave the same answer:

'I won't say it till the Princess is my wife.'

'Perhaps after all you may do it for less,' said the King, who saw that there was no chance of making away with the shepherd; and he ordered the state coach to be got ready, then he made the shepherd get in with him and sit beside him, and ordered the coachman to drive to the silver wood. When they reached it he said: 'Do you see this silver wood? Well, if you will say, "To your good health," I will give it to you.'

The shepherd turned hot and cold by turns, but he still persisted:

'I will not say it till the Princess is my wife.'

The King was much vexed; he drove further on till they came to a splendid castle, all of gold, and then he said:

'Do you see this golden castle? Well, I will give you that too, the silver wood and the golden castle, if only you will say that one thing to me: "To your good health."'

The shepherd gaped and wondered and was quite dazzled, but he still said:

'No; I will *not* say it till I have the Princess for my wife.'

This time the King was overwhelmed with grief, and gave orders to drive

on to the diamond pond, and there he tried once more.

'Do you see this diamond pond? I will give you that too, the silver wood and the golden castle and the diamond pond. You shall have them all—all—if you will but say: "To your good health!"'

The shepherd had to shut his staring eyes tight not to be dazzled with the brilliant pond, but still he said:

'No, no; I will not say it till I have the Princess for my wife.'

Then the King saw that all his efforts were useless, and that he might as well give in, so he said:

'Well, well, it's all the same to me—I will give you my daughter to wife; but, then, you really and truly must say to me: "To your good health."'

'Of course I'll say it; why should I not say it? It stands to reason that I shall say it then.'

At this the King was more delighted than anyone could have believed. He made it known all through the country that there were to be great rejoicings, as the Princess was going to be married. And everyone rejoiced to think that the Princess, who had refused so many royal suitors, should have ended by falling in love with the staring-eyed shepherd.

There was such a wedding as had never been seen. Everyone ate and drank and danced. Even the sick were feasted, and quite tiny new-born children had presents given them.

But the greatest merry-making was in the King's palace; there the best bands played and the best food was cooked; a crowd of people sat down to table, and all was fun and merrymaking.

And when the groomsmen, according to custom, brought in the great boar's head on a big dish and placed it before the King so that he might carve it and give everyone a share, the savoury smell was so strong that the King began to sneeze with all his might.

'To your very good health!' cried the shepherd before anyone else, and the King was so delighted that he did not regret having given him his daughter.

In time, when the old King died, the shepherd succeeded him. He made a very good king and never expected his people to wish him well against their wills; but, all the same, everyone did wish him well, for they all loved him.

[image]

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