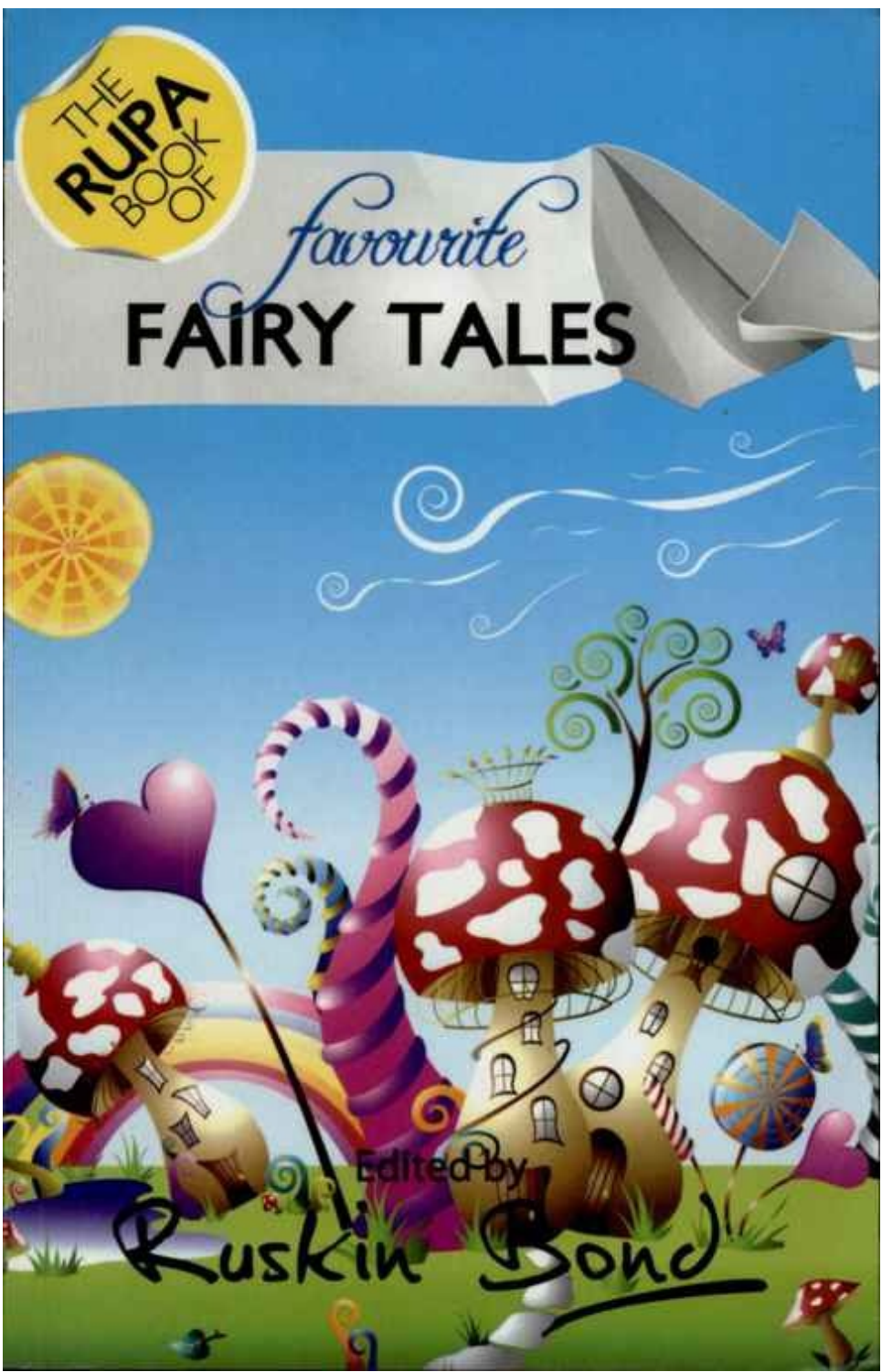


THE
RUPA
BOOK
OF

favourite
FAIRY TALES

Edited by

Ruskin Bond



THE
RUPA
BOOK OF

favourite

FAIRY TALES

Edited by

Ruskin Bond

Magical stories loved by children all over the globe, fairy tales have remained firm favourites of readers for centuries. In this collection, Ruskin Bond offers to you his favourite fairy tales, bringing together some amazing, unusual tales from all over the world—China, France, New Zealand....'From The Green Man of Sinai'—a tale from ancient Egypt, to 'Jivaka the Boy Wonder'—a tale from India—this collection is a must-read for book enthusiasts.

Ruskin Bond, well-known as one of India's best-loved and most prolific writers, has been writing novels, poetry, essays and short stories for almost half a century now. Apart from this, over the years he has expertly compiled and edited a number of anthologies, For his outstanding literary contribution, he was awarded the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957, the Sahitya Akademi award in 1992 (for English writing in India) and the Padma Shri in 1999.

Rupa Co

www.rupapublications.com

**THE RUPA BOOK OF
FAVOURITE FAIRY TALES**

By the same author:

Angry River
A Little Night Music
A Long Walk for Bina
Hanuman to the Rescue
Ghost Stories from the Raj
Strange Men, Strange Places
The India I Love
Tales and Legends from India
The Blue Umbrella
Ruskin Bond's Children's Omnibus
The Ruskin Bond Omnibus-I
The Ruskin Bond Omnibus-II
The Ruskin Bond Omnibus-III
Rupa Book of Great Animal Stories
The Rupa Book of True Tales of Mystery and Adventure
The Rupa Book of Ruskin Bond's Himalayan Tales
The Rupa Book of Great Suspense Stories
The Rupa Laughter Omnibus
The Rupa Book of Scary Stories
The Rupa Book of Haunted Houses
The Rupa Book of Travellers' Tales
The Rupa Book of Great Crime Stories
The Rupa Book of Nightmare Tales
The Rupa Book of Shikar Stories
The Rupa Book of Love Stories
The Rupa Book of Wicked Stories
The Rupa Book of Heartwarming Stories
The Rupa Book of Thrills and Spills

THE RUPA BOOK OF
FAVOURITE FAIRY TALES

Edited by
Ruskin Bond

Rupa & Co

Selection and Introduction Copyright © Ruskin Bond 2006

First Published 2006
This edition 2010
Second Impression 2011

Published by
Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj,
New Delhi 110 002

Sales Centres:

Allahabad Bengaluru Chennai
Hyderabad Jaipur Kathmandu
Kolkata Mumbai

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Typeset in 13 pts. AmericanGaramound by
Mindways Design
1410 Chiranjiv Tower
43 Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019

Printed in India by
Gopsons Papers Ltd.
A-14 Sector 60
Noida 201 301

CONTENTS

Introduction

Jivaka the Boy Wonder

A Tale from Ancient India

Sindbad the Sailor

A Tale from the Thousand and One Nights

Cinderella

A Fairy Tale from the French

The Story of the Bird Feng

A Fairy Tale from China

The Blue Boy of the Pool

A Tale from Old China

The Maori Fairy Fishermen

A Tale from New Zealand

The Dance of the Goblins

A Tale of Old Japan

The Red Spring

A Traditional Tale from China

Blue Beard

An Old Tale from the French

The Green Man of Sinai

A Tale from Ancient Egypt

Three Tales from India, as told again by Ruskin Bond

The Friendship of Heera and Lal

The Wise Parrot

Seven Brides for Seven Princes

Three Tales from the English Countryside

The Tulip Pixies

The Clicking Toad

The Green Ladies of One Tree Hill

Two Japanese Fairy Tales, as told by Lafcadio Hearn

The Old Woman who Lost her Dumpling

The Boy who Drew Cats

INTRODUCTION

So much contemporary fiction is ephemeral, quickly forgotten, while the works of yesteryear's prize-winning novelists gather dust. But the great stories of folk and fairy lore are still with us, alive and ready to be told again, for they have stood the test of generations of readers and listeners. Tales from the *Panchatantra*, or the *Arabian Nights*, or the rich folklore of Europe and Asia, continue to enchant us, both as children and as adults. The adventures of Sindbad, or Aladdin, never grow stale. Cinderella and Snow White still pull at our heart-strings. Giant killers of all sorts still stir the imagination, for as children we would all be giant killers.

The fairy story is largely traditional, but over the past two hundred years many outstanding writers have given rein to their imaginations and created their own fairy lore. Hans Anderson created many original and memorable fairy tales. Lewis Carroll with *Alice*, and J.M. Barrie with *Peter Pan*, exposed their own worlds of fantasy; even Kipling's *Jungle Book* is a fairy tale of sorts: the world of Mowgli and his animal companions could only exist in the imagination.

Wizards and wizardry have always had their attractions for the young. Clever young Harry Potter had his predecessor in Jivaka, the boy wonder, whose exploits found their way into early Indian, Arabian and even Tibetan folklore. He was the Sherlock Holmes of the East.

We learn a great deal about human nature from the great fairy stories. Greed and generosity, cowardice and courage, enmity and goodwill, despair and hope—the negative and positive traits of humankind are brought into focus in these immortal tales. False pride is punctured. Arrogance is humbled.

The success of a collection such as this also depends on a mixture of the comic and romantic. Goblins can be funny, as the tales from China and Japan demonstrate. Countryside humour comes to the fore in the old English tales. And even the story of diabolical Bluebeard has a comical element. Sindbad could take the rough with the smooth; he had a great sense of fun and adventure. And there are lessons in living to be learnt from 'The Green Man of Sinai', 'Heera and Lai' and 'The Blue Boy of the Pool.' The horrific element is never too far away either, whether it be in a nursery tale such as 'Red Riding Hood', or Eastern tales of jinns and rakshasas. Young readers are not easily scared. The struggle against sinister forces is always a strong element in a successful fairy tale.

The world has a heritage of many thousands of folk and fairy tales. This is a Very personal selection; my very own favourites.

The story of *The Tulip Pixies*' always reminds me of my great-aunt Lilian who, when I was a small boy, told me that fairies lived in cup-shaped flowers such as poppies, bluebells, buttercups, lilies, or within the petals and folds of snapdragons and roses. I would spend hours in the garden, patiently waiting for a fairy to step out from its fragrant abode.

When I failed to see one, I complained to my aunt who, without batting an eyelid, said, 'You won't see them by day, dear. During the day they remain under the roots of trees and bushes. They enter the flowers only at night.'

So I kept looking out of my window at night, hoping to glimpse a fairy or two amongst the sweet-peas, but fell asleep before the fairy revelry began.

All the same, I do believe in fairies. They are an invisible presence, made up of our sweetest thoughts and deepest emotions. Those fleeting moments of happiness that come our way, and the delight that comes to most of us in a beautiful garden—nature's garden or your very own—are conjured up by the magic wands of colour and fragrance. For the flowers themselves are fairies.

In some of these stories, readers will come across a few old-fashioned words, such as, 'yonder' (over there), 'tarry' (wait), 'nay' (no), 'hither and thither' (here and there), 'behold' (look upon). They add to the charm of the stories. Not only are such words beautiful in themselves (and more expressive than their modern counterparts), they also give us a flavour of ancient times and faraway fairy lands. Let us preserve them too.

Ruskin Bond

JIVAKA THE BOY WONDER

A Tale from Ancient India

King Bimbisara, that mighty warrior whose fame has spread far and wide, had three sons, the youngest of whom was named Jivaka. The eldest sons resembled their father. They had great muscular strength, were skilled in the use of arms, and displayed courage whether in battle against the fierce hill tribes or when hunting lions and tigers. Jivaka was a gentle youth, who took no pleasure in warlike sports, or in the society of warriors. He loved to walk about alone, and he rarely spoke unless he was spoken to.

The king was greatly troubled about Jivaka, and spoke to him, saying: 'Have you any ambition in life? You never join your brothers either when they engage in sports or when they go into the jungle to hunt wild beasts.'

Said Jivaka: 'It is my desire, O honoured father, to become a learned man, and to earn my living as a physician.'

'It is not usual for kings' sons to become physicians.'

'But, O father, why should not the son of a king become a learned man?'

'I grant your wish,' the king said, 'but, as you do not require to earn your living, I cannot understand why you want to leave me. You are not able to take care of yourself like your elder brothers.'

Said Jivaka: 'I shall disguise myself, and go into another kingdom where no man will know who I am.'

'I shall allow you to go,' said the king. 'The quest of wisdom is a noble one. Wherever you go, behave modestly. Honour those who know what you do not know. Learn from everyone, observe everything, and use your intelligence.'

Jivaka bade farewell to the king, his father, to the queen, his mother, and to his brothers. He disguised himself, left the palace under cover of night, and walked a great distance until he came to the house of a Brahman. The Brahman welcomed him, and said: 'Who are you, and what do you seek?'

Said Jivaka: 'I desire to become a learned man.'

'Tarry with me for a time,' the Brahman said, 'and be my disciple.'

Jivaka abode for a year in the Brahman's house, and when he had learned everything the Brahman could teach him, he asked leave to take his departure.

Before he went away the Brahman said: 'Go to the hills and live a time among the fierce tribes that dwell there. They have great skill as trackers. Learn all they know, and you will benefit by their knowledge. Then go next to my brother, who is a great physician, and has skill in opening skulls to cure diseases of the head. When you have learned all he can teach you, go in search of the green jewel, which shines like a lamp, and will enable you to find out from what malady a sick man is suffering. I bless you and bid you farewell, O my son.'

Jivaka went away and did as the Brahman advised him. He dwelt for a time among the fierce hillmen. They received him kindly, because they saw that he was a young man of great modesty and kindly heart. In time they instructed him how to track wild beasts, and how to observe the tracks of every living creature on roadways, in the forests, and across wide plains. He spent three years among the hillmen, and he acquired great skill as a tracker.

After leaving the hillmen, who sorrowed to part with him, he dwelt with the Brahman physician, and learned how to treat wounds and open skulls. He remained with this Brahman for two years. The old physician became very fond of Jivaka because he was an excellent student, and soon became very skilful. When the young man bade him farewell, he said: 'You must now search for the green jewel, which is hidden in a young tree, the bark of which always sheds a fine dust. The wood of this tree is as heavy as iron.'

Jivaka turned his face southwards towards his father's kingdom, and travelled across wide plains and deep forests. One morning he reached the hut of an old Brahman. This holy man had just recited his morning prayers, and was sitting on the side of the roadway in front of his dwelling.

Jivaka sat down beside him, and they spoke to one another for a time regarding holy things. Then the young man told the story of his travels, but he did not tell who he was.

Said the Brahman: 'I gather from what you say that you are a keen observer. Now, I shall put your skill to test. Can you tell me if any living creature went past me this morning?'

'I shall soon tell you,' the young man said with a smile.

Jivaka walked along the road, and after a little time returned and sat down. Then he said: 'A man went past here this morning carrying wood. The burden was too heavy for him, because he was not only weak but also very thin.'

'You speak truly,' said the Brahman.

'Afterwards an elephant went past. It was a female, and a woman led it. The elephant was crippled, having injured its left hind foot, and its right eye was blind.'

'You speak truly,' said the Brahman.

'An hour went past, and then a man came driving a bullock-cart. He was in a hurry, and whipped the bullocks, and he had a dog which leapt about and barked at

them.'

'If you had been sitting here beside me,' said the Brahman, 'you could not have seen more.'

'Then,' said Jivaka, 'a thief crept out of the wood. He stood still for a few minutes when he caught sight of you, but as you were praying with closed eyes he ran past, and you did not observe him. As he has been wounded he cannot have gone far.'

'I know nothing of the thief,' said the Brahman.

He had no sooner spoken than three soldiers rushed out of the wood and leapt on to the roadway. They looked first to the left and then to the right, but were unable to make up their minds which way they should go.

Jivaka watched them, and said: 'The thief entered the king's palace during the night, and these are three of the sentinels. They followed the thief, and saw him in the forest, where one wounded him with an arrow; but the fellow managed to hide himself, and lead them astray after he had bound his wound.'

Seeing the Brahman and Jivaka sitting on the side of the road, the sentinels hastened towards them and spoke, saying: 'Have you seen a man passing this way?'

The Brahman shook his head, but Jivaka said: 'He went past less than an hour ago. He is the thief you seek, and has been wounded by an arrow. How came it about that you allowed him to escape in the wood?'

'Have you spoken to him?' asked one of the sentinels.

'No,' Jivaka answered, 'I have not even seen him.'

Then how do you know that we are pursuing a thief, and that he has been wounded?'

'I shall explain to you afterwards. Hasten onwards to the left, and you shall find him not far from here.'

'You know more about the man than you will confess to,' said one of the sentinels. 'You had better, therefore, come with us.'

'As you will,' answered Jivaka. He rose up to go with the sentinels, and, turning to the Brahman, said: 'Wait here until I return.'

Jivaka walked in front of the sentinels, gazing at the ground. They began to ply him with questions, but he said: 'Keep silent, lest the thief should hear you and take alarm. I shall answer all your questions when we find him.'

They went on together in silence after that. In time they reached the ruins of an old house. Jivaka placed his right hand over his mouth as a sign to the men not to speak. Then he pointed towards the house. The sentinels crept forward stealthily, and, entering the house, found the thief lying in a corner fast asleep. They seized and bound him, and carried him outside.

'Where is the jewel that you have stolen?' asked a sentinel.

The thief answered, saying: 'What jewel? I do not know what you mean. Why have you seized me and bound me?'

'You stole the magic jewel from the king's house.'

'Oh, no! You are mistaken. You have followed the wrong man.'

'It was you whom we pursued in the forest. You were wounded by an arrow in the thigh. I see you have bound the wound.'

'It was I whom you wounded,' the thief said, 'but I am innocent. I was sleeping in the forest when I heard you coming. Thinking you were robbers I fled away, and when you wounded me I hid myself, because I dreaded that you desired to slay me for some reason or other.'

The man seemed to be speaking the truth, and one of the sentinels said: 'If this is not the thief, we shall be punished for our folly.'

Jivaka did not say a word. He knelt beside the man, who had been laid on a grassy bank, and examined his hands and feet. Then he undid the bandage on his thigh, and, having placed healing leaves on the wound, he bound it skilfully. The prisoner thanked him and blessed him, saying: 'My wound does not pain me now, O Physician.'

'Do you know this man?' a sentinel asked, speaking to Jivaka.

Said Jivaka: I have never set eyes upon him before, but I shall tell you what I know about him. He is a potter, and last night entered the palace garden and climbed an asoka tree. He concealed himself among its branches until it was nigh to midnight. Then he crept down and entered the palace through the servants' quarters, knowing his way well, because he has often sold earthenware pots to the chief cook. In the darkness he made his way to the room in which the jewel is kept. The room is covered with deerskin rugs. When he found the jewel he left the palace through a window, and, grasping a trailing plant, slipped down to the ground, but when he was near the ground the plant snapped and he fell. For a time he lay stunned on the ground. Then, hearing cries of alarm being raised within the palace, he ran through the garden, climbed the wall, and hastened towards the forest.

'By this time the moon had come out from behind the clouds, and you caught sight of him and followed him. In the forest you shot many arrows, and one wounded him in the thigh. He concealed himself amidst the undergrowth, and when you had gone past him he rose up, having bound his wound, and made his way towards the highway. He saw a Brahman praying in front of his hut and ran past him. As his bandage had become loose he readjusted it, but, having lost much blood, he found he was not able to go far. Seeing this ruined house, he made up his mind to hide in it, but before entering it he hid the jewel in a clay-hole.'

The thief gasped with wonder as Jivaka spoke. 'You are a magician,' he said.

Jivaka spoke sternly, saying: 'Now lead us to the spot in the clay-hole where you have hidden the jewel.'

The sentinels unbound the man and he rose. He led them to a clay-hole behind the ruined house, and, lifting a stone, took up a ball of wet clay, which he broke in two.

The jewel dropped out, and Jivaka caught it and handed it to the chief sentinel.

The sentinels and the thief marvelled greatly to meet so wise a man as Jivaka, and they paid him great deference as they walked with him back to the place where they had left the Brahman. The Brahman greeted them and said: 'You have found the thief and the jewel also.'

Said the chief sentinel: 'You speak truly; but we should not have been successful had not this wise young man gone with us. Pray tell me,' he said, addressing Jivaka, 'what is your name?'

Jivaka gave him a strange name, and said: 'Now that I have served you well, allow me to bid you farewell.'

The sentinels bowed and took their departure. Then Jivaka sat down beside the Brahman.

Said the Brahman: 'Now tell me all that took place.'

Jivaka told him. Then the Brahman said: 'Now tell me how you knew that there passed along the roadway this morning a thin man carrying wood, a crippled elephant led by a woman, and a bullock-cart driven by a man who whipped the bullocks, and was accompanied by a dog which leapt about and barked at the slow animals?'

Jivaka answered, saying: 'It has always been my custom to ' make close observations. All that I told you I saw on the empty roadway. I saw the footprints of the man who carried wood. He walked heavily on his heels, and his footprints showed that his feet were thin. I knew, therefore, that he was a thin man. As he walked he swayed from side to side. I knew, therefore, that his burden was heavy; and I knew he carried wood because the dust of the bark is sprinkled along the highway in his tracks.'

Tell me how you knew that the elephant came along after the man had passed.'

'Because, O master, some of the man's footprints had been trodden over by the elephant.'

'How did you know that the elephant was a female?'

'A male elephant leaves round footprints, and a female elephant leaves oblong footprints. The footprints of this elephant are oblong. Observe them for yourself.'

'How did you know that the elephant was crippled?'

'Because it pressed lightly with the left hind foot, which has been injured.'

'How did you know its right eye was blind?'

'The elephant cropped grass from the bank as it went along, but it cropped on the left side only, and when the woman led it to the other side of the road it did not crop at all.'

'How did you know that a woman led it?'

'A woman's footprints are different from those of a man.'

'Now tell me how you knew that the bullock-cart followed after the elephant?'

'The tracks of the cart crossed some of the footprints of the elephant.'

'And how did you know that the driver was in a hurry and that he whipped the bullocks?'

'Because the distances between the bullocks' hoof-marks were so unequal. When the driver whipped them, they sprang forward at a quickened pace; their tracks were then made deeper and they were closer together. I knew by the tracks of the dog that it leapt about and barked at the bullocks. Having pondered over the tracks, I saw, as in a vision, an angry and impatient driver who made the bullocks quicken their pace by whipping them, and also urged his dog to bark at them.'

'It seems all so simple,' said the Brahman. 'Still, I cannot understand how you knew so much about the thief. How did you find out that he had hidden in a tree, and, entering the palace through the servants' quarters, made his way to a room covered with deerskin rugs? Tell me also how you came to know that he went through a window and slid down a creeper which broke, so that he fell to the ground and lay stunned there, and how you found out that he fled through the forest, passed this spot when my eyes were closed, ran onwards towards the clay-hole, where he hid the jewel, and then concealed himself in the ruined house?'

Said Jivaka: 'I shall tell you, O Brahman, how I discovered the thief's secret. First of all I observed his footprints leading from the wood. He tiptoed across the tracks of the bullocks. Therefore I knew that he came after the bullock-cart had passed. Three times he paused because he saw you. Then he crossed the road and ran lightly. In the spots where he paused, his footprints were impressed fully and clearly. When he ran he left the marks of the forepart of his feet only. I knew, therefore, that he was a guilty man. He did not want you to see him, and I concluded you did not see him because your eyes were closed in prayer.'

'Wonderful!' exclaimed the Brahman. 'Now tell me how you came to know about his doings last night after you had tracked him to the ruined house?'

Said Jivaka: 'I examined very closely his hair, his body, his hands, and fingernails, his legs, his toes, and his toenails. I also examined his wound and the bandage that was wrapped round it.'

'And what did you see?'

'I knew he was a potter because the palm of his right hand was smooth, while the palm of his left hand was rough. Potters turn their wheels with their left hands, and the wheel hardens the skin. I saw seeds of the asoka tree in his hair, and knowing that no asoka tree is to be found near the king's palace except in the garden, and that the seeds would not have fallen in his hair unless he had pressed his head among the branches, I concluded he had climbed the tree after scaling the wall; he would not have dared to enter through the gate, which is guarded by sentinels; therefore he must have climbed the wall. I saw red sand in his toenails. Red sand is strewn daily round the servants' quarters, and, as he is a potter, I concluded he had been in the

habit of selling pots to the chief cook. By making regular visits to the palace, and hearing the conversation of the servants, he must have learned where the jewel was kept.'

'I follow your reasoning, O wise young man,' said the Brahman.

Jivaka continued: The potter was greatly excited when he entered the palace. Men who are excited perspire freely. As I examined his body I saw that there were hairs from deerskins on it. There were also hairs under the upper part of his toenails. He must have lain on the rugs for a time. Hairs clung to his body-cloth and the bandage with which he had bound his wound.'

'But how did you know,' asked the Brahman, 'that he left the room through a window?'

Said Jivaka: 'There were green and purple stains on both his hands. These came from the crushed leaves and blossoms. Besides, two of his fingers on the left hand and one on the right were cut as if by a cord. He must have slipped down quickly to have so cut his fingers. Anyone who slides down so frail a thing as a creeper is sure to break it; so I examined his body carefully and saw bruises on his left hip, his left elbow, and his left ear. I concluded therefore that he had fallen, and was made certain of this when I saw black earth in his hair on the left side of his head. He must have lain for some time on the ground, because the earth was caked on his hair. That was because the earth was damp with dew. He would not have lain there unless he had been stunned.'

'Your reasoning is wonderful. It delights my heart!' said the Brahman.

Jivaka continued: 'I saw that there were scratches on his knees, and that they were inflicted after he had lain on the deerskin rugs, because some hairs had been pressed into them. I concluded he had climbed the wall hurriedly. I also noticed that three of his toenails on the right foot had been bent inward, and as there was red sand inside them I knew they had been bent after he had left the palace. Of course it was to be expected that he would climb the wall, seeing there were sentinels at the gate, but he would not have climbed hurriedly unless he had been alarmed.'

'How did you know,' asked the Brahman, 'that the moon rose after he had scaled the wall?'

'He would not have been seen otherwise. Men do not shoot arrows in the dark, and this man was wounded by an arrow.'

'No wonder the thief confessed his guilt,' the Brahman said. 'He must have thought you were a magician. The only thing that puzzles me now is, how you knew the man had hidden the jewel in the clay-hole, because you never went near it.'

'Passing along the way a few days ago,' explained Jivaka, 'I saw the clay-hole behind the ruined house. There are other ruined houses on the other side of the clay-hole. Once upon a time several potters lived with their wives and families in these houses, but finding the clay had become of inferior quality they deserted their little

village and went elsewhere. This man, being a potter, was probably born in the house in which he hid himself, and being a potter he could think of no better place than a clay-hole in which to hide something of value, for no man, except a potter, ever thinks of entering a dirty clay-hole.'

'I am glad you have come this way,' the Brahman said. 'Tarry with me and let us converse together. It is many years since I met with a man of such great intelligence.'

Said Jivaka: 'I must walk to the nearest inn, because I wish to purchase the wood that the thin man is carrying.'

'Why do you wish to purchase it?' the Brahman asked.

'Come with me and you will know.'

The Brahman walked with Jivaka towards the inn, and when they reached it they saw the thin man sitting in front of it. He was very poor, and was waiting for someone to offer him food.

Jivaka spoke to the man, saying: 'Will you sell the wood you have been carrying?'

'Yes, master,' answered the beggar.

'Name your price, then.'

The man named his price, and Jivaka paid it, although the Brahman thought it far too high.

Jivaka carried the wood back to the Brahman's hut, and examined each piece very carefully. Then he split one piece and took out a green jewel. 'At last I have found it,' he said. 'I knew by the dust that fell from the bark that the thin man had found and cut down the tree I had been searching for.'

The Brahman was greatly surprised. 'What jewel is this?' he asked.

Said Jivaka: 'He who possesses it will become a great physician. When it is placed near a sick man it will shine like a lamp and reveal what malady he is suffering from.'

'I should like to see it tested,' the Brahman said.

He had not long to wait, for soon afterwards a beggar came along the road wailing and beating his head.

'What ails you, poor man?' asked the Brahman.

'Alas! O master, my head pains me as if someone were stabbing it with a dagger.'

Said Jivaka: 'Allow me to examine your head.'

The beggar sat down, and Jivaka placed the green jewel on his head. Then he said: 'A centipede has crawled in through your ear, and is eating its way through to your brain.'

'Oh, cure me, master!' cried the beggar.

Jivaka made the man dig a hole and go into it. The earth was then heaped up to his neck, so that he could not move. When this was done, Jivaka opened his skull, and, seizing the centipede with pincers, took it out. Then he closed the skull, put

healing herbs on the wound, and bandaged the man's head. When the beggar was taken out of the hole, and given food to eat, he said that his pain had gone. He thanked Jivaka, and went on his way.

'If the king hears of your skill,' said the Brahman, *he will appoint you his chief physician.'

He had hardly spoken the words when the soldiers who had arrested the thief came hastily towards his hut. The chief sentinel spoke to Jivaka, saying: 'His Majesty the king, having heard from me of your wonderful powers of observation, desires to see you and converse with you. Come with us now to the palace.'

'Very well,' Jivaka answered, 'I shall go.'

He bade farewell to the Brahman, who was grieved to part with him, and went to the palace with the soldiers.

Now the king suffered from a tumour which grew out of his head, and his physicians were unable to deal with it. When Jivaka was brought before him, he said: 'Have you knowledge of the art of healing?'

Jivaka bowed, and said that he had. He spoke in a strange voice, because he perceived that the king, his father, did not recognise him.

First of all Jivaka prepared a ripening poultice, which caused the tumour to grow larger. Then he used the green jewel, and saw that he could deal with the tumour without further delay. He asked the king to go into his bath. When His Majesty did so, Jivaka poured many jugfuls of hot water, in which herbs had been soaked, over the tumour. Then he touched the tumour with his lancet, and poured more water over it, until the tumour emptied itself. The king felt no pain, and did not know that the lancet had been used.

Next Jivaka applied healing herbs, which caused the wound to close quickly and become quite whole.

'Now feel your head,' Jivaka said.

The king passed his hand over his head, and was greatly astonished to find that the tumour had been taken away. He called for a mirror, but although he looked closely into it he was unable to find the exact spot where the tumour had been.

After the king had partaken of a meal, he called his ministers together, and said: 'See, the young physician has cured me. I shall appoint him chief physician.'

Jivaka was called before the king, who spoke to him, saying: 'I appoint you my chief physician, O honourable young man. I shall also reward you because of the help you gave to my soldiers, when they were searching for the thief who stole my precious jewel. I pray you, tell me who you are and whence you come, and how you have become so learned a man, although still quite young.'

Said Jivaka: 'O King, I have become a learned man because I have obeyed the command of my father. He told me to travel through the world alone in search of wisdom. He bade me observe everything and use my intelligence.'

'Who is your father?' asked the king.

Jivaka prostrated himself at His Majesty's feet, and said: 'Behold! O King, I am your son, Jivaka.'

The king was overcome with joy. He raised his son and embraced him, and said: 'This is indeed a happy day, for once more I hold in my arms the son of my heart, whom I have long , yearned for.'

Jivaka was appointed the king's chief minister as well as his chief physician, and he lived happily ever afterwards, beloved and admired by all.

SINDBAD THE SAILOR

A Tale from the Thousand and One Nights

O King of the Age, as thou biddest me re-tell the strangest adventure of Sindbad the Sailor in all his marvellous voyages, I will name it without hesitation: it is that of Sindbad's fifth voyage, wherein he was in fearful peril from that great bird, the rukh, and afterwards was ridden almost to the point of death by the Old Man of the Sea.

But first let me call to thy recollection how Sindbad the Sailor came to tell his story to Sindbad the Landsman, for herein lies much meaning, O King.

In the time of the Caliph Harun-er-Rashid, in the palmy days of Baghdad, there lived and slaved a poor, discontented porter, whose moments of rest and leisure were most pleasantly occupied in grumbling at his hard lot. Others lived in luxury and splendour while he bore heavy burdens for a pittance. There was no justice in the world, said he, when some were born in the lap of wealth, and others toiled a lifetime for the price of a decent burial.

This discontented porter would run apace with his burden to gain time for a rest upon the doorstep of some mansion of the rich, where, a master in contrasts, he would draw comparisons between his own lot and that of the rich man dwelling within. Loudly would he call on Destiny to mark the disparity, the incongruity, the injustice of the thing; and not until he had drunk deep at the fountain of discontent would he take up his burden and trudge on, greatly refreshed.

One day, in pursuance of this strange mode of recreation, he chanced to select the doorstep of a wealthy merchant named Sindbad the Sailor, and there, through the open window, he heard as it were the chink of endless gold. The song, the music, the dance, the laughter of the guests—all seemed to shine with the light of jewels and the lustre of golden bars. Immediately he began to revel in his favourite woe. He wrung his hands and cried aloud: 'Allah! Can such things be? Look on me, toiling all day for a piece of barley bread; and then look on him who knows no toil, yet eateth peacocks' tongues from golden dishes, and drinketh the wine of Paradise from a jewelled cup. What hath he done to obtain from thee a lot so agreeable? And what have I done to deserve a life so wretched?'

As one who flings back a difficult question, and then bangs the door behind him,

so the porter rose and shouldered his burden to continue his way, when a servant came running from within, saying that his master had sharp ears and had invited the porter into his presence for a fuller hearing of his woes.

As soon as the porter came before the wealthy owner of the house, seated among his guests and surrounded by the utmost luxury and magnificence, he was greeted with the question: 'What is thy name?' 'My name is Sindbad,' replied the porter, greatly abashed. At this the host clapped his hands and laughed loudly. 'Knowest thou that my name is also Sindbad?' he cried. 'But I am Sindbad the Sailor, and I have a mind to call thee Sindbad the Landsman, for, as thou lovest a contrast, so do I.'

'True,' said the porter, 'I have never been upon the sea.'

'Then, Sindbad the Landsman,' was the quick rejoinder, 'thou hast no right to complain of thy hard lot. Come, be seated, and, when thou hast refreshed thyself with food and wine, I will relate to thee what at present I have told no man—the tale of my perils and hardships on the seas and in other lands—in order to show you that the great wealth I possess was not acquired without excessive toil and terrible danger. I have made seven voyages: the first thou shalt hear presently—nay, if thou wilt accept my hospitality for seven days, I will tell thee the history of one each day.'

Thus it was, O King, that Sindbad the Sailor, surrounded by a multitude of listeners, came to tell the story of his voyages to Sindbad the Landsman. Now on the fifth day he spoke as follows:

Having sworn that my fourth voyage should be my last, I dwelt in the bosom of my family for many months in the utmost joy and happiness. But soon my heart grew restless in my bosom, and I longed again for the perils of the sea, and the adventures found only in other lands. Moreover, I had become inspired of a new ambition to possess a ship of my own in which to sail afar, and even to greater profit than on my former voyages.

I arose, therefore, and gathered together in Baghdad many bales of rich merchandise, and departed for the city of El-Basrah, where, in the river's mouth, I soon selected a splendid vessel. I purchased this and secured a master and a crew, over whom I set my own trusty servants. Then, together with a goodly company of merchants as passengers, their bales and mine being placed in the hold, I set sail.

Fair weather favoured us as we passed from island to island, bartering everywhere for gain, as merchants do, until at length we came to an island which seemed never to have known the fretful heel of man. Here we landed, and, almost immediately, on sweeping our gaze over the interior, we espied a strange thing, on which all our attention and wonder soon became centred.

There in the distance shone beneath the sun a great white dome. Loud was the talk among us as to the meaning of this. Some said the island could not be uninhabited since a mosque was built upon it; others contended that, as the island was

uninhabited, the structure could not be a mosque. A third party, cooling their minds in the shade of the trees, preferred idly that it was probably some huge white rock smoothed and rounded by wind and weather; yet even these, when the discussion became heated, were constrained by curiosity to follow as we bent our steps inland to discover what this strange object really was.

As we drew nearer and nearer, the wind-and-weather merchants lost in countenance what they gained in speed, for the mystery deepened: it was very clear that no mere wind and weather could have fashioned such a perfect, glistening dome. Nearer still, and then we all ran our utmost, and arrived breathless at the base of the marvellous structure. Gigantic and perfect in form, this must be some wonderful dome built to the glory of Allah, and fashioned in such a way that, with its lower half embedded in earth and its upper half rising in the air, it typified at once the division and the union of heaven and earth. A learned merchant of our company—one who had travelled greatly in the further realms of Ind—raised his voice and assured us that the object represented the mysterious Hiranyagarbha—the Egg of All Things; whereupon another, to test this theory in derision, struck violently with his hatchet upon the shell of this supposed egg. 'If this be the egg of Hiranya—something,' he shouted, 'let us get to the yolk!'

Following his words, and his blow, the strangest thing happened. The great dome seemed to shake itself as if something within it had awakened to life. We stood in awe and waited. Then, as a chicken comes forth out of its shell, there came forth, with a terrific rending of the dome, a mighty fledgling having the aspect of that monstrous bird, the rukh, which, when grown, darkens the sky with its wings.

'It is indeed the young of the rukh,' I cried, for well I knew the bird. 'Beware!'

At first we were terrified beyond measure, but soon some among us, seeing the helplessness of the creature, set upon it with their hatchets, and, though I pleaded with them to forbear, it was quickly slain and dismembered.

'Woe!' I cried. 'Ye have slain the offspring of the rukh, and, as the time of hatching was near, the parents will come, and there will be trouble.'

But they heeded my words so little that they roasted and ate the choicest parts of the young rukh and left the remains as a sign of contempt. I, who live to tell the tale, O Landsman, did not eat. In vain I entreated them to conceal all traces of their foul crime, even as they had concealed the choicest portions in their capacious stomachs. In vain I told them what I had learnt by costly peril at the hands of the giant rukh, foretelling the dire vengeance of those fierce monsters of the sky. Indeed, from the experiences of a former voyage, as you know, I had every reason to fear them. But the merchants, smacking their lips at the memory of their repast, laughed in my face. 'We have dined,' said they, and your fearsome rukhs cannot touch us.' To this I returned no word, but a stern face; for I knew the power of the rukh.

We returned towards the ship, but we had no sooner reached the seashore when

we saw the master making signs of wild alarm. Shouting loudly to us to make all haste he pointed towards the horizon. He had sailed those seas before, and he knew, as did I, the sign of a terrible danger. There in the distance were two black clouds, growing rapidly larger.

'A storm!' cried some among us.

'Nay, nay,' I answered. 'I would it were, even a twofold storm. Storms come not so. Yonder come the rukh and his mate to attend the hatching of their young. Aboard! aboard! We may yet escape.'

As soon as I had given this warning there were hurry and scurry among the merchants. The flesh of the young rukh seemed to have turned within them, and it now cried out for vengeance. With all haste we made our way on board the ship.

'What have ye done?' cried the master in alarm.

They were silent.

'They have roasted and eaten the young of the rukh,' I said. The master wrung his hands and his face blanched. Then he sprang to action.

'All sail! All sail!' he cried out. 'Woe be on us if we escape not quickly. They know not yet, but when they learn they will rest not until—'

Instantly the crew leapt to the ropes, while the merchants stood around in terror, regarding the two black clouds as they drew rapidly towards us, side by side. Now they loomed nearer as monstrous birds, and presently they passed overhead, darkening the sky as they craned their gigantic necks and looked down upon us with suspicion.

With the utmost speed the ship was put upon her way, the while we watched the rukhs hover and settle inland. We were already speeding fast for the open sea when we saw them rise and circle in the air, heard their hoarse complaint and clamour for vengeance, and noted their swift swoop towards the rocky heights of the interior. We gave a sigh of relief. We thought we had escaped, so well did the breeze serve us; but we had forgotten, or did not yet know, the power of wings.

Soon there arose from the far heights of the island two gigantic shapes. As they moved towards us they grew bigger and bigger, and now we heard the beating of their wings, ever louder and louder on our ears. They were coming, the rukhs, to wreak vengeance; and, now we saw it with fear, in the talons of each was a granite crag torn from the bedrock of the island. Their purpose was as plain as it was terrible.

We cowered as they drew overhead. They circled round the ship, each clutching its mighty rock and giving forth cries of rage and fury. Now they hovered above us, and one let go his missile of destruction. Our steersman, bent on taking the vessel this way and then that, evaded the falling crag, which fell a caster's throw astern. The ship danced high on the mountain waves raised by the falling mass, and then fell as deep into the watery valleys between them. We thought our time had come, but it was

not yet, though it was soon to be. No sooner had we come to rest on a level tide than the other rukh hovered above us and dropped its crag. It struck the ship in the middle and split it to pieces.

In that moment all was a swirl of confusion. The crash of the rock, the cries of the giant birds, the wash of the waves on my ears—these were the last things I knew. It seems to me that I gripped some wreckage, and, lying thereupon in a swoon, was borne onwards by the tide to the shores of an island; for, when I awoke to life, I found myself on a sandy slope, with my head on the high-water mark and my feet against the stranded wreckage that had supported me.

As if from death's door I crawled up and away, gaining strength as I went, until I reached a point from which I could view the nature of the island. Allah! What a paradise it was! Streams of fresh, pure water wimpled down between banks where grew the lordliest trees laden with the rarest fruits. The sight gave me fresh strength. I rose and wandered from stream to stream, drinking the cool water and plucking and eating the delicious fruit. But, O Sindbad the Landsman, though I knew it not, there was a vile snake in this paradise, as I was soon to discover to my cost.

Coming at length to a stream of some width, I sat down upon a mossy bank with my back against a tree to watch the rippling current purling by. Lulled by this and the songs of the birds, I became drowsy and turned to find a soft bed on the moss, when I caught sight of an object which arrested my attention. There, sitting against the tree next to mine, was an aged man of comely and benevolent aspect.

I regarded him intently. What a kindly old man he looked, with his flowing silver locks and his ample white beard! The more did I consider him one of nature's innocent children from the fact that his body was clothed from the waist downwards with the green leaves of trees—a raiment neatly threaded together on the fibres of some plant. As I scrutinised his appearance intently for some moments, I felt that here was one of the simplest and kindest dispositions, who knew not the meaning of wrong. I arose and advanced towards him, but, when I spoke, he shook his head sadly and sighed. Alas! was he deprived of the power of speech? To make certain, I saluted him, saying, 'Allah be with thee!' But he merely bowed his head, making no other reply. All my questions brought never a word: he was, indeed, dumb. But he could make intelligent signs, and I perceived by these that it was his greatest wish to be carried across the stream. Seeing that he was old and infirm as well as dumb, I readily consented. My heart was sorry for him, and I stooped down and told him to climb upon my shoulders. This he did with alacrity, and so I carried him over the stream.

But, when I stooped for him to dismount on the further bank, he showed no manner of inclination to do so. On the contrary, he gripped me with both hands round my throat, and beat me violently in the ribs with his heels. What with the throttling, and the hard blows with his heels, I swooned away; but, notwithstanding,

when I regained my senses I found the old fellow still clinging like a leech to my neck. And now he belaboured me so unmercifully that I was forced to rise against my will.

Once on my feet I determined to shake him off, but he rode me well, and even my efforts to crush him against the trunks of trees were of no avail. I ran hither and thither wildly, employing every trick against him, but all in vain: he kept his seat, and with hand and heel punished me severely. In less than an hour I was broken to the will of this truculent fellow, and he guided me hither and thither among the fruit trees, pulling me up when he would gather fruit and eat, and urging me on again when he so desired.

In this fashion he stuck to me all that day, and such was his behaviour that I forswore my first opinion of him. He was by no means the gentle being I had thought him. Though he clung so close we were not friends, nor likely to become such. I was his bond-slave, and he ceased not to remind me of it by his utterly vile behaviour. When I dallied he thrashed me unmercifully with his feet; when I thought to brush him off against the overhanging branch of a tree he would duck his head and throttle me with his long bony hands. At night, when I slept exhausted, I woke to find him digging his heels into me in his sleep; indeed, once it seemed that I had thwarted him in a dream, for he thrashed me and treated me abominably. I thought my end had come.

Thus for many days and nights was I beridden by this abandoned fellow, forced hither and thither at his will, with never a word from him, though he had many from me. So great was my agony that I turned upon myself, crying, 'By the living Allah! Never again will I do a kindness to any; never again will I show mercy!'

Long I pondered by what subtle trick I might unseat him. I thought of many things, but dared not try one of them, lest it should fail and I be punished unmercifully. But at last Allah took pity on me and threw a strange opportunity in my way.

It chanced that, one day, while I was being goaded about the island, we came upon a place where pumpkins grew. They were ripe and luscious, and, while the old fellow was eating greedily, I bethought me of a fashion of our own country. I gathered some of the largest, and, having scooped them out, I filled them with the juice squeezed from grapes which I found growing in abundance nearby. Then I sealed them up and set them in the sun. In this way I obtained in a few days a good quantity of pure wine.

The old man did not notice my curious behaviour—he was always engaged in eating pumpkins—until one day I drank so deep of my new-made wine that I became exalted, and danced and rollicked about with him among the trees. With fist and heel he sought to sober me, requiring to know the reason of my merriment. At length I took him to the spot where I had laid my pumpkins in the sun, and then, laughing

and dancing again, signed to him that they contained pure wine.

The idea was new to him, but, when he understood that I had drunk with such pleasant results, he insisted on drinking also. So I unsealed one of the pumpkins and handed it to him, whereupon he drank and smacked his lips. Then he drank again and again and again, with evident satisfaction, until the wine taking effect, and the pumpkin being empty, he broke it over my head and bade me hand him another. This also he emptied and broke in the same manner. Being by this time in a state of vile intoxication, he thrashed me thrice round the open space, and then in among the trees, behaving in the wildest manner possible, rocking and rolling from side to side with laughter.

Now I had not drunk so much of the wine that I could not see my chance. I adopted the utmost docility, and, never letting him suspect my purpose, contrived to regain the place where I had laid the pumpkins in the sun. As I had expected, he demanded another, and I gave it him. This time he drank half the wine and emptied the remainder over my face—so vile was this creature of sin. Then I perceived with joy that he was losing control of his limbs. He swayed from side to side, and his head lolled. Slowly I unwound his legs from my neck, and then, with a vicious twist, I flung him on the ground.

As I looked upon him lying there, my joy turned to uncontrollable fury. I thought of what I had endured at the hands of this aged villain. Should I allow him to live he would surely serve some other poor shipwrecked traveller in the same abominable fashion. The island would be well rid of such an inhuman monster. Without another thought I slew him then and there. May his accursed spirit be ridden forever by one worse than himself!

I went forth upon the island like one walking on air. Never was mortal man rid of so heavy a burden as I had just flung from me. Even the very atmosphere of the place seemed light and joyous with relief. The streams rippled more merrily, the birds sang more sweetly, the dreamy trees sighed with content as if at a great and long-desired riddance. They all seemed to feel that this terrible old man no longer oppressed them: his legs were no longer round their necks, his masterful feet and hands no longer gripped them in a vice. Rid—all was rid of an intolerable burden. Having found a shady spot, I sank down on the bank of a stream and wiped my brow, thanking Allah devoutly for this sweet deliverance.

For long days thereafter I sat by the seashore, scanning the ocean for the speck of a sail. But none came in sight, and I was abandoning myself to the thought that Allah had rescued me from one peril only to consign me into the hands of another—that of death by desolation—when one morning I descried a large ship standing in towards the shore. She cast her anchor, and many passengers landed on the island. With a great shout of joy I ran down to greet them. Many voices answered mine, and all plied me with questions respecting my condition. Presently, perceiving that my

case was extraordinary, they ceased questioning while I told them my story. They listened with amazement. Then someone said:

'In my travels in these seas I have heard many tales of such an old man of whom thou speakest, dwelling alone upon an island, and lying in wait for shipwrecked sailors. I know not how these tales were spread abroad, for it is said that of those he has ridden none has survived. Thou art the only survivor. His name is called the Old Man of the Sea. But now he is no more: Allah be praised for that! And thou hast escaped: Allah be praised for that also!' And all extolled the greatness of Allah.

I returned with them to the ship, and they clothed me in rich apparel and set food and wine before me; and, when I had refreshed myself, we made merry as the ship set sail.

We were bound for El-Basrah, and my thoughts flew further—to Baghdad, the Abode of Peace.

CINDERELLA

A Fairy Tale from the French

Once upon a time there lived a gentleman who married twice. He had one fair daughter by his first wife. Ella was sweet and gentle, taking after her dear dead mother, who had been the most lovable of women. His second wife, a widow with two hard-featured daughters, was very proud and overbearing; and, if her two daughters had only never been born, or, being born, had died, she would then have possessed the vilest temper in all the world. As it was, the three were all equally gifted in that respect.

From the very day of the wedding the stepmother and her daughters took a violent dislike to the young girl, for they could see how beautiful she was, both outwardly and inwardly; and green envy soon turns to hate. They dared not show it openly, for fear of the father's anger; but he, poor man, finding he had taken too heavy a burden upon his shoulders, fell ill and died— simply worried into his grave. Then his young daughter reaped the full measure of jealousy and spite and malice which her stepmother and sisters could now openly bestow upon her. She was put to do the drudgery of the household at no wages at all, and what was saved in this way was spent on the finery so sorely needed to make the two hard-featured ones at all passable. The poor girl scrubbed the floors, polished the brights, swept the rooms and stairs, cleaned the windows, turned the mangle, and made the beds; and in the evening, when all the work was done, she would sit by the kitchen fire darning the stockings for recreation. When bedtime came she would gaze awhile into the fire, answer the door to her stepsisters coming home from the theatre in all their finery; and then, with their stinging words still in her ears, she would creep up to bed in the garret, there, on a wretched straw mattress, to sleep fast for very weariness and dream of princes and palaces till at morning light she had to begin her dreary round again.

And it was indeed a dreary round. No sooner had she begun to sift the cinders when the bell would ring, and ring again. One of the sisters wanted her—sometimes both wanted her at once. It was merely a matter of a pin to be fixed, or a ribbon to be tied, but when she came to do it she met with a shower of abuse, 'Look at your hands, you dirty little kitchen slut! How dare you answer the bell with such hands?

And your face—go and look in the glass, Ella: no, go straight to the kitchen pump—you filthy little slut!

The 'glass' was corrected to the 'kitchen pump' because they knew very well that if she stood before the glass she would see the reflection of a very beautiful girl—a reflection which they themselves spent hours looking for but could never find.

Yet the child endured it all patiently, and, when her work was done, which happened sometimes, she would sit in the chimney corner among the cinders, dreaming of things which no one knows. And it was from this habit of musing among the cinders that she got her name of Cinder-slut, which was afterwards softened, for some unknown reason, to Cinderella.

Now the day of a great festival drew near. It was the occasion of the king's son's coming of age, and it was spread abroad that he would select his bride from among the most beautiful attending the state ball. As soon as the elder sisters got breath of this they preened and preened and powdered and anointed, and even ran to the door themselves at every knock, for they expected invitations; and they were not disappointed, for you will easily see that at a ball even beauty must have its plain background to set it off. Very proud they were of their gold-lettered invitation cards bearing the royal seal, and, when they rang for Cinderella, they held them in their hands to emphasise their orders. This must be ironed, just so; this must be pressed and set aside in tissue paper; this must be tucked and frilled and goffered in just such a fashion, and so on with crimping and pleating and tabbing and piping and boxing, until poor Cinderella began to wonder why the lot of some was so easy and the lot of others so hard. Nevertheless, she worked and worked and worked; and always in her drudgery came day-dreams of what *she* would wear if she were invited to the ball. She had it all planned out to the smallest frill—but how absurd! She must toil at her sisters' bidding and, on the great night when they were there in their finery, she must sit among the cinders dreaming—in a fairy world of her own—of the prince who came to claim her as his bride. Fool! What a wild fancy! What an unattainable dream!—and there was the bell ringing again: her sisters wanted something, and woe betide her if she dallied.

At last the night of the ball arrived. Early towards the evening there was no peace in the household. When the elder sister had fully decided, in spite of her complexion, to wear her velvet cramoisie trimmed *à l'anglaise*, and the younger had brought out her gold-flowered robe in conjunction with a jewelled stomacher, to say nothing of an old silk underskirt, which, after all, would be hidden; when they had squabbled over the different jewels they possessed, each complimenting the other on the set she desired least herself; when the milliner and the hairdresser had called and gone away exhausted; when the beauty specialist had reached the limit of his art and departed sighing heavily; then and not till then was Cinderella called up and allowed the great privilege of admiring the result.

Now Cinderella had, by nature, what one might call absolute taste'. She knew instinctively how one should look at a state ball, and she gave them her simple, but perfect, advice, with a deft touch to this and that, which made all the difference. She got no thanks, of the couple; but one of the sisters did unbend a little.

'Cinderella,' said she, 'wouldn't you like to be going to the ball?'

'Heigho!' sighed Cinderella. 'Such delights are not for me. I dream of them, but that is all.'

'Quite enough, too,' said the other sister. 'Fancy the Cinder-slut at a ball! How the whole Court would laugh!'

Cinderella made no reply, though the words hurt her. Pin after pin she took from her mouth and fixed it dexterously, where you or I might have done some accidental damage with it, and drawn blood. But not so Cinderella. She had no venom in her nature. When she had arrayed them perfectly she expected no thanks, but just listened to their fault-finding with a hidden smile. It was only when they had left the house, and she was going downstairs to the kitchen, that one word escaped her: 'Cats!' And if she had not said that she would not have been a girl at all, but only an angel. Then she sat down in her favourite place in the chimney corner to look into the fire and imagine things quite different from what they were.

The house was very still—so still that you could have heard a pin fall in the top room. The stepmother was on a visit to a maiden aunt, who was not only dying, but very rich, so the best thing to do was to show the dying aunt her invitation card to the ball and play another card—the ace of self-sacrifice. Yes, the house was *very* still. Cinderella, watching the pictures in the glowing embers, could almost hear what the prince of her dreams was saying.

All of a sudden a storm of feeling seemed to burst in her bosom. She—Cinderella—was sitting there alone in the chimney corner dreaming dreams of princes and palaces: what a contrast between what *was* and what *was not*, nor ever could be! It was too much for the child; she broke down, and, taking her head in her hands, she sobbed as if her heart would break.

While she was still crying bitterly, a gust of cold air swept through the kitchen. She looked up, thinking that the door had blown open. But no, it was shut. Then she gradually became aware of a blue mist gathering and revolving upon itself on the other side of the fireplace. It grew bluer still, and began to shine from within. It spun itself to a standstill, and there, all radiant, stood the queerest little lady you could ever imagine. Her dress was like that of the fairy mother of a prince, with billowy lace flounces and a delicate waist. There was not an inch of it that did not sparkle with a jewel. And as this little lady stood, fingering her wand and looking lovingly and laughingly at Cinderella, the girl knew not what to do. She could only smile back to those kindly eyes, while, half-dazed, she fell to counting the powdered ringlets of her hair, which was so very beautiful that surely it must have been grown

in Fairyland! Then, when she looked again at the wand and saw a bright blue flame issue shimmering from the tip of it, she was certain that the door of Fairyland had opened and some one had stepped out.

'Good evening, my dear,' said the visitant, in the voice and manner of one who could do things. 'Dry your tears and tell me all about it.'

Cinderella was gazing up at her with wonder in her beautiful eyes, though they still brimmed with misery.

'Oh!' she said, choking down her sobs, 'I want—I want to go—,'and then she broke down again and could say no more.

'Ah! you got that want from me, I'll warrant; for I have come on purpose to supply it. You want to go to the ball, my dear; that's what you want, though you didn't know it before. And you shall. Come, come, dry your eyes, and we'll see about it. I'm your fairy godmother, you know; and your dear mother, whom I knew very well, has sent me to you. That's better, you have got your mother's smile. Ah! How beautiful she was, to be sure, and you—you're her living image. Now to work! Have you any pumpkins in the garden?'

'What an odd question!' thought Cinderella. 'Why pumpkins? But still, why not?' Then she hastened to assure her fairy godmother that there were plenty of them, big and ripe.

Together they went out into the dark garden, and Cinderella led the way to the pumpkin bed.

'There,' said her godmother, pointing with her wand at the finest and largest, 'pick it and bring it along.'

Cinderella, wondering greatly, obeyed, and her godmother led her to the front doorstep, where, bidding the child sit beside her, she took from the bosom of her dress a silver fruit-knife, and with this she scooped out the fruit of the pumpkin, leaving only the rind. This she set down in the street before them, and then touched it with her wand, when, lo and behold! The pumpkin was immediately transformed into a magnificent coach, all wrought with pure gold.

Cinderella was so amazed that she could not speak. She caught a quick breath of delight, and waited.

'That's that!' said her godmother. 'Now for the horses. Let me see: I suppose you haven't a mousetrap anywhere in the house.'

'Yes, yes, I have,' cried Cinderella, 'I set one early this evening, and I always catch such a lot—sometimes a whole family at once.'

'Then go find it, child; we shall want at least six.'

So Cinderella ran in and found the mousetrap she had set; and, sure enough, there was a whole family of six—father and mother, a maiden aunt, and three naughty children who had led them into the trap. In high glee Cinderella ran back to her godmother and showed her.

'Yes, yes; that is quite good, but we're going a bit too fast. Here are six horses—though they don't look it at present—but we must first have a coachman to manage them. Now I don't suppose, by any chance, you've got a—'

'A rat?' cried Cinderella, her eyes sparkling with excitement. 'Well, now, I *did* set a rat trap in the scullery—not a guillotine, you know, but just a thing to catch them alive: I always think they much prefer to be caught alive and then drowned.'

'Run, then, and see, child. We can do nothing without a coachman, nothing at all.'

So Cinderella ran and fetched the rat trap. In it were three large rats, and the two inspected them closely.

'I think that's the best one,' said Cinderella, 'look at his enormous whiskers! He'd make a lovely coachman.'

'You're right, child. I was just thinking that myself: he's got a good eye for horse-flesh too/

With this the fairy godmother touched him with the tip of her wand, and instantly he stood before them—a fat coachman with tremendous whiskers, saluting and waiting for orders.

'Now,' said the fairy godmother to Cinderella, 'open the door of the mouse trap and let one out at a time.'

Cinderella did so, and, as each mouse came out, the godmother tapped it with her wand, and it was immediately changed into a magnificent horse, richly harnessed and equipped. The coachman took charge of them and harnessed them to the coach as a six-in-hand.

That's that!' said the fairy. 'Now for the footmen. Run, child, down to the farther end of the garden. There, in the corner, behind the old broken water-pot, something tells me you will find six lizards in a nest. Bring them here to me.'

Cinderella ran off, and soon returned with the identical six lizards. A tap of the wand on each and there stood six imposing footmen, such as are only seen in kings' palaces. Their liveries were dazzling with purple and gold. To the manner born they took their places on the coach and waited.

'But—but,' cried Cinderella, who saw by now that she was bound for the ball, 'how can I go like this? They would all jeer at me.'

Her godmother laughed and chided her on having so little faith. Tut, tut,' she said, and tapped her on the shoulder with her wand.

What a transformation! The girl, lovely indeed in herself, that stood a moment ago in rags, now stood there a splendid woman—for there is always a moment when a child becomes a woman—and a woman clothed in cloth of gold and silver, all bespangled with jewels. The untiring-maids of Fairyland had done her hair up to show its beauty, and in it was fastened a diamond clasp that challenged the sparkling stars. An osprey, too, quivered and danced to the beating of her heart. 'But,' said Cinderella, when she had recovered from her amazement, 'I see that I have lovely

silk stockings, yet, O my godmother, where are my shoes?'

'Ah! that is just the point.' And her godmother drew from the folds of her dress a pair of glass slippers. 'Glass is glass, I know, my dear; and it is not one in a hundred thousand that could wear such things; but perfect fit is everything, and, as for these, I doubt if there is any in the world but yourself who could fit them exactly.'

Cinderella took the slippers and poked her toes into them very carefully, for, as her godmother had said, glass is glass, and you have to be measured very carefully for it. But what was her delight to find that they were, indeed, an absolute fit. Either her feet had been made for the slippers or the slippers had been made for her feet, it did not matter: it was the same thing, and not a little surprising.

Now Cinderella stood up, a perfect picture, and kissed her godmother and thanked her. The carriage was waiting, the horses were restive, the coachman sat on the box, and the footmen were in their places.

'Now, there's just one thing which is rather important,' said the fairy godmother, as Cinderella entered the coach, 'and you must not forget it. I can do this, that, and the other, but at midnight there's an end to it all. You must leave the ball before the clock strikes twelve, for, if you don't, you'll be in a pretty pickle. Your coach will turn into a pumpkin again, your coachman into a rat, your horses into mice, and your footmen into lizards; and there you will be in the ballroom in nothing but your dirty rags for all to laugh at. Now, remember; it all ends at the stroke of twelve.'

'Never fear,' said Cinderella. 'I shall not forget. Goodbye!'

'Goodbye, child!'

Then the coachman cracked his whip and the prancing horses sprang forward. Cinderella was off to the ball.

'That's that!' said the fairy godmother, as she looked after the coach for a moment. Then the blue flame at the tip of her wand went out, and so did she—flick!

It was a glorious night. The same moon that had looked down on Cinderella's pumpkins now shone upon the King's palace and the royal gardens. Within, the ball was at its height. The movement of the dance was a fascinating spectacle. In the great hall the light of a thousand candles was reflected from the polished floor; from the recesses came the soft splash of cool fountains and the fragrance of the rarest flowers; while, to the sweet strains of the violins, many pairs of feet glided as if on air. Without, among the trees, where hanging lanterns shed a dim light and the music throbbed faintly on the warm night air, couples strayed and lingered, speaking in voices sweet and low, while from cloud to cloud wandered the moon, withdrawing to hide a maiden's blushes, shining forth again to light her smiles.

Suddenly a note of something unusual seemed to run through the whole scene. The chamberlain was seen to speed hither and thither on some quest that left his dignity to see after itself. Breathless he sought the prince, and at last he found him.

'Your Serene Highness,' he gasped, 'a princess of high degree has just arrived in

state and desires admission. She will not give her name, but—if you will permit me to be skilled in these matters—she is a lady that cannot be denied. Beautiful as a goddess and proud as a queen; why, the very jewels in her hair are worth a thousand square miles of territory. Believe me, your Serene Highness, she is a princess of exalted dignity.'

The prince followed the chamberlain to the gate, where they found the fair unknown waiting in her coach. The prince, silent for want of words—she was so very beautiful—handed her down and escorted her through the palace gardens, where, as they passed, the guests started and sighed at sight of one so rare. So they reached the ballroom, and immediately the dance ceased. Even the music fainted away as this vision of beauty came upon the scene. All was at a silent standstill as the prince led the unknown down the hall, and nothing could be heard but whispers of 'Ah! how beautiful she is!' and 'Never, never have I seen such loveliness!' Even the old king was altogether fascinated. 'My dear!' he said to the queen in a whisper, 'what an adorable woman! Ah! She and those very words remind me of you yourself.' From which the queen, by a rapid retrospect, inferred that the stranger was indeed a very beautiful woman, and did not hesitate to admit it.

The prince presented the stranger with few words—for beauty speaks for itself—and then led her out to dance. *Tara tara tara ra ra rat*—the fiddles struck up a sprightly measure, and all the couples footed it with glee; but one after another they wilted away to watch the graceful pair, so exquisitely did they dance. And then, as if by common consent, the music fell to a dreamy waltz; the prince and the fair unknown passed into the rhythm, and all were spellbound as this perfect couple danced before them. Even the hard-featured stepsisters were lost in admiration, for little they guessed who the beautiful stranger really was.

The night wore on, and Cinderella danced with the stateliest of the land, and again and again with the prince. And when supper was over, and the prince had claimed her for yet another dance, she almost fainted in his arms when she happened to glance at the clock and saw that it was just two minutes to twelve. Alas! Her godmother's warning! She had fallen madly in love with the prince, as he with her, and she had forgotten everything beside. But now it was a case of quick action or she would soon be in rags and coachless; how they would all laugh at her then!

With a wrench she tore herself away, and, concealing her haste till she got clear of the ballroom, sped like a deer through the ways of the palace till she reached the marble steps leading down to the gate, when she heard with dismay the ominous sound of a great clock striking twelve.

Down she went, three steps at a time, a flying figure of haste in the moonlight. One of her glass slippers came off, but she had to leave it. There—there was the coach waiting for her. She rushed towards it, when, lo and behold, as the last stroke of twelve died away, there was no coach at all; nothing but a hollow pumpkin by the

kerb, and six mice and a heavily whiskered rat nibbling at it, to say nothing of six lizards wriggling away. And that was not all. She looked at herself in horror. She was in rags!

With the one thought to hide herself, she ran as fast as her legs would carry her in the direction of her home. She had scarcely covered half the distance when it came on to rain hard, and, before she reached her doorstep, she was drenched to the skin. Then, when she had crept to her chimney corner in the kitchen, she made a strange discovery. As you know, the coach and all that appertained to it had disappeared; her splendid attire had gone; but—how was this?—one real glass slipper still remained. The other, she remembered, she had dropped on the steps of the palace.

'Well, child?' said a clear voice from the other side of the fire-place; and Cinderella, looking up, saw her godmother standing there gazing down at her with a quizzical smile.

The slippers!' she went on. 'Oh no; however forgetful you might have been, they could never have vanished like the other things. Don't you remember, I brought them with me? They were *real*. But where is the other one?'

'In my haste to get away I dropped it on the palace steps.' And Cinderella began to cry.

'There, there; never mind. Perhaps somebody with a capital S has picked it up. You were certainly very careless, but you are not unlucky—at least, not if I can help it.' And when Cinderella looked up through her tears her godmother had gone.

'Somebody with a capital S,' mused Cinderella, as she gazed into the dying fire. 'I wonder!' But just then the bell rang announcing the return of her stepsisters. Oh! they were full of it! A most beautiful princess had been to the ball, they said, and they had actually spoken with her. She was most gentle and condescending. Their faces shone with reflected glory. And she had left suddenly at midnight, and the Prince was beside himself; and there was nothing to show for it all but a glass slipper which he had picked up on the steps of the palace. What a night! And so they rambled on, little thinking that Cinderella had the other glass slipper hidden in her bosom along with other state secrets.

The next day events followed one another with great rapidity. First, came a royal proclamation. Whereas a lady had cast a slipper at the ball it must be returned to the rightful owner, and so forth. Secondly, came news that the slipper had been tried on the princesses, duchesses, marchionesses, countesses, and viscountesses, and finally on the baronesses of the Court, but all in vain. It fitted none of them. Thirdly, it gradually became known that any lady with a foot that betokened good breeding was invited to call at the palace and try on the slipper. This went on for weeks, and finally the prime minister, who carried the glass slipper on a velvet cushion, went out himself to search for the fitting foot, for the prince was leading him a dog's life,

and threatening all kinds of things unless that foot and all that was joined to it were found.

At last, going from house to house, he came to Cinderella's sisters, who, of course, tried all they could to squeeze a foot into the slipper, but without success. Cinderella looked on and laughed to herself to see how hard they tried, and, when they had given it up, she said gaily, 'Let me try and see if I can get it on.'

Her sisters laughed loudly at the idea of a little kitchen slut trying her luck, and began to mock and abuse her; but the chamberlain, seeing what a beautiful girl she was, maintained that his orders were to try it upon every one.

So Cinderella held out her little foot, and the chamberlain put the slipper on quite easily. It fitted like wax. This was an astonishing thing, but it was more astonishing still when Cinderella produced the other slipper and put it on the other foot. Then, to show that wonders could never cease, the door flew open, and in came the fairy godmother. One touch of her wand on Cinderella's clothes, and there she stood again, dressed as on the night of the ball, only this time there were not only jewels in her hair but orange blossoms as well.

There was a breathless silence for a while. Then, when Cinderella's stepsisters realised that she was the same beautiful unknown that they had seen at the ball, they prostrated themselves before her, begging her to forgive all. Cinderella took them by the hand and raised them up and kissed them. And it melted their hard natures to hear her say that she would love them always.

When the fairy godmother had witnessed all this she said to herself, 'That's that!' and vanished. But she never lost sight of Cinderella. She guided and guarded her in all her ways, and, when the prince claimed his willing bride, their way of happiness was strewn with roses.

THE STORY OF THE BIRD FENG

A Fairy Tale from China

In the Book of the Ten Thousand Wonders there are three hundred and thirty-three stories about the bird called Feng, and this is one of them.

Ta-Khai, Prince of Tartary, dreamt one night that he saw in a place where he had never been before an enchantingly beautiful young maiden who could only be a princess. He fell desperately in love with her, but before he could either move or speak, she had vanished. When he awoke he called for his ink and brushes, and, in the most accomplished willow-leaf style, he drew her image on a piece of precious silk, and in one corner he wrote these lines:

The flowers of the peony
Will they ever bloom?
A day without her
Is like a hundred years.

He then summoned his ministers, and, showing them the portrait, asked if any one could tell him the name of the beautiful maiden; but they all shook their heads and stroked their beards. They knew not who she was.

So displeased was the prince that he sent them away in disgrace to the most remote provinces of his kingdom. All the courtiers, the generals, the officers, and every man and woman, high and low, who lived in the palace came in turn to look at the picture. But they all had to confess their ignorance. Ta-Khai then called upon the magicians of the kingdom to find out by their art the name of the princess of his dreams, but their answers were so widely different that the prince, suspecting their ability, condemned them all to have their noses cut off. The portrait was shown in the outer court of the palace from sunrise till sunset, and exalted travellers came in every day, gazed upon the beautiful face, and came out again. None could tell who she was.

Meanwhile the days were weighing heavily upon the shoulders of Ta-Khai, and his sufferings cannot be described; he ate no more, he drank no more, and ended up forgetting which was day and which was night, what was in and what was out, what

was left and what was right. He spent his time roaming over the mountains and through the woods crying aloud to the gods to end his life and his sorrow.

It was thus, one day, that he came to the edge of a precipice. The valley below was strewn with rocks, and the thought came to his mind that he had been led to this place to put an end to his misery. He was about to throw himself into the depths below when suddenly the bird Feng flew across the valley and appeared before him, saying:

'Why is Ta-Khai, the mighty Prince of Tartary, standing in this place of desolation with a shadow on his brow?'

Ta-Khai replied: 'The pine tree finds its nourishment where it stands, the tiger can run after the deer in the forests, the eagle can fly over the mountains and the plains, but how can I find the one for whom my heart is thirsting?'

And he told the bird his story.

The Feng, which in reality was a Feng-Hwang, that is, a female Feng, rejoined: 'Without the help of Supreme Heaven it is not easy to acquire wisdom, but it is a sign of the benevolence of the spiritual beings that I should have come between you and destruction. I can make myself large enough to carry the largest town upon my back, or small enough to pass through the smallest keyhole, and I know all the princesses in all the palaces of the earth. I have taught them the six intonations of my voice, and I am their friend. Therefore show me the picture, O Ta-Khai, and I will tell you the name of her whom you saw in your dream.'

They went to the palace, and, when the portrait was shown, the bird became as large as an elephant, and exclaimed, 'Sit on my back, O Ta-Khai, and I will carry you to the place of your dream. There you will find her of the transparent face with the drooping eyelids under the crown of dark hair such as you have depicted, for these are the features of Sai-Jen, the daughter of the King of China, and alone can be likened to the full moon rising under a black cloud.'

At nightfall they were flying over the palace of the king just above a magnificent garden. And in the garden sat Sai-Jen, singing and playing upon the lute. The Feng-Hwang deposited the prince outside the wall near a place where bamboos were growing and showed him how to cut twelve bamboos between the knots to make the flute which is called Pai-Siao and has a sound sweeter than the evening breeze on the forest stream.

And as he blew gently across the pipes, they echoed the sound of the princess's voice so harmoniously that she cried: 'I hear the distant notes of the song that comes from my own lips, and I can see nothing but the flowers and the trees; it is the melody the heart alone can sing that has suffered sorrow on sorrow, and to which alone the heart can listen that is full of longing.'

At that moment the wonderful bird, like a fire of many colours come down from heaven, alighted before the princess, dropping at her feet the portrait. She opened

her eyes in utter astonishment at the sight of her own image. And when she had read the lines inscribed in the corner, she asked, trembling: Tell me, O Feng-Hwang, who is he, so near, but whom I cannot see, that knows the sound of my voice and has never heard me, and can remember my face and has never seen me?'

Then the bird spoke and told her the story of Ta-Khai's dream, adding: 'I come from him with this message; I brought him here on my wings. For many days he has longed for this hour, let him now behold the image of his dream and heal the wound in his heart.'

Swift and overpowering is the rush of the waves on the pebbles of the shore, and like a little pebble felt Sai-Jen when Ta-Khai stood before her.

The Feng-Hwang illuminated the garden sumptuously, and a breath of love was stirring the flowers under the stars.

It was in the palace of the King of China that were celebrated in the most ancient and magnificent style the nuptials of Sai-Jen and Ta-Khai, Prince of Tartary.

And this is one of the three hundred and thirty-three stories about the bird Feng as it is told in the Book of the Ten Thousand Wonders.

THE BLUE BOY OF THE POOL

A Tale from Old China

In the days when the great Ta Ti was Emperor of China,¹ a herbalist named Wang Shuh went up a mountain to search for herbs. The season was midsummer, and the sun shone brightly from an unclouded sky. Wang Shuh followed the course of a little stream which here and there formed noisy waterfalls, under which were deep pools, and here and there ran very smoothly along the green level ridges of the great hill. Although there were many herbs on the banks of the stream, the particular herb that Wang Shuh searched for was very rare and difficult to find. He had to walk a great distance, stooping most of the time; and when the sun rose right overhead at noon, he felt so hot and weary that he lay down to rest on a green and shady knoll at the foot of a pretty waterfall. The spray was flung through the air like thin rain and drenched the leaves of overhanging trees, and left many a pearly drop on the petals of brightly-coloured wild flowers. As Wang sat eating a meal of cooked rice that he had brought with him, he bared his head and enjoyed the coolness of the drops of water which fell upon his face and forehead.

Having eaten his meal, he stretched himself at full length, and, leaning his head on his hand, gazed into the waters of the deep pool below the waterfall, watching the little coloured fish darting to and fro. As he gazed, he was greatly astonished to see a little blue boy peering round a grey stone in the depths of the pool. The boy was no more than a foot in height. His face and hands were of lighter blue than his clothing, and his eyes sparkled like pearls and flashed many colours. After peering round about for a few seconds, the little boy vanished, and Wang Shuh began to rub his eyes, wondering if he had been dreaming. When he looked into the pool again, however, he saw that the blue boy had come out from his hiding-place. He was riding on the back of a red carp, and held a blue rush in his right hand. Three times the carp darted round the pool among the other fishes, which, strange to tell, showed no signs of alarm. Then it rose to the surface, where the sunrays that broke through the network of leaves and branches overhead sparkled like diamonds on the clear rippling water. The little boy turned the carp this way and that, and when the sunshine fell on him his body sparkled like a sapphire, while every scale of the carp shone as brightly as fire. Wang Shuh gazed with eyes of wonder until the carp rose

in the air. Then he began to be afraid, and crept backward into a bush to hide himself. But the little blue boy never came near him. He turned the red carp towards the east, and rose speedily through the air, until he looked no bigger than a bee in flight. At length the carp and its rider vanished from sight, having entered a cloud that came creeping across the blue sky.

Wang Shuh rose up and climbed to the top of the mountain, so as to search for the herbs he sought at the little well from which the stream flows. When he reached the edge of the wood through which he walked, not far from the mountain top, he looked around him, and saw to his surprise that great masses of dark and yellow clouds were rising over the sea. A great thunderstorm was gathering in the east, and the herbalist then realised that the little blue boy he had seen riding on the back of the red carp was the thunder dragon. As he gazed on the writhing clouds he caught sight of the monster, which had increased its size and turned quite black.

'Alas, alas!' he cried. 'What shall I do? I have gazed on the black Kiao in the shape of a blue boy riding on a red carp. It is an evil omen, and I shall certainly perish.'

Suddenly the thunder voice of the dragon was heard coming over the sea. Its great head was thrust out from the clouds that hid it, and the herbalist caught a glimpse of its fiery tongue as it spit out the wriggling lightning.

Greatly terrified, he ran towards a hollow tree and hid himself in it. Crouching low, he shut his eyes and stopped his ears with his fingers, so that he might not see the lightning nor be deafened by the roaring voice of the black dragon. How long he remained there he could not tell. The moments dragged slowly past, and every moment the dragon seemed to be coming nearer and nearer, as if searching for the man who had gazed upon him in his form of a blue boy riding a red carp.

Rain came down in heavy drops and drenched the earth. The little mountain stream began to flood, and lashed itself in fury. Wang Shuh could hear its waterfalls roaring between the loud peals of thunder that shook the mountain and made the hollow tree tremble and shrink, as if it shared the terror of the man it concealed.

At length the rain ceased to fall, and silence fell on the world. Wang Shuh opened his eyes and peered through a fissure of the tree towards the east. He saw with joy that the sky had cleared again, and that the sun was shining brightly across the sea. Thankful that he was still alive, he crept out of his hiding-place and began to descend the mountain, following the course of the stream. When he reached the little waterfall below which he had rested and eaten his meal, he paused for a moment, because the sound of sweet music fell on his ears. It was sweeter than the song of birds, but faint as the humming of insects. He peered through the leaves towards the pool. As he did so he saw the little blue boy returning through the air on the back of the red carp. He stood frozen with fear and unable to move. The dragon in its comely shape descended towards the pool, skimmed round the surface, and

vanished. Then Wang Shuh was no longer afraid. He ran towards the pool and gazed into it, but saw nothing. He noticed, however, that one of the herbs he searched for had grown on the edge of the pool. Leaning forward, he plucked it, and then, turning round, ran down the mountain-side. Nor did he pause until he reached the village, where he told his friends what he had seen.

It chanced at this time that the daughter of the emperor, a beautiful princess dearly loved by her father, was lying ill in the royal palace. In vain the physicians of the Court endeavoured to heal her, by mixing herbs with the dust of dragon bones that had been found among the mountains. Hearing of Wang Shuh's adventure, the emperor sent for him. When the herbalist reached the palace, His Majesty spoke, saying: 'Is it true, as men tell, that you have seen the black Kiao in the form of a little blue boy riding a red carp?'

Wang Shuh made answer: 'It is indeed so, Your Majesty.'

'And is it true that you have found the dragon herb, that grew during the thunderstorm?'

'I have brought the herb with me,' Wang Shuh answered.

Said the emperor: 'Mayhap it will cure my daughter of her sickness.'

'I pray you to accept the herb from me,' Wang Shuh then said. His Majesty led the herbalist to the room in which the princess lay, and Wang Shuh took a leaf from the herb, which had a sweet odour, and gave it to her to smell. As soon as the princess smelt it, she smiled and her eyes grew bright. This was taken as a good omen. Wang Shuh then made a medicine from the herb, and after the princess had partaken of it she grew well and strong again.

The emperor's heart was filled with joy, and he appointed Wang Shuh his, chief physician. Thus the herbalist became a great man. He had cause to bless the day when he gazed upon the little blue boy riding the red carp in the pool below the waterfall of the little mountain stream. To few mortals falls the good fortune of gazing on a dragon in any form, and to fewer mortals is the vision followed by good fortune.

¹ A monarch of the Wu Dynasty, AD 228-31.

THE MAORI FAIRY FISHERMEN

A Tale from New Zealand

There are fairies in New Zealand, and the Maoris call them Patu-Paiarehe. They have fair hair and white skins, and live among the hills, where they have secret dwellings. All day long they hide from human beings, but when darkness falls they come out to search for food. They often hold meetings in lonely places, at which they feast, and afterwards dance and sing merrily. These fairies are very clever, and the Maoris used to learn many things from them.

Like fairies elsewhere, they are said to steal babies and leave little fairy children, called changelings, in their places. The Maoris believe that the white-haired albinos among them are changelings, and that the fairies are so fond of them that they teach them some of their arts. It is said that the Maoris learned the art of making fishing-nets from their fairies. The Maori who made the first fishing-net was an albino named Kahoo-Koora. He lived a long time ago, and the story told about him is as follows:

One day when Kahoo-Koora was walking along a lonely part of the beach, at some distance from his native village, he saw large numbers of heads and tails of mackerel lying in heaps on the sand. He wondered who had caught so many fish, and looked about for the footprints of the fishermen, so that he might know to what tribe they belonged; but, much to his surprise, he could not see a single one. Then he knew that the fishers were fairies. He examined the heads and tails of the mackerel, and came to know that the fairies had been fishing during the night. Said he to himself: They could not have caught all these fish with hooks. They must have used nets. If we knew how to make nets, we should be able to catch as many fish as the fairies.'

Kahoo-Koora walked slowly towards his home, thinking over what he had seen; and, after a time, he made up his mind to watch the fairies catching fish, and, if possible, to obtain their net, so that he might find out how it was made. He told his wife about the matter, and she said: 'It is a dangerous thing to spy upon the fairies. They might kill you if they discovered you.'

Said Kahoo-Koora: 'I shall be very careful. There is no moon tonight, and the fairies will not be able to see that I am a human being.'

When the sun had set, Kahoo-Koora set out to visit the part of the beach where the fairies were accustomed to catch mackerel. He reached the place just as the fairies arrived from the hills, and he had no time to hide himself. They ran up and down the beach calling out to one another, and when one of them spoke to Kahoo-Koora, saying: 'Why are you not helping?' he realised that he was regarded as one of themselves. He did not, therefore, feel afraid .

A shoal of mackerel came close to the shore, and the fairies got busy at once. A canoe went out to drop the net into the water round the shoal, and then those who stood on the shore began to haul it in. As the fairy fishers worked the net, they kept singing:

*The net here, the net there,
Haul the net and do your share;
Drop the net into the sea,
Haul the net right merrily.*

When the net was hauled ashore, large quantities of mackerel were thrown on the beach. Kahoo-Koora did his share of the work. The fairies never dreamed that he was a human being, because Kahoo-Koora was an albino, and all fairies have white skin and fair hair.

The dawn was near at hand, and the fairies had to work very hard to gather up their catch, because they had to return to their dwellings, among the mountains, as soon as the sun rose above the horizon.

Kahoo-Koora noticed that the fairies did not divide the fish into equal lots, as do human fishers. Each one collected as many fish as he could, and, having gutted them, strung them together. As they collected the catch, each one taking as many mackerel as he could carry away, the fairies kept singing:

*String the fish and haste away,
All of you, ere break of day.*

Now Kahoo-Koora was in no hurry to leave the beach before sunrise. It was his desire to delay the fairies, so that he might lay hands on their net. He made a slip-knot on the string, and each time he lifted up his share of the mackerel, the knot slipped, and the fish fell in a heap on the sand. Then he began to collect them again. Time and again the fairies left their own work to help him to string the fish. They knotted the string securely for their human companion, but each time Kahoo-Koora unfastened the knot, so that the fish might slip off as he lifted them up. He thus delayed the departure of the fairies, who grew very excited as they sang:

*String the fish and haste away,
All of you, ere break of day.*

Kahoo-Koora wanted to get the fairy net for himself, and that was why he kept playing tricks with the fish. He was just putting off time, so that the fairies would not be able to leave the shore before daybreak. So well did he act his part, that at length the sun began to rise, when two fairies began for the twentieth time to string his fish for him.

In the growing light the fairies then saw that Kahoo-Koora was not one of themselves, but a human being of the fairy race. They cried out with alarm, because they could not punish him in the daylight, for the sun blinded their eyes and made them feel afraid. They called one to another:

Haste you! haste as fast as you can!—
He's not a fairy, but a man.

Throwing away their fish, and leaving their boat and net on the shore, all the fairies ran towards the hills to hide themselves. The sun rose brightly, and Kahoo-Koora was left alone on the beach. He looked around, and, being well pleased with himself for having tricked the clever fairies, he laughed long and loudly.

Then he examined the fairy boat, and found that it had been made of flax. It was so light that he could lift it with one hand and carry it under his arm. Then he picked up the net and spread it out on a smooth bank of sand. It had been made of rushes, and was so frail that he knew it could not be used again. He did not care whether it could be used or not, however. All he wanted to know was how it had been made. He sat down and studied it closely, and when he had done so he took a long piece of cord and began to make a net for himself. In this way he learned the art of net-making, using the fairy net as a pattern.

Kahoo-Koora was well pleased with himself, and, rolling up the fairy net and the net he had made himself, he went home and hid both nets in his house. Then he told some of his friends that a large quantity of newly-caught fish was lying on the beach, where the fairies were wont to throw their catches. They went with him to the spot, and divided the fish between them.

Kahoo-Koora afterwards made two or three large nets, and taught the fishermen how to use them. The Maoris could then catch fish in big quantities like the fairies.

Kahoo-Koora never needed to catch fish for himself. He was kept busy making nets, and men came from distant villages to buy them. He was asked for so many nets that he had to teach his children how to make them.

For the rest of his life Kahoo-Koora was called the 'Net-maker'. When he grew old he gave the airy net to his eldest son, who kept it as a pattern. Kahoo-Koora's

descendants were famous net-makers for many generations, and the story of how the first net was made was handed down from father to son.

Times have changed in New Zealand, but the Maori mothers still tell their children many stories about the white fairies who dwell among the hills, and of the wonderful things they used to do in the great days of old.

THE DANCE OF THE GOBLINS

A Tale of Old Japan

In a village in old Japan there once lived two beggars, who were nicknamed Hojo and Tametomo. They were unable to do any work, because they had big lumps on their necks. Hojo was liked best, because he was always cheerful and full of fun. Tametomo was bad-tempered and quarrelsome. The children used to shout names at Tametomo, and he chased them and flung stones at them.

One day Hojo went into a forest on a mountainside, near Tokio, to gather firewood. Rain began to fall heavily, and he crept into the hollow trunk of an old tree to shelter himself. Several hours went past and still the rain came down, and Hojo, feeling weary, crouched low and fell asleep. He slept until after sunset, and when he awoke he found that the rain had ceased to fall, and the moon was shining clearly in a cloudless sky. He shivered as he rose up, partly because he was cold and partly because he was afraid of being alone in the forest in the nighttime. He peered out of the hollow of the tree, and as he did so he heard the sound of sweet music, and, looking in the direction whence the sounds came, he saw a little company of goblins dancing merrily in an open space. The music was so sweet, and the goblins seemed so happy, that he forgot to be afraid.

Hojo watched them for a long time, and as they danced he danced too. After a time they all sat down in a ring and sang together. Then one after another the goblins began to dance in competition. Up got a little old goblin and tripped lightly in the middle of the ring. Then he sat down, and the others clapped their hands with delight. A young goblin rose next and danced merrily, whirling round about and leaping into the air. He was followed by another and another. The fun grew fast and furious, and the music grew louder and merrier. At length Hojo could no longer contain himself. He wanted to dance like the goblins, and the space inside the tree trunk was too small for him. With a merry shout he ran towards the goblins, entered the ring, and began to dance in competition with the others who had displayed their skill. The goblins sat watching him with twinkling eyes. Hojo was so much delighted with the music that he danced as he had never danced before, leaping and whirling and tripping merrily, and now and again shouting with joy. The goblins were well pleased with him, and when he lost his breath, and sank down panting on

the grass, they all rose up and danced round him, singing,

*Hojo the dancer
Dances like a goblin;
A merry one is Hojo,
And we shall reward him.*

When Hojo rose up, the goblins became silent, and at first he was afraid of them; but the chief of the spirits spoke to him, saying: 'You have danced well, and we are all delighted with you. What reward do you ask for?'

Said Hojo: 'Men say that you can cure any affliction. If you wish to do me a favour, take this ugly lump off my neck, so that I may be like other men.'

The chief of the goblins waved a wand and touched Hojo's neck. No sooner did he do so than the lump disappeared. Hojo was then quite a handsome-looking man. 'No one will mock at you now,' said the chief goblin.

Hojo rubbed his neck, and, finding no lump there, felt so happy that he began to dance again. He danced with the goblins until daybreak, when they all vanished suddenly as dewdrops vanish before the bright sun. Then Hojo heaved a sigh, and walked through the forest towards his native village. Although he had danced all night he did not feel weary, so great was his joy because he had got rid of the lump.

As Hojo walked through the village street, everyone who saw him was greatly surprised, and one after another called out: 'Where is your lump, Hojo?' With a merry laugh he answered, saying: 'It is up yonder in the forest. I danced all night with the goblins, and they took it away.'

Every man, woman, and child in the village was pleased because Hojo had been cured of his trouble, except one person, and that was Tametomo. 'It is not fair,' he said, 'that Hojo should get rid of his lump, and that mine should be still left on my neck.'

He spoke to Hojo, saying: 'How came it about that the goblins cured you?'

Hojo told him all that had taken place, and then Tametomo said: 'I shall go to the forest tonight and dance with the goblins.'

He did as he said he would do. In the evening he walked to the forest, and hid himself in the hollow trunk of the old tree. Night came on, and the moon rose. Then the goblins came out to dance in the clearing. Tametomo watched them for a time, and when the single dancers came out, one after another, to show their skill, he walked towards the ring and called out: 'It is my turn now.'

He spoke gruffly, and the goblins all looked at him in silence.

Tametomo walked into the middle of the ring, and the goblin musicians, who had ceased playing when he had spoken, began to play again. Tametomo danced to their music, but he danced very badly, because there was no merriment in his heart.

When he was wearied he stopped dancing, and said to the chief of the goblins: 'Now that I have danced before you, take the lump off my neck as you took the lump off Hojo's neck last night.'

The goblins were angry with him because he spoke in so ill-tempered a manner, and had danced so badly.

Said the chief of the goblins: 'Hojo was a merry fellow, and gave us much delight; but you are a sour, disagreeable man. You have not earned a reward, but you deserve to be punished for coming here to spoil our fun. I shall not take the lump off your neck, but I shall give you the lump we took off the neck of Hojo.'

As the goblin chief spoke he waved his wand, and the next moment Tametomo found that he had two lumps—one on either side of his neck. Terror-stricken he ran away, and the goblins ran after him, raising shouts of anger. He did not stop running until he reached the village. The day was breaking, and several workers were leaving their houses. When they saw Tametomo, one said to the other: 'Here comes that ill-tempered fellow! He has quarrelled with the goblins, as he has always quarrelled with his fellows, and now he has two lumps instead of one.'

Thus it came about that Hojo, the good-tempered and merry-hearted man, was cured of his trouble, while Tametomo, who had an evil heart, was punished by the goblins. It is good for a man to be cheerful, even when in trouble, for, if he is, he will get sympathy and find friends who will be ready to help him. A spiteful and jealous man like Tametomo always makes enemies.

THE RED SPRING

A Traditional Tale from China

There is a saying that, while there is no banquet in the world that does not come to an end, there are husbands and wives whose love keeps on forever. And in illustration of this you have but to read the following story.

At one time in a certain village, never mind exactly where, there was a young man named Shi Dun who was a most able and hard-working fellow. In the spring he married a girl, Jade Flower, as pretty as you could imagine, and an excellent housewife. The young couple loved each other dearly.

But goodness, it seems, does not always win its reward. Shi Dun had a stepmother who was a cruel and unfeeling woman. She would always find fault with the food, no matter how much care Jade Flower had put into preparing it. She would scold Jade Flower, saying the rice was either too hot, or too cold, or served too late. No matter how much work Jade Flower did, and no matter how carefully she waited on her, she would always scold or beat her. Whenever this happened, Shi Dun would feel as much pain as if she had actually scolded or beaten him. But he was helpless, for in those days, it was an accepted custom for a mother-in-law to beat her daughter-in-law. The son could not interfere.

Jade Flower was getting thinner every day, and her face lost the freshness it once had.

One day when Shi Dun entered the house, he saw Jade Flower sitting on the edge of the bed with teardrops trickling down her cheeks. Shi Dun heaved a sigh.

'Shi Dun!' Jade Flower said, gazing at him. 'I have suffered more than enough. I can bear the cruelty and misery no longer; the only thing is I can't bear leaving you alone!'

Shi Dun felt a great pain in his heart. 'Jade Flower!' he said, after thinking a while, 'you will come to a tragic end if you remain with this stepmother of mine. Let us run away this evening to some other place.'

Jade Flower brightened at the suggestion. After midnight, they led two thin horses from the stable, opened the back gate silently, and galloped off towards the northwest.

There is a common saying: 'A swift horse is faster than a meteor.' The two

horses, though thin, could run very fast. They passed through they didn't know how many villages. Actually, they didn't know where they were, nor did they care. Shi Dun said: 'Horses, don't run on the broad road; follow the narrow, mountain path.'

It seemed the horses understood him, for they turned on to a steep slope and their hooves beat loudly on the rocky track.

As day dawned they came to an uninhabited mountain. It was spring. The grass was green and the flowers were in bloom. Cranes glided in the sky and birds sang and chirped in the branches.

Jade Flower sighed. 'Even the birds have a nest,' she said, 'but where shall our home be?'

Shi Dun smiled. 'We can pass the night in a cave or in the shelter of trees.'

Jade Flower said: 'I want nothing else in my life if I can be with you forever.' She no longer felt sad.

They crossed a fog-shrouded gully and a high cliff and came to a dew-soaked mountain peak.

Early next day they continued their journey. As the sun rose they came to a hollow. The horses halted. They were surprised to see a fair-sized spring, the water of which looked as red as a petal of the cherry-apple flower, with a sheen as bright as the moon in an azure sky. Even the wild flowers and grass around it sparkled as with a red light.

Jade Flower caught a strange, fragrant smell. Whether it came from the red spring or from the flowers, she did not know. 'We are tired,' she told Shi Dun, 'and the horses too. Let us have a rest.'

Shi Dun agreeing, they jumped down from the horses which began to munch the red grass beside the spring. When Shi Dun and Jade Flower came near the spring, they found the red water crystal clear. Jade Flower felt thirsty. Dipping her cupped hands into the spring, she drank a mouthful of the red water. It was sweeter than honey. As the cool liquid went down her throat, she felt a great warmth spread over her body. When she stood erect, Shi Dun saw that she looked more fresh than the peach blossom. They heard the horses neigh. Looking around, they were amazed to find that the horses had changed—their coats were glossy, their bodies round and fat. Not knowing the reason for the extraordinary change, they were at once astonished and afraid. Hastily mounting, they rode out of the hollow and galloped on their way.

The horses now became swifter of feet, galloping over the rugged mountain path as if it was a smooth, broad road, and jumping over gullies dozens of feet wide. They raced on thus for days and nights. They could not reckon the distance they had covered. At last, when they looked back, the big mountain, blue and misty, was fading into the horizon.

In the evening of that day, Shi Dun and Jade Flower came to a hamlet. At the head

of it stood three cottages, within which lamps were burning. Dismounting from their horses, they knocked at the first door. It was opened by an old woman who surveyed them briefly and said: 'You don't seem to be local people. What do you mean by knocking at my door?'

'Old lady,' Jade Flower hurried to explain, 'we come from far away. Now that it's dark, we have little chance of finding a lodging house. Please, can you let us pass the night here?'

The old lady was delighted. 'Certainly!' she said. 'I'm living alone. If you don't mind, I'll sleep in the east room and you two in the west.'

They were very happy that the old lady had accepted their request, and followed her into the cottage. The old lady cooked rice and made soup for them.

She was an alert and kind-hearted woman, and Shi Dun and Jade Flower soon looked upon her as their dear mother. They told her everything—how they had run away from home, what experiences they had had during the trip, and the story of the red spring. Before she had heard the story of the red spring through, the old mother was in tears.

'Children,' she said sadly, her tears still flowing, 'I fear you two will not be together long.'

Completely bewildered, they were about to ask her to explain when she went on: 'The red spring you saw, children, leads from a red mountain. On top of this mountain is a large maple tree from whose roots oozes juice which becomes the water in the red spring. Every year when the maple leaves redden, the maple tree changes into a red-faced devil, with a pair of fire-stars for eyes which can see through a thousand rock walls and ten big mountains. This red devil goes to the top of the red mountain and sees the girls who have drunk the red spring water. He then picks out the best-looking one among them, snatches her away and makes her his wife. Later, when the snow falls, not only the red-faced devil, but the wife, too, are transformed into maple trees.' She turned to Jade Flower, 'Child, I am afraid you cannot escape him.' So saying, her tears ran again.

Jade Flower was alarmed, worried and afraid. But seeing that the old mother was so sad for their sake, she soothed her, saying: 'Dear mother, the red-faced devil won't carry me away.'

'Dear mother,' Shi Dun also said, 'no matter how terrible the devil is, he won't part us.'

The old mother wiped her eyes. 'You are good children,' she said. 'I have been alone since my husband died. Now you two live here, and we will be one family.'

Then Shi Dun and Jade Flower lived with the old mother, who now no longer needed to worry about the sewing of clothes or the harvesting of crops in the field. Shi Dun never allowed her to get tired and Jade Flower prepared the most delicious dishes for her.

Time flies. The wheat was cut. The millet and grapes ripened, and the maple leaves turned red. The old mother was nervous and could not sleep or eat. Every day she calculated with her fingers, hoping that autumn would soon pass. She hoped that the cycle of day and night would roll on faster.

The days in autumn are short. One evening, when the moon had just taken up the duty of the sun, Shi Dun returned from the field, and Jade Flower from the threshing ground. After cutting the grass, they took it to feed the horses. The old mother had cooked the meal and was passing the courtyard when a large red maple leaf came fluttering down from the sky. It began to whirl in the courtyard, until a whirlwind developed, in the centre of which stood a red-faced devil, with red hair, red beard, red eyes, and in a red robe with long sleeves. It jerked its sleeves, and the maple leaf immediately transformed itself into a decorated bridal sedan-chair.

The old mother uttered a cry and fell to the ground. Hearing her, Shi Dun and Jade Flower, who were feeding the horses in the stable, rushed out.

When the red-faced devil saw Jade Flower, it chuckled, and with a flick of its long sleeves, Jade Flower was whisked into the sedan-chair. Another flick and the sedan-chair, wheeling in circles, rose into the sky. In a twinkling everything was gone, sedan-chair and all. From afar came the voice of the devil: 'She drank my red spring water; she's mine.'

The old mother began to cry. Shi Dun was greatly distressed, but he did not cry. Helping the old lady to her feet, he said: 'Mother! I must go and get her back at all costs.'

The old mother stopped crying and said agitatedly: 'Child! you must not go. The red-faced devil has carried away nobody knows how many girls, yet no one is ever known to have been retrieved. If you go, you would die to no purpose.'

Shi Dun made no reply. Guiding the old mother into the house, he said: 'Mother! Do not worry. I'll go at once to find her.'

Seeing that he could not be persuaded to stay, the old mother said: 'Child, you can't go empty-handed. Here, take this dagger with you.'

Taking the dagger, Shi Dun mounted one of the horses and dashed towards the big mountain.

Being impatient, he thought the horse was going too slow, so he said: 'Horse, jump over this hollow.' In a flash the horse leaped over the hollow. Then he said: 'Horse, go up the ridge.' And the horse bounded up the ridge.

When morning came, Shi Dun found himself on a big mountain. It was high and had many trees in the hollows. He searched but could not find the red spring. Tears rolled down his face.

Shi Dun stared at the mountain, wishing it could tell him where the red-faced devil had taken Jade Flower. Climbing to the peak, he looked sadly towards the horizon, thinking of what he would do, if at that very moment, he espied the red-

faced devil and Jade Flower.

Brushing away his tears, he said to the horse: 'Horse! I must find Jade Flower even if I have to climb all the mountains in the world. Now go to the highest mountain in the far distance/

The horse sped along, jumping across gullies, dashing up slopes and sliding down thousand-foot precipices. No matter how dangerous the going, Shi Dun never reined in. Mountain after mountain, and always yet another mountain, still he could not reach the highest.

It was in a tremendous cave, halfway up the highest mountain that the red-faced devil had hidden Jade Flower. The cave was handsomely decorated, with scrolls of landscape paintings hanging on the wall. The bed was spread with a silk coverlet and quilts. The red-faced devil changed himself into a handsome scholar and, smiling, said to Jade Flower: 'Since you have drunk my red spring water you shall become my wife. Forget your husband. He shall never come here even if he has three heads and six arms.'

Jade Flower trembled with anger when she heard the devil's voice. Sitting in the cave, she could not hear the sougning of the wind or the chirping of birds, but she was conscious that Shi Dun was searching for her on the big mountain. She knew that he was shedding tears for her. Raising her head she said: 'I've drunk your red spring water, but I shall never become your wife!'

The red-faced devil grinned and said: 'I see, you still expect to see him. I'm not boasting, but if your husband comes to my red mountain, I'll let him take you back.' And he cackled maliciously. But when he looked out, through the gullies and hills, he was shocked to see Shi Dun speeding towards the mountain on horseback. Quickly he changed back into his true form.

Quickly unbuckling a speckled belt from his body, the red-faced devil flicked it in the air. It changed into a tiger which leaped out of the cave.

Shi Dun had jumped over five more mountains and was proceeding at a thunderous pace when suddenly a pair of red lamps loomed up in front of him. They proved to be the eyes of a tiger, which stood, mouth open, directly in his path. The horse could not check its onward rush. Shi Dun rode headlong into the huge gaping mouth. He seemed to tumble into a cauldron of boiling water. Bearing the pain with clenched teeth, he slit the tiger's belly with the dagger, and with a hiss he and the horse fell out on to the ground. Looking around he could see no tiger, only a speckled belt lying on the path.

After crossing two more mountains, Shi Dun was within view of his goal.

The red-faced devil, thinking that Shi Dun by this time was no more, was boasting to Jade Flower. But Jade Flower only wept, giving no heed to him.

The devil was in the act of seizing her when suddenly he stopped in wonderment. Through a break in the hills he could see Shi Dun. Quickly taking down a scroll of

landscape painting from the wall, he flicked his sleeve and a steep and slippery mountain drifted out of the cave.

After scaling another hill, Shi Dun encountered a bare, steep mountain. The horse made a dash but slipped back. Dismounting, Shi Dun started to climb. With great effort he went halfway up, but he slid back. His face was cut by the stones and his body was bruised and sore. But he did not flinch. Getting to his feet, he made another attempt and yet another. He was soaked through with perspiration which dripped from his clothes. It ran into his eyes. Wiping the sweat from his face, again he dashed at the steep, slippery mountain, but it had disappeared. Instead, he found himself standing in a hollow. By his side was a pine tree on which hung a piece of scroll with a mountain drawn on it. The paper had been damped by his perspiration.

Remounting his horse, Shi Dun continued to advance until he found himself finally in front of the highest mountain. It was all red. It must be the red mountain, he thought. With a movement of the reins, the horse proceeded upwards.

In the cave, the red-faced devil flapped his sleeve at Jade Flower who became transfixed. He flicked his sleeve at a pair of pillow-cases, which changed into the likeness of Jade Flower, mute and motionless. Then, with a flash, he disappeared.

Halfway up the mountain, Shi Dun looked around and found even the stones and maple leaves were red. Then he found the cave, the entrance of which was decorated with multicoloured gems. Shi Dun halted his horse. 'Maybe this is the residence of the red-faced devil,' he murmured. Dismounting, he pushed open the stone door and walked in. He stopped dead, stupefied. There stood three Jade Flowers, with the same slender eyebrows and big eyes, all looking at him, mute and immovable. Worried and grief-stricken, Shi Dun heaved a deep sigh! Jade Flower,' he said, 'it is with great difficulty that I have found you. Why don't you say a word to me and come to me?'

Jade Flower heard distinctly every word he said. How she longed to tell him all she had experienced; but her tongue was as if it were stone. How she longed to walk towards him, but her legs would not move. It is said that the most bitter thing in the world is to part from one's beloved, but that was nothing compared with the grief she now suffered. Tears streamed down her face.

The difficulty was solved. Only the real Jade Flower would weep for her lover. Picking up Jade Flower, from whose eyes tears were still flowing, he backed out of the cave. The body of Jade Flower was as hard and heavy as rock. Riding was impossible. Without putting down Jade Flower, Shi Dun said to the horse: 'Horse, you know the road, let us get back.'

Carrying Jade flower, Shi Dun trudged over rubble, weed, and shrubs. He would rather suffer a hundred wounds than let her be scratched by a twig. With Jade Flower in his arms, he entered a maple grove. His legs were sore and his arms were numb, but he would not put her down.

Jade Flower's tears had run dry. 'Shi Dun,' she said in her mind, 'put me down. The journey is long. You'll never reach home carrying me.'

Jade Flower was grievously distressed because she was unable to let him know what was in her mind. Fearing that Jade Flower might have doubts, Shi Dun said to her: 'Even if you were really changed into stone, I would not leave you.'

Shi Dun continued on his way with the fossilized Jade Flower in his arms. Suddenly maple leaves fluttered down in front of him. In a flash the red-faced devil stood before him. With one arm clasping Jade Flower and the other hand gripping the dagger, Shi Dun was about to make for the devil when the latter raised a restraining hand. 'Young man,' he said, 'my heart was harder than flint. I have never been moved and I have never admitted defeat. But today I admit I am beaten. I shall never again have the heart to part a wife from her husband.'

As he said this, tears dropped down from his face. In the twinkling of an eye, the red-faced devil transformed into a tall maple, on the red leaves of which sparkled silvery dew drops. As Shi Dun passed under the tree with Jade Flower in his arms, its branches shook, and the crystal drops fell on Jade Flower. Immediately she regained her power of speech and movement.

The horse carried Shi Dun and Jade Flower over mountains and broad roads and finally back to the home of the old mother. The three of them passed their days happily together.

As for the strange red spring, people saw it again in the big mountain and some women drank its tinted water. But, when the maple leaves turned red, the red-faced devil did not appear, and no girl was ever again borne away.

BLUE BEARD

An Old Tale from the French

Think of it! A man rich as a prince, of fine upstanding presence and commanding manner; a man of great moment in Baghdad!

Think of it again! A man cursed by nature with a beard that was quite blue, from the roots of the hairs to their very tips!

To be sure, he had three alternatives in the matter. First, he might shave it off, thus avoiding earthly ugliness while renouncing all hope of a place in Paradise; secondly, he might marry a scold, and so become prematurely grey; and last, he might keep his blue beard and remain the ugliest man in all the world. There was no other alternative, for the beard was so deadly blue that no dye could touch it.

He had staked his chances on the second point: he had married, and more than once; but, although his wives had disappeared mysteriously, his blue beard still remained, as blue as ever. How it was that he had ever found any woman blind enough to marry him it is difficult to imagine, for he was so frightfully ugly that most women at sight of him ran away screaming, and hid in the cellar. But it is only fair to say that Blue Beard had such a way with him that, given two hours' start, he could snap his fingers at any rival.

Now it so happened that, in his neighbourhood, there lived a lady of quality, who had two sons and two daughters; and, in his walks abroad, Blue Beard often met the two girls, and soon fell into the lowest depths of love. Both were adorable, and he really could not decide which one he preferred. Always in exquisite doubt on the point, he finally approached the mother and asked her for the hand of one of her daughters, leaving the choice to her. And she, like a wise woman, said nothing, but simply introduced Blue Beard to Anne and Fatima, and left the rest to nature and their own fancies.

But neither Anne nor Fatima fell in love with their admirer at first sight. His beard was so blue that they could not endure it, and, between them, they led him a dance. Neither was inclined to marry a man with a beard like that, and, what made matters worse, they soon learned that he had already been married several times, and that his wives had disappeared mysteriously. This was rather disconcerting, and each was angling for a brother-in-law rather than a husband.

But, as already stated, Blue Beard had a way with him. He did not expect to be accepted at first asking. Indeed, when he proposed, first to one and then to the other, they both said, 'Oh! you must see father about it'. Now Blue Beard knew very well that their father, having led a very wicked life, was dead and gone; and, as he pondered over it, stroking his beard the while, he began to realise what they meant when they said, 'You must see father about it'.

But Blue Beard did not despair, he merely altered his plan. He invited the whole family, with some of their chosen friends, to one of his country houses, where he gave them the time of their lives. Hunting, hawking, shooting with the bow, or fishing for goldfish in the ponds, they enjoyed themselves to the full especially in the evenings, when they were rowed upon the lake to the sound of beautiful music, and made moonlight excursions to some of Blue Beard's ruined castles, of which he possessed quite a number. Whatever the nature of the day's pleasure-party, the night hours were taken up with banqueting, dancing, or some other form of revelry, until such a late hour that Blue Beard said to himself, 'Only wait till I marry one of them, then we shall see who is master.' For the present he was content to take their pranks in good part. When he found himself trying in vain to get into an apple-pie bed he merely laughed; when he found his pillow stuffed with prickly cactus, or the sleeves and legs of his garments stitched up so that he could not put them on, he swore merrily and fell more deeply in love than ever. One day they cut down the stem of an aloe that was about to flower—a thing which happened only once in every hundred years. The head gardener, who had been listening every day for the loud report with which the aloe blossoms burst their sheath, was heartbroken when he saw what had been done; but Blue Beard consoled him by raising his wages, saying that in a hundred years' time, when every one was bald, the plant might blossom again—what did it matter? In fact, things went so smoothly, and everything in the garden was so very lovely, that the younger daughter, Fatima, being the more poetical and impressionable of the two, began quietly to think what a splendid beard their host's would be if it were not so blue. From this—for you know that love is colour-blind—she began to see the beard in a different light. Like a dutiful and affectionate daughter she spoke to her mother upon the point.

'Mother,' she said, 'it may be only my fancy, but I really think his beard has changed a little in colour during the last few days. Perhaps it's the country air, I don't know; but it doesn't seem to me quite so blue, after all.'

'My darling child,' replied the mother, 'it is strange that you should have mentioned that. I had also noticed it, but, thinking my sight was failing me, I feared that old age was creeping on, and so held my tongue on the matter.'

'That settles it, dear mother. Sooner than believe that you are growing old and your sight is failing I prefer to believe that what we have both noticed is an actual fact. But mind you, though there is a slight change, it is still horribly blue, mother.'

'Yes, dear; but blue's a very nice colour. It's lucky to some people. The eyes of the Goddess of Love were blue; the sky above is blue; the bird of paradise is blue; the deep sea is blue. Press your thumbs on your eyes and what do you see? Blue—the deepest blue imaginable: it is the light of the mind and soul burning in your head, dear; and that is why poets and singers are so found of blue.'

'Then you think—'

'Think? I know, child. Besides, a man with a blue beard is different from all other men; and besides, again, in the dark all beards are black.'

'But even in the light, dear mother, you think it is changing—just a little?'

'Yes, my darling, I do. And the reason I know full well. He has fallen in love, dear; and I think I know with whom. And love can work wonders. Just as grief can turn black hair grey, so can love turn a blue beard—'

'Not grey, mother. Say a greyish blue.'

'I was going to say a bluish grey. But there—if this worthy gentleman suffers from an affliction—which, mind you, I am far from allowing—what could be sweeter in a woman than to pity him? And pity, my darling, sometimes leads to love.'

Fatima then sought her sister Anne, and told her what was on her mind. 'Oh, well,' said Anne when she had heard all about the wonderful change, 'your having discovered it now saves me the trouble of finding it out later on. Not only do I thank you, Fatima, I congratulate you.'

Greatly relieved by her mother's and her sister's attitude, Fatima decked herself out in her best, and waited for Blue Beard to come and find her, which she felt sure he would do. And she was right. That very evening Blue Beard led her aside from the others into the garden, where the moon was shining and the nightingales singing. And there he spoke soft words to her, and wooed and won her for his wife. As soon as they returned to town the wedding was celebrated, and there were great rejoicings over the happy event.

Now, shortly after the honeymoon was over, Blue Beard was called away into the country on matters of urgent importance, which would occupy his attention for at least six weeks. And when Fatima, on hearing this, pouted and began to cry, he sought to console her by suggesting that she should amuse herself among her friends during his absence.

'See now, my dear,' he said, 'these keys will unlock all the doors for you so that you shall want for nothing. These two are the keys of the store-chambers, and these others open the strong rooms where the gold and silver plate is kept. These here are the keys to my money chests, and these smaller ones fit the locks of my jewel coffers. But this little one here'—he separated a curious little key from the others and showed it to her—'is the key of the little room with the iron door at the end of the great corridor. Do what you will with all the rest, but, I warn you, open not that

door. Now, I have trusted you with everything: if you disobey me in this one little matter you will incur my gravest displeasure.'

'That will I never do,' said Fatima as she took the keys from his hand. And she meant it at the time. Blue Beard kissed her, embracing her fondly. Then he entered his coach and was driven away.

Fatima, in her grand home, eagerly welcomed the change of holding high revelry and playing hostess to her friends. They all came running at her invitation, and were immediately shown over the great house. Rooms, cupboards, wardrobes, closets, cabinets and presses were opened by the aid of keys on the bunch, and they went into ecstasies over the wonderful treasures the house contained. There were magnificent pictures, tapestries, costly silk hangings, gold and silver ornaments, the loveliest soft carpets, and, best of all, gold-framed looking glasses reaching from floor to ceiling. These last, which cast one's reflection taller and fairer than the original inlooker, were the subject of long and careful admiration. All spoke with rapture of the splendid luxury of the place, and congratulated Fatima on her great good fortune.

'For my part,' said one, 'if my husband could give me such a magnificent house as this, I would not trouble about the colour of his beard.'

'You're right,' said another. 'Why, for half this grandeur I would marry a man even if his beard were all the colours of the rainbow, especially if he went away and left me the keys of the whole house.'

'The whole house,' thought Fatima, 'nay, this little key here he has forbidden me to use. I wonder why!'

But he had been so stern about it—and his beard got very blue when he was angry—that Fatima put her curiosity away, and continued to entertain her guests. Still, the temptation to slip away and open that forbidden door returned again and again; but always she said to herself, 'Nay; I have the run of the whole house beside: is it a great matter that I am forbidden one pokey little room at the end of a dark corridor?' Then, having triumphed for the twentieth time, she fell at last the more easily—at least she fell to this extent, that she slipped away from her guests and ran along the corridor, just to go and take a peep at the door.

There was nothing unusual about the door. It was of plain, solid iron, and the keyhole was very small. She wondered if the little key would fit it. She tried, and found that it went in quite easily; yet, remembering her promise, she would not turn it, but pulled it out again and tore herself away. But, after all, she could not see what possible harm there could be in opening a small room like that and just having one look inside. Besides, if her husband had been really serious he would have kept the key himself and not given it to her with the others. To be sure, he was a kind, indulgent husband, and would not be so very angry; and then, again, he need never know that she had opened the door.

With thoughts like these passing quickly in her mind she hesitated, paused, and finally turned again to the door. Her disobedient hands trembled as she selected the key a second time, detached it from the bunch, and inserted it in the lock. In another moment she had turned it and pushed the heavy door open.

At first, as the shutters were closed, she could see nothing; but gradually her eyes became accustomed to the dim light and she saw that the floor was of porphyry—at all events, it was red. Then, as she shaded her eyes from the light creeping through the chinks of the shutters, and peered more closely, she discovered to her horror that what she had taken for porphyry was nothing of the kind—it was blood! Here it had clotted in dark crimson pools, and there it had run in little streams along the irregular stone floor. Quickly she traced those streams to their source by the opposite wall, where, as she raised her eyes, she discerned seven dark forms hanging feet downwards from seven spikes driven through their necks into the masonry.

Her first impulse was to flee from the spot—then there came a dreadful thought, and she stayed. Whose bodies were those hanging in the forbidden cupboard? She took a step forward and inspected them more closely. Yes, they were women, and they had been young and beautiful. O horror of horrors! Could it be true? Were those the bodies of Blue Beard's wives, who had disappeared, one after another, so mysteriously? There they hung, spiked through the neck, their feet dangling above pools of their life's blood—mute evidence of foul murder.

As Fatima stood gazing at the scene before her, her eyes dilated with fear, and, her breath coming in gasps, the little key fell from her fingers and clinked upon the floor. The sound recalled her to her senses, and she picked the key up hastily. Then she turned and rushed out; and, having locked the door—no easy feat with such trembling hands—she ran upstairs, her face as pale as death. She thought to escape and regain her composure in her own room, but, when she arrived there, she found it full of her guests, who were so busy admiring its luxurious appointments that her pallor went unnoticed. One by one, however, perceiving that she was tired, they melted away, promising to come again on the morrow—unless her husband was expected to return. It was evident they feared him; so did she, now.

At last they were all gone, and, as soon as she was left alone, she bethought her of the key and drew it from her pocket. What was her horror to observe the dull red stain of blood upon it, which she had not noticed when she picked it up from the blood-smearred floor of the dreadful chamber. Quickly she seized the nearest rag, thinking to wipe off the stain; but, rub as she might, it would not come off. As she scoured and polished without result, terror slowly grew on her face. 'Alas!' she cried, 'There is Blue Magic in this. Now I know my husband has consorted with fiends: his beard for one thing, this bewitched key for another. If I am not mistaken, nothing will remove the stain of foul murder from this key.'

Nevertheless, she bethought herself of many things: of sand, and pumice, and strong acid, and she tried them all upon the key; but though she wore the metal away by hard rubbing, the bloodstain still remained, for, being a magic key, it had absorbed the blood of Blue Beard's victims, and was saturated through and through with it.

She was just beginning to realise that the task was hopeless when she heard the rumble of wheels, but she still went on polishing the key, for, whatever coach was approaching, she assured herself it could not be her husband's—thank Heaven, he was not due to return yet for six weeks, and by that time she might contrive to have a new key made, exactly like the old one. But presently, when the coach drew up at the gate, and the horns sounded in her husband's style and manner, she started up with a cry of dismay, and her knees trembled with sudden fright.

Her first care was to hide the key in her bosom; then she ran out, but, for very fear, could get no farther than the head of the main stairway, where she stood clutching the stair-rail, and quaking in every limb. There, in the hall below, stood Blue Beard giving some final orders to the coachman. With a quick movement he turned, and, looking up, perceived her standing irresolute.

'Yes, it is I, my darling,' he called up gaily as he advanced to the foot of the stairs. 'Some letters reached me on the road, showing me that my long journey was unnecessary. So, you see, I have returned to your arms.'

By this time Fatima was tottering down the stairs, bent on giving him a fitting welcome; for, though she feared him more than aught else, she must try not to show it. 'Seven of them!' she kept saying to herself, as she gripped the balustrade, 'And seven and one are eight! And I have a throat as well as they, as sure as iron spikes have points.'

There was only a dim light in the hall, so that Blue Beard could not see her trembling condition; and if, when she greeted him, he felt that her body was quaking, he was fond enough to put it down to joy at his unexpected return. And Fatima, taking cover in this, behaved in an excited manner, like one so delighted to see her husband back again that she did not know what she was doing. She ran hither and thither, ordering this and that to be done, and then countermanding the orders, doing this or that herself, and then immediately undoing it again—behaving, in short, like one demented with excitement, until Blue Beard smiled and stroked his beard, and thought she was a wonderful little bundle of delight.

And so, through such artfulness long sustained, it transpired that the question of the keys did not arise all that night, nor, indeed, until late the following day, when, as ominous as a thunderclap, came a summons from Blue Beard that Fatima should attend him immediately on the terrace. With a wildly beating heart she hastened to answer the summons.

'I want my keys,' he said in the usual manner of a man. 'Where are they?'

'The keys?—Oh yes, the keys. I—I will go and fetch them immediately.'

Fatima ran off, and you can imagine her thoughts and feelings as she went. Blue Beard remained—he was always a grim figure—standing as she had left him—just waiting: his thoughts and feelings were in his beard.

Presently Fatima returned, purposely out of breath in order to hide whatever confusion she might feel, and handed the bunch of keys to her husband. He took them without a word, looked at them carefully, and then slowly turned his eyes upon her.

'The key of the room at the end of the corridor,' he said grimly, 'it is not here: where is it?'

'The key of the—Oh, you mean the key of the—'

'I mean the key of the—; yes, that's what I mean. Where is it?'

'Oh! I remember now. You said I was not to use it; so, to make sure, I took it off the bunch and put it away in a drawer of my dressing-table. I will run and fetch it.'

'Do,' said Blue Beard, and, while she ran off, he stood there looking for all the world like a blue thundercloud before the lightning comes.

Once out of sight Fatima paused to collect her wits. Then, having made up her mind, she ran twice up and down stairs, and finally rejoined her husband, panting heavily.

'It is not there,' she cried in dismay. 'I put it in my jewel case,—of that I'm sure—but now it's gone. Who can have taken it?'

'Go look again,' replied Blue Beard, dangerously calm.

She ran away again, and again came running back. 'No,' she said, 'it is not there. Who can have—?'

'Silence, madam!' broke in Blue Beard. 'That was no ordinary key; and something tells me it is in your bosom now.' And, with this, he gathered her shrinking form in his rough arm, and with a rougher hand searched for, and found—the key!

'So!' he said. 'You lied to me. And—what is this? How came this blood upon the key?'

Fatima was very pale, and trembling like an aspen leaf. 'I do not know,' she replied. 'Perhaps—'

'Perhaps nothing!' roared Blue Beard in a terrible voice. 'Madam! Your face tells me you are guilty. You have presumed to disobey me; to enter that room at the end of the corridor. Yes, madam; and, since you would sooner indulge your fancy for that room than obey my commands, you shall go there and stay as long as you like. Seven and one are eight, madam!'

'Mercy! Mercy!' cried Fatima, flinging herself at Blue Beard's feet. 'Do what you will with me, but do not put me in that room.'

She looked up sobbing, imploring his forgiveness; and, if a woman's beauty in

despair could have melted a heart of stone, the sight of her would have melted his. But it will not astonish you to know that his heart was as flinty as his beard was blue, and Fatima realised this as she looked again at his terrible face.

'I have said it, madam,' he replied to her pleadings. 'None can disobey me and live. Prepare, then, for death.'

'Then,' said she, her imploring eyes brimming with tears, 'you will give me a little time to prepare? If I must die, I must say my prayers.'

'Ten minutes will suffice for that. Not a second more.'

Fatima hurried away towards her own room, but on the way she met her sister Anne, who was looking for her.

'Oh! Dear Anne,' sobbed Fatima, as she embraced her sister, 'ask me no questions; there is no time. My husband has returned, and, because I disobeyed him, he has threatened to kill me. Oh! where are my brothers? If they were only here!'

'They are on the way hither,' said Anne quickly. 'They were delayed, but promised to follow me very soon.'

'Then run, dear sister, if you love me; run to the top of the tower, and, if you can see them coming, make a sign to them to hasten; for in ten minutes I must die.'

Quickly Anne ran up and up until she reached the roof of the tower; and Fatima, standing at the foot, called up to her, 'Sister Anne! Dear sister Anne! Do you see any one coming?'

And Anne answered her: 'I see naught but dust a-blowing, naught but the green grass growing.'

Presently Fatima called up again: 'Sister Anne, can you see no one coming?'

'Nay, I see naught but dust a-blowing, naught but the green grass growing.'

Fatima, in despair, continued to call again and again, but always the same answer came down from the roof of the tower. And so the ten minutes ran out, and Fatima wrung her hands and groaned.

Meanwhile, Blue Beard, having sharpened his sword, was trying its edge on the greensward of the terrace below. Fully satisfied with it, he strode into the house, and, standing at the foot of the stairs, shouted, 'Madam, your time is up. Come down at once!'

'One moment—just one moment,' she replied, then called softly to her sister: 'Anne, sister Anne, do you see any one coming?'

'Nay, naught but dust a-blowing, naught but the green grass growing.'

'Madam,' roared Blue Beard, 'if you do not come down quickly, I will come up and drag you down.'

'I am coming,' she replied; and again she called softly to Anne: 'Sister Anne, do you see any one coming?'

'Sister, I see a great cloud of dust.'

'Raised by galloping horses?'

'Alas! Nay, it is but a flock of sheep.'

'Will you come down?' bellowed Blue Beard, 'Or by—'

'I am coming in another moment.' Then to Anne: 'Sister Anne, can you see anybody coming?'

'Yonder I see—God be praised—I see two knights in armour, riding fast. ... Yes, they are my brothers. ... I am waving my kerchief to them. ... They see me. ... They spur and hasten. ... Sister, they will soon be here.'

Then Blue Beard stamped his foot and roared out so terribly that he made the whole house tremble. At this his poor wife, wholly fascinated by terror, crept down to her doom. Her face was stained with tears, her long hair was dishevelled; she flung herself at his feet and besought him to take pity on her.

'Pity!' he thundered, 'I have no pity. You must die!' He seized her by the hair and twisted her head back to expose her beautiful throat; then, flourishing his sword, he went on: 'This is my last word on the abominable crime of curiosity as practised by women. By that detestable vice misfortune and grief came into the world, and we owe our present state of evil to the first woman, whose daughters greatly resemble her in that peculiar gift of prying into matters forbidden. ...' And so he continued to harangue his poor wife, grasping her hair with one hand while he flourished his great sword with the other.

When at length he paused for want of words to describe the horrible crime he was about to meet with punishment, Fatima wailed, 'O sir! wilt thou punish me before I have recommended myself to Heaven? One moment, I implore thee, while I turn my soul to God.'

'Nay, thy prayers are said.' And he raised his sword to strike. But the sword remained in air, as Blue Beard, startled by a loud battering at the gate, turned his head. Then, as the gate was burst in, and two knights came running with drawn swords, he loosed his hold upon Fatima, who sank in a huddled heap like one already dead. Turning quickly, Blue Beard fled, but the two brothers were hot upon his heels; and, after a rapid chase through the house and garden, they came up with him just as he reached the steps of the main porch. There they ran their swords through and through his body, and left him dead in a pool of blood.

When Fatima opened her eyes and saw her two brothers and her sister Anne bending over her, she thanked Heaven for her deliverance. With a sword all dripping red, one brother pointed towards the porch, and Fatima gave a deep sigh of relief. She knew, and was satisfied to know, she was a widow.

Now, as Blue Beard had no children by any of his wives, his sole surviving wife became mistress of all that had been his. All his vast estates and treasures came into her possession, and she was young and beautiful into the bargain. The first thing she did was to purchase commissions for her two brothers in the army; next, she bestowed a splendid estate and a large sum of money upon her sister Anne as a

wedding present on the occasion of her marrying the young man of her choice. Then Fatima fell in love with, and married, a worthy gentleman who adored her, and these two lived out their lives in one continuous hour of happiness.

His beard was black, and, when at length it grew grey, and then silvery white, she only loved him all the more. Even in the first year of her marriage she had quite forgotten the dark cloud cast upon her early life by that terrible man, Blue Beard; and ever afterwards she never had the slightest cause or reason to remember him.

THE GREEN MAN OF SINAI

A Tale from Ancient Egypt

The desert of Sinai is haunted by a little old man, who may often be seen wandering among the sand-hills and across the bare limestone ridges. He is usually met with in the grey twilight, when camels are tethered and tents are set up, and fires are lit to cook the evening meal. Nobody ever speaks to him, and he never speaks to anyone, but when he comes near a camp he may gaze wistfully at it as he passes by. If a child should ask, 'Who is that little old man?' an Arab will answer, 'It is only El Kedir, the Wanderer, a poor old man who will never do anyone harm.'

And if a child should then say: 'Why is he walking past the camp when night is coming on? Why does he not come and ask for food and a bed?' the Arab will answer: 'He never eats and he never sleeps. He is always searching for what he will never find, and he takes no rest by day or by night.'

'Is he a spirit?' a child may ask.

'No, he is not a spirit; he is only a very old man.'

When the evening meal is eaten, and before children are put to bed in the little Arab tents, the story of El Kedir is sure to be told to those who have seen the strange old man for the first time.

'Now, hear the story of the Wanderer,' an Arab will say when the children gather round him in the light of the camp fire. 'I heard it long ago from my father, as my father heard it from his father. El Kedir has been wandering about in the desert for hundreds of years. No one knows rightly how old he is. Once upon a time he was a merchant in Mecca. He was a dealer in precious stones, and became very rich. It worried him very much to think that some day he must die and leave all his riches behind him. He read old books which tell of magic charms, and of herbs that help to prolong life and cure diseases, and he came to know that somewhere in the world there is a fountain called the Well of Life. He spoke to the priests and magicians about this wonderful well, and they told him that anyone who drank of its water would never die.'

Said El Kedir: "Where is this Well of Life? I would fain drink of the water, because I fear death."

A wise old priest made answer, saying: "The Well of Life is in a far distant land. To reach it one must cross wide deserts and climb high mountains, which are infested with wild beasts. Beyond the mountains is a river full of crocodiles, and beyond the river is a deep forest, and beyond the forest is a high cliff which no man can climb. In the face of the cliff there is a cave, and the cave leads to the country of the Well of Life. The passage through the cliff is very long and very dark. It is also dangerous, because serpents and other reptiles swarm among the rocks, waiting to devour any man who dares to seek for the Well of Life. The reptiles can see in the darkness, and they fear light, because light blinds them."

Said El Kedir: "Can a man not carry a torch to guide himself through the dark passage?"

The wise old priest shook his head. "The passage is very long. If a man walks very quickly he cannot get through it in less time than a day and a night. No torch will keep burning for that length of time. Besides, blasts of wind sweep through the passage now and again, and these will blow out a torch, and before one can relight it the reptiles will attack the man who has dared to enter their dwelling-place."

El Kedir's heart was sad when he heard of the perils of the dark passage, and he returned home to think out a plan which would enable him to get a draught of water from the Well of Life.

Next day he spoke to several men, and offered them much money if they would set out in search of the well, but no one dared to do so.

A year went past, and then a stranger came to El Kedir's house. He spoke to the merchant, saying: "I have a jewel to sell. Will you buy it from me?"

Said El Kedir: "No. I have more jewels than I know what to do with."

"But this jewel," the stranger said, "is unlike any other jewel in the world."

Said the merchant: "Show it to me."

The stranger opened his right hand, in which lay a small bright stone.

Said El Kedir: "Your jewel is not worth very much. I have many precious stones which are more costly and more beautiful."

The stranger closed his hand. "Darken the window," he said, "and then you will know something about this wonderful jewel."

El Kedir drew a thick curtain across the window, and the room was then as dark as if it were midnight.

"Now, show me the jewel again," he said.

The stranger opened his hand and revealed the jewel, which shone so brightly that the room was lit up as if the sun were still shining through the window.

El Kedir cried out with surprise. "I have never before seen so bright a gem," he said. "Where did you find it?"

"I cannot tell you," answered the stranger, "but I did not steal it. This bright stone is called Light in Darkness, and also Adam's Jewel, because it was found by our first

father, Adam, in the Garden of Eden. Will you buy it from me?"

El Kadir was thinking of the Well of Life, and said: "Will this jewel shine in the darkest cave, and lead me through the passage to the land of the Well of Life?"

The stranger answered, saying: "Yes. The jewel will light up the darkest of places, and its light will never go out. It will also protect the man who owns it against all perils. No wild beast will attack him and no reptile will sting him, and when he is in need the jewel will cause the jinn to serve him when he needs their help."

Said El Kadir: "What price do you ask for this jewel?"

The stranger drew aside the dark window curtain, so that the sunshine might stream into the room. Then he sat down and laid the jewel on a little table. "It is priceless," he said. "If a king asked me what I wanted for it, I would ask for his kingdom."

"Alas!" El Kadir said, "I am not as rich as a king."

Said the stranger: "Although you have not a kingdom to offer me in exchange for the jewel, yet you have great wealth. I shall give you Light in Darkness on condition that you give me in return all that you now possess—your house, your land, your slaves, your jewels, your gold, your silver, your ivory ornaments, and your ornaments of ebony."

El Kadir heaved a deep sigh. "If I give you all I possess," he said, "I shall be a beggar."

Said the stranger: "Ah, no! You will not be a beggar. You will be the richest man in the world, because you will possess Adam's Jewel."

El Kadir said: "I will give you half of my possessions for this precious stone."

The stranger rose to his feet as if to leave.

"You are not going away, surely," the merchant said.

"If you will not agree to my terms, I must certainly go at once," replied the other very firmly. "Listen to me. I will give you this jewel now on condition that you walk out of the house and leave me as master and owner of it. Not only must you leave the house, you must leave Mecca, and set out on your journey to find the Well of Life. What is your answer? Will you go now, or must I go away?"

"Give me a night to think it over," El Kadir pleaded.

"No," said the stranger; "I have not time to spare. You must say yea or nay now. What is your answer?"

As he spoke he opened his hand and displayed the gleaming jewel.

"It is priceless," said El Kadir.

The stranger nodded.

El Kadir seized the jewel, and said: "I agree to the bargain. I shall set out on my journey now. But tell me in what direction I must go."

"The jewel will lead you," the stranger said. "Now go away. I am master and

owner of this house." He frowned and stamped his foot.

El Kedir was startled. He realized all at once that he had parted with everything he possessed, and he fled from the house and made his way towards the western gate of the city. As he passed through the streets many people saluted him, but he took no notice of their salutations.

"Has El Kedir gone mad?" men asked one another.

El Kedir himself wondered if he was in his right mind as he passed through the western gate and set out to cross the desert. He wandered on and on, not knowing whither he was going, until he became very weary. The afternoon went past, and still he trudged on his aimless way. Not until the sun began to set over the bleak desert hills did he pause to look around. He was hungry and thirsty, and he feared that he would faint and perish. "Alas!" he cried, "I have been a fool. I have given away all my possessions for this useless jewel."

He sat down on the sand and began to examine the jewel. Tears sprang to his eyes. "Alas!" he sighed. "The stranger bewitched me, and now I must perish for my folly. Would I had food to eat and water to drink! Would I had a tent to sleep in and servants to attend to me!"

He had no sooner spoken than a man appeared beside him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

El Kedir looked up. "Who are you?" he asked.

The man bowed. "I am your servant," said he. "Come with me and I will give you all you ask for."

El Kedir rose to his feet and followed the man, who walked round the shoulder of a bare hill and entered a cave. With wonder and joy El Kedir saw a table spread in the cave. It was loaded with dainties. "I have been waiting for you," the man said.

Servants brought water and washed El Kedir's feet and hands. Then they gave him wine to drink. Feeling refreshed, the weary merchant began to eat, and he ate until he was satisfied. Afterwards he lay down to rest on a soft couch, and soon he fell asleep.

In the morning, when El Kedir awoke, he gazed round about in surprise, for he found himself alone in the midst of the desert. The cave had vanished; even the hill had vanished. "I have been dreaming," he said. "Would I had water to drink and food to eat!"

He rose up and looked around, and, to his surprise, saw on a flat stone a jar of water and a bunch of figs. He drank the water and ate of the fruit until he was satisfied. Then he realised that he could obtain anything he desired simply by wishing, because he possessed the wonderful jewel that grants all desires.

He held the jewel in his right hand and said: "I want a camel to ride on and servants to attend upon me."

In a minute a man came towards him, leading a camel. This man bowed to El

Kedir and said: "I am your servant. How many attendants do you wish to have with you on your journey?"

Said El Kedir: "As many as you think I require for protection against robbers and wild beasts."

The man clapped his hands thrice, and three armed men mounted on camels came in sight.

"Whither would you go?" the man asked next.

Said El Kedir: "It is my desire to visit the land in which I shall find the Well of Life."

"I shall lead you thither," the man said, "but you must go through the dark underground passage alone."

Said El Kedir: "Very well. So be it."

The camel knelt on the sand and El Kedir mounted it. Then, following his guide, he set out on his journey towards the land of his desire.

For seven days El Kedir and his attendants travelled westward. Each evening they found a camp prepared for them, and in it plentiful supplies of water and food.

On the evening of the seventh day they reached a camp below a ridge of high mountains, and, when darkness came on, El Kedir heard lions roaring as they came forth to seek for their prey. He seized the jewel and said: "May the lions cease to roar! May every wild beast leave this place until I go away!"

There was silence after that. El Kedir knew that his wish had been granted, and he lay down to sleep.

Next morning, as he sat in his tent eating figs, El Kedir spoke to his guide, saying: "How shall we cross the mountains?"

"Call for the birds, and they will come hither," said the guide.

El Kedir seized the jewel and called for the birds.

No sooner had he done so than he heard a loud noise like the noise of a tempest. He looked up and saw great birds flying towards the camp. They had wings like the sails of an ocean ship, and bodies big as camels.

"We shall ride on their backs," said the guide. "They will carry us across the mountains."

The birds alighted on the sand and crouched low to allow El Kedir and his servants to mount them. Although of great bulk, the birds were very beautiful. Their bodies were of bright gold, and their wings were coloured like the rainbow.

As soon as El Kedir and his attendants were mounted on their backs, the great birds rose high in the air and began their flight. El Kedir looked down and he saw, as if from the top of a high hill, the great desert he had crossed and the rocky steeps and great chasms he was being carried over. The wild beasts that prowled among the mountains looked up as the birds flew towards the west. Beyond the mountains there was a broad river, and El Kedir knew it was the River of Crocodiles. It ran through a

green and fruitful valley, and beyond it there was a deep forest of mighty trees.

When the mountains were crossed the birds alighted on the left bank of the river, and El Kadir and his companions leapt down from their backs. Then they flew away.

El Kadir gazed at the river and saw many crocodiles. "Would that these reptiles would move away!" he said. When he had spoken thus, hundreds of crocodiles took flight as if pursued by an enemy. Then El Kadir said, "I have need of a boat."

He had no sooner spoken than a ferryman appeared, rowing a boat from the opposite bank. As soon as he came near enough, El Kadir and his attendants stepped into the boat and sat down. The ferryman spoke not a word to them. He conveyed them over the river, and when they stepped ashore he returned to the middle of the river, where his boat sank and disappeared. El Kadir then knew that the ferryman was a spirit being.

After resting and partaking of food, El Kadir and his attendants walked towards the forest. It was pleasant to enter its shadowy depths for the sun was hot and there was not a cloud in the sky. The music of birds and the humming of insects made sweet music in their ears. Flowers of every hue adorned the beautiful forest, and the air was full of their sweet odours.

They walked on until they came to an open space in which there was a gleaming pool. Brightly coloured fish swam to and fro in the clear water. The sight of the pool filled El Kadir's heart with joy, and he said: "Here could I dwell for the rest of my days and feel content."

When he had spoken thus, his chief attendant bowed before him and said: "Master, we can go no farther. Permit us to bid you farewell."

Said El Kadir: "If you must go, then I must say 'farewell', but fain would I reward you first."

No sooner did he say 'farewell', however, than his attendants were changed into fishes. They leapt into the pool and were lost among the others that swam there. El Kadir then knew that his attendants were spirit beings. He began to feel afraid, and turned away from the pool. The sun was setting, and the sky was lit up by the golden rays of evening. Birds ceased to sing, insects vanished, and a silence deep as death fell on the forest. El Kadir turned towards the west and walked on. Twilight came on and darkness followed swiftly. Then the Wanderer feared he would be lost. "Alas!" he cried, "I fear to pass the night alone in the forest. Would I could find a dwelling in which to lie down and rest in safety!"

He had no sooner spoken than he saw a light twinkling among the trees. Wondering greatly, he walked towards it, and soon found that it shone from the open door of a house. He entered the house, and saw a little old man sitting on the floor. On a low table beside him were baskets of ripe fruit and two stoups of wine.

El Kadir bowed to the little old man, and said: "I am a traveller, and desire food and a bed."

The old man greeted him pleasantly, saying: "You are welcome. Come and sit with me. I am just about to partake of supper."

As he spoke he clapped his hands, and two dark-skinned servants came out of the shadows. They bowed to El Kedir, and brought him water to wash himself. When he had washed, they clad him in raiment of green silk, and put a red turban on his head.

El Kedir felt happy and comfortable, and sat down to partake of supper. The little old man asked him whence he came and whither he was going, and he told him that he came from Mecca and was searching for the Well of Life.

Said the old man: "Have you got the jewel that the stranger gave you?"

El Kedir answered "Yes", and showed the jewel in the palm of his right hand.

"It is well," the old man said, "On the morrow you will follow the path which leads from my house towards the cave. Holding the jewel in your hand, you will enter the dark passage, which swarms with venomous reptiles. Then you will throw the jewel before you, and walk towards the place where it falls. As soon as you reach it, you will pick it up and throw it before you again. Thus, throwing the jewel before you, I promise that you will go through the dark passage in safety. When you reach the Well of Life, you can drink of its water if you so desire, but before you drink, turn the jewel round three times, and bid the guardian of the well to appear before you. When you return through the dark passage, throwing the jewel before you, come to this house and I will give you further instructions."

Near morning El Kedir bade farewell to his host, and walked towards the cave. He peered into it, and as he did so he heard strange noises, like the rushing of winds, and the beating of wings, and the rustling made by reptiles as they creep to and fro. A cold shiver went through his body, and he feared to enter the cave.

He sat down on the ground for a time, wondering whether he should go on or turn back. The wood was very silent, but soon the silence was broken by the sound of breaking twigs. He looked towards the place whence the sound came, and was horrified to behold a great black serpent creeping towards him. "Alas!" he cried. "Who art thou?"

The serpent reared its shaggy head, and answered him, saying: "I am the messenger of Death."

"Come not near me," El Kedir said, taking the jewel from his pouch and grasping it firmly in his right hand.

The black snake coiled itself and answered him, saying: "I cannot follow you, but I can prevent you from returning, O man of timid heart!"

El Kedir was greatly terrified, and ran into the cave. As he did so, he flung the jewel in front of him. When he did this, the cave was lit up, and the reptiles that lay in his path fled and hid themselves, for the bright rays of Adam's jewel had blinded them and made them afraid. El Kedir walked on, and when he reached the jewel he picked it up and flung it in front of him again. He then saw that the passage was long

and narrow. Indeed, it was not wide enough for more than one at a time to walk through it. El Kadir went on and on, flinging the jewel before him. Now and again blasts of wind blew through the passage, and made him stumble as he pressed forward, and when the wind fell a deep and dreadful silence followed, and in the silence he heard the noise of the creeping reptiles far behind him and far in front of him. On and on he went, fearing to rest and feeling faint and hungry, and at length he said: "Would I had water to drink and fruit to eat!"

He had no sooner spoken than he heard the noise of falling water. The sound was pleasant to his ears, and when he reached the jewel he found that it had fallen in front of an inner cave in which there was a waterfall and a deep pool. He stooped down and drank of the water, and then bathed his hands and his feet and washed his face. Feeling refreshed, he rose up and gazed round the cave. In a small recess he saw a silver table piled up with ripe fruit and rich golden-coloured cakes. He went towards it and ate until he was satisfied. Then, feeling strong and active again, he picked up the jewel and went on his way, flinging it in front of him along the dark passage.

On and on he went, until at length he reached the end of the passage, which led into a beautiful garden. El Kadir gazed on the garden with eyes of wonder. Never before had he seen such bright flowers and such stately trees. He marvelled greatly, but he marvelled still more when he found that the blossoms and flowers on the trees were jewels of priceless value, and that the trunks and branches of the trees were of silver and gold.

In the midst of the garden was a green pool, which twinkled in the rays of the sun.

El Kadir feasted his eyes on the beauties of the garden. Then, after a time, he remembered what the little old man had told him. Accordingly he turned the jewel round three times and said: "May the guardian of the Well of Life appear before me!"

When the words were spoke, a beautiful woman, clad in garments that shone like silver, appeared before him. "Alas!" she said. "Why have you come hither?"

Said El Kadir: "It is my desire to find the Well of Life."

The woman pointed towards the green pool in the middle of the garden, and said: "That is the Well of Life."

El Kadir uttered a cry of joy; but the fair lady said to him: "Beware of the pool! If you drink of the water you will never again enjoy the companionship of mankind. You will become a stranger without a home and without a friend."

Said El Kadir: "If I drink of the water I will cease to fear death."

"Yes, you will cease to fear death," the lady answered with a sigh, "but you will begin to dread life."

El Kadir laughed. "I have come a long journey. I have gone through many perils," said he, "and now that I have found the Well of Life, you ask me not to drink.

I have given away all I possess for the jewel named Light in Darkness, so that I might come hither, and yet you ask me not to drink of the magic water. If I turn back now without drinking of the water, the black serpent will attack me and I will die; and if I escape the serpent and return to Mecca, all men will mock me and spurn me because I have parted with my possessions for a useless jewel. No, no; I will not take your advice. I must drink of the water of the Well of Life."

The lady guardian of the well made no answer, but faded from his sight in a ray of dazzling sunshine.

El Kedir was weary, and went towards the shining pool. Stooping down, he lifted water in the palm of his right hand and sipped it. When he did so his weariness left him and he felt refreshed. The water was cool and sweet and inviting, and casting off his garments El Kedir plunged into it. He bathed his whole body and drank many great draughts of the water. It seemed to him then that he had become young again. His limbs were full of vigour and strength, and when he left the pool he began to dance with joy.

As he danced, the ripples passed off the surface of the pool and it became quite clear again. El Kedir looked into the water and then he discovered that all his body had turned green. He gazed upon his arms and legs with astonishment, and exclaimed: "Alas! what has happened to me? I am now a green man." That is how he came to be called El Kedir, which means "the Green One".

A sadness fell upon his heart, and he wondered what the people of Mecca would say when they beheld him again.

"I shall return home without delay," he said to himself.

He entered the dark passage again, throwing the jewel in front of him as he went, and when he had passed through, and returned to the forest, he hastened towards the house of the little old man.

The old man was sitting at the door of his house waiting for him.

"You have tasted the water of the Well of Life," said the old man.

"Yes," El Kedir answered, "but my skin has turned green."

"You have paid the penalty," said the old man. "I advise you not to return again to Mecca, but to dwell here."

Said El Kedir: "I came hither to drink of the magic water so that I might be able to enjoy life. I must therefore return to Mecca."

"You will not be welcomed by your fellows."

"You jest."

"Besides, you cannot return again without my help."

"What mean you?"

"The birds that flew over the mountains will not carry you back to the desert unless you give me Adam's jewel."

"Alas!" El Kedir said, "The jewel is all I possess. I gave the stranger my entire

possessions for it."

"But you have had your reward. You have drunk of the water of the Well of Life."

"Must I then return to Mecca as poor as a beggar?"

"Yes, my friend. That is why I have advised you to remain here."

El Kadir was silent for a time. Then he said: "No, I cannot stay with you. I long for my old friends. I would rather return to Mecca as a beggar than remain here for ever. I have become young again; I can set to work and make another fortune and enjoy life. Take the jewel and help me to return home."

"As you will," said the little old man, who took the jewel from El Kadir and placed it in his breast. "Now, lie down and sleep."

Said El Kadir: "Will you not offer me fruit to eat and water to drink?"

"You have no need of food or water," the old man said, "because you have drunk of the magic water."

El Kadir laughed. "Will I never need to eat and drink again?"

"No, never," the little old man said.

Said El Kadir: "Then I shall soon become a rich man again."

He lay down to sleep. When he awoke he found himself lying on the desert sand, because while yet he slept he had been carried back by spirit beings to his native land. He stood up and gazed about him.

The desert was wrapped in darkness, and out of the darkness a voice spoke to him, saying: "You have slept your last sleep. You will never sleep again, and yet you will not feel weary."

El Kadir clapped his hands with joy. "I shall no longer have to eat, or drink, or sleep," said he. "How fortunate I am! I shall soon become very rich, and all men will envy me."

He saw lights twinkling in the darkness and walked towards them. Soon he reached the wall of a large town. Sentinels stood at the gate, and he spoke to them, saying "What city is this?"

Said a sentinel: "This is the city of Mecca. Who are you, and whence come you?"

El Kadir gave his name, and asked permission to enter through the gate.

Said the sentinel who had already spoken: "The gate will be opened at dawn. Then you may enter."

El Kadir sat down, waiting for the dawn. When the first ray of light appeared in the east the gate was opened, and he rose to enter the city. The sentinels allowed him to go past, but no sooner had he passed them than they uttered cries of horror and fled away to the right and to the left.

El Kadir wondered why the sentinels had behaved in this strange manner, but did not wait to ask. He walked on until he reached the marketplace. There he saw a woman carrying a jar of water on her head. He spoke to her, saying: "You have gone early to the well."

The woman turned round and looked at him. As soon as she did so she uttered a cry of dismay, dropped the jar, which was shattered on the roadway, and fled from before him.

The sun rose and the air grew bright. El Kedir walked through the marketplace and saw several slaves coming towards him carrying bales of silk. He waited till they came near, but as soon as their eyes fell upon him they flung down their bales and ran away, crying: "The green man! The green man!"

Then was El Kedir's heart filled with dismay. "Alas!" he said, "I am feared by everyone. I must hide myself."

He left the marketplace, and, seeing an empty house, crept into it through a broken window. There he remained until the people passed up and down the streets in increasing numbers. He peered out through a slit in the door of the old house, and at length saw many merchants whom he knew and with whom he had done business. He longed to speak to them, and at length he ventured to leave the house. To conceal his face he drew his robe across it, and he blackened his hands and legs with soot. Thus disguised, he left the house and entered the marketplace. Many eyes followed him as he passed along. "Who is that man?" one asked another. "Why does he hide his face?"

El Kedir walked towards a group of dealers in precious stones, and sat down in front of them.

"Who comes hither?" asked one, gazing with wonder on the form of El Kedir.

"You will know my voice," El Kedir said.

"It is the jewel merchant who gave all he possessed to a stranger," said one of the dealers.

"Yes, indeed, it is I and no other," El Kedir answered.

The men laughed because he had said: "It is I."

"Why do you hide your face?" one asked.

Before El Kedir could answer, a woman who stood near him shrieked, and cried out with horror: "He casts no shadow. He is an evil spirit."

The dealers sprang to their feet, and one of them seized El Kedir's garment and rent it in twain. Then everyone saw that his face was green, and his body and his limbs were green also.

Men, women, and children fled at once from the marketplace, crying: "The green man! The green man!"

Then El Kedir realised that he could never live among his fellow men again, because everyone feared him. He returned to the empty house and hid himself until darkness fell. Then he came out and fled through the streets towards the western gate.

The gate was already closed, but he asked the sentinels to open it. At first they refused to do so, one of them saying: "Who are you that dares to command us to

open the gate?"

"I am the Green Man," El Kadir answered. "Let me go forth, and I shall never again return."

The sentinels opened the gate and he ran out of the city. The gate was closed quickly behind him.

In this manner El Kadir left his native city to wander alone in the desert. It is said that he is still wandering about searching for the spirit guide who led him westward towards the land of the Well of Life, and that when night falls he hears voices calling him through the darkness. He has been wandering up and down the desert for long years—indeed, for hundreds of years. He cannot rest, he never sleeps, and he cannot die, because he has drunk of the water of the Well of Life."

When an old Arab tells this story to the young people the children pity the desert wanderer. "Poor old man," a woman may say, "perhaps he will be forgiven in time, and allowed to lie down and die."

**Three Tales from India, as told again by Ruskin
Bond**

THE FRIENDSHIP OF HEERA AND LAL

In a certain town there lived a poor grass-cutter who made his living by cutting grass in the forest and selling it in the town for a few paisa. One day, as usual, he rose early in the morning and went into the forest. When he had cut sufficient grass, he found that he had left behind the rope with which he usually tied the bundle. He was very upset, because this meant he had lost a day's labour and earnings; but, as he was walking home despondently, he saw what appeared to be a glistening rope lying a few paces ahead of him.

The grass-cutter took the rope in his hand, and, as he did so, it changed into a long, green snake. He dropped the snake; and, as the reptile touched the ground, it resolved itself into a ruby, or *lal*, of great value.

The grass-cutter had no idea of the value of what he had found; but, tying it in his turban, he returned home. Next morning he went to the palace and presented his find to the Raja.

The Raja was so pleased with the ruby that, certain that his Rani would admire so beautiful a stone, he took it into her apartment and presented it to her. But as soon as the Rani took the stone in the palm of her hand she found that it was no longer a ruby but a beautiful new-born baby.

As the Rani had no children of her own, she adopted the child, and brought him up with care and affection. When Lai was eight years old, he was sent to a school where only the children of royal families were taught. There he met an enchanting Princess called Heera, and they became close friends.

As the years passed, and the boy and girl grew older in each other's company, their young love grew stronger. When the Raja, Lai's foster-father, heard of their friendship, he immediately ordered the boy to stop seeing Heera. Meanwhile Heera's parents, for political reasons, announced the engagement of their beautiful daughter to a powerful Raja who was old, one-eyed, and bent double. When Lai heard of the betrothal, he stole out of his father's palace, mounted on a swift horse, and rode to the kingdom of Heera's father.

He reached the city on the day of the marriage. The bride came out of the palace followed by a long procession, and people marched with lights and drums through the gaily decorated streets. As the procession passed down the main street, Heera caught sight of Lai. And while the celebrations were at their height, she slipped away

and joined him. Then, disguising herself as a boy—so that she resembled Lai very closely—she rode out of the city with him.

They rode fast and far, the hooves of their steeds giving out sparks of fire as they thundered through the forests. On and on they rode until the sun went down and the stars came out. And after several days they reached a large city, where they took lodgings at an inn.

When they were passing through the streets the next day, they noticed a woman sitting at a cooking-pot, weeping bitterly.

'Why are you weeping, mother?' asked Heera.

'Don't you know, my child?' said the woman. 'The Raja of this city has a beautiful daughter for whom every day a young man is sacrificed. Now it is the turn of my son, and these are the last sweets I shall ever make for him.'

'Do not weep, mother,' said Heera, 'We will go instead of your son to this terrible princess.' And they rode to the palace where the Raja's officers showed them into the chamber of the princess.

At first the princess treated him with great kindness; but later, when she was alone with Lal, a sudden change came over her. She began foaming at the mouth and tearing her hair. She rolled on the ground, and writhed and screamed. Heera rushed into the room. At the same time the exhausted princess fell into a deep coma, and, as she lay unconscious, her left thigh burst open, and a terrible black snake emerged from it.

The snake darted towards Heera with a great hiss, its forked tongue darting in and out. But Lal drew his sword and cut off the snake's head with a single blow.

They remained all night with the unconscious princess, and by morning she had come to her senses.

When the Raja came to know that the snake which had possessed his daughter for so long had been killed by two brave youths, he called them before him, and offered them whatever they liked.

'Announce our betrothal to each other,' requested Heera. 'Permit us to be married in your city.'

'But you are a boy,' said the Raja.

'No, I am the Princess Heera in the guise of a boy. And this is my consort, Prince Lal.'

The Raja immediately made them welcome as his guests, and his daughter and Heera became close friends. But as the day of the marriage drew near, the princess began to grow jealous. She was afraid that Lal would take Heera away from her.

One day the princess asked Heera: 'Tell me, dear sister, what is the caste of our dear friend Lai? Though we know he is the adopted son of a Raja, there is some mystery about his birth. I have heard it said that his real father was a mere grass-cutter.'

'Does it matter?' asked Heera. 'Am I not happy in his love, and in his delightful presence? What need is there to know his caste?'

But the princess persisted with her questioning, and made Heera promise that she would ask Lai about his caste.

One evening as Heera and Lai sat beside each other on the banks of a small river, she put her question to him.

Lal looked very distressed, and said, 'Heera, do not expect me to answer that question. Is it important to you?'

But Heera's curiosity was now aroused. She was bent on knowing the truth, and kept questioning Lai.

The boy walked a little way into the river, and said, 'Are you determined to know my caste?'

'Yes,' said Heera. 'You must tell me.'

He walked deeper into the river until the water reached his shoulders, and again he asked, 'Do you still want to know my caste, Heera?'

And Heera, thinking it was all agone, answered playfully, 'Yes, I do!'

Then Lal moved deeper into the water, until his body was submerged and only a tuft of his hair could be seen on the surface. And his voice came from under the water, asking Heera, are you still bent upon knowing my caste? There is time to change your mind! His voice sounded deep and strong, as though he was already speaking from another world.

But Heera did not waver in her resolution, and answered, 'I do. I do!'

As soon as she had spoken, the tuft of hair disappeared. In the place where Lal had been standing, there appeared a beautiful white lily, and on it lay a sparkling ruby. The flower and the ruby were visible for only a few moments. Then they vanished.

Heera waited day and night for Lal to reappear; but she waited in vain. He never came back.

THE WISE PARROT

Once upon a time there was a Raja who owned a parrot, and its name was Hiramantota.

This parrot was so very wise that the Raja would always consult it before attending his Court. Hiramantota was also very good at predicting the weather and days of good fortune, and the Raja and his ministers, whenever they wanted to go out hunting or on a long journey, would consult the wise parrot before choosing a day on which to start out.

One afternoon, when Hiramantota was sitting in the Court, a flock of parrots flew past the open door and settled noisily in some guava trees that grew in the gardens.

The Raja was most surprised when Hiramantota turned to him and said, 'Those are my people, perched on the guava trees. They have come to ask me to visit the country where I was born and bred. Please give me permission to take a holiday, so that I may visit my old home and see my parents and relatives again.'

But the Raja was disturbed by the parrot's request.

'If you go away, Hiramantota,' he said, 'who will advise me and help me to make correct decisions? And how do I know that you will return from that distant country where your people live?'

Hiramantota felt hurt that the Raja should doubt his loyalty.

'You know, O Raja, that I never break my word,' he said. 'If I promise that I will return upon a certain day, you know that I will do so. Moreover, upon my return, I will bring you a truly wonderful fruit which has the rare quality of giving immortality to those who eat it.'

The Raja's curiosity was aroused by the parrot's description of this unusual fruit, and, although he was reluctant to part with Hiramantota even for a short time, he agreed to let him go for a week.

Hiramantota flew off with a shrill scream of delight, and joined the flock of parrots in the guava trees. For a few minutes there was a great chattering in the trees, and then, at a given signal, they all rose into the air and flew off in a westerly direction in the track of the setting sun.

Hiramantota's father was king of all the birds in his native country, and he and his queen were delighted to see their son again. There was great feasting and rejoicing

in honour of the visit. Time passed all too quickly, and at the end of the week Hiramantota told his parents, 'I must now return to my Raja. He is expecting me back tomorrow, and I must not disappoint him.'

'Go my son,' said the King of the parrots, 'and if your master can spare you again, come and visit us next year.'

'I will try to come,' said, Hiramantota. 'And I have one favour to ask you. Will you allow me to carry back to my master a specimen of the fruit of immortality which grows in these forests?'

'Most certainly,' said the King of the parrots, and he gave his son one of these wonderful fruits.

Some hours later, while the Raja and his prime minister were together in the council chamber, the parrot flew in at the open window and settled at the Raja's feet. In his beak he carried the golden fruit.

'A thousand welcomes, my Hiramantota!' cried the Raja, stooping down and caressing his friend. 'And is this the fruit of immortality of which you spoke?'

'It is,' said the parrot, laying the fruit on the King's throne. 'Those who partake of it shall never die.'

All eyes in the council chamber turned enviously upon the golden fruit.

The Raja considered for a moment, and then said, 'This precious fruit must not be wasted. Let us plant it in the ground, and raise from it a tree which will bear more fruits upon its branches. In that way, many people will benefit from it.'

The head gardener was sent for, and he was told to plant the fruit with great care in the royal gardens. When the young tree appeared, it was to be well watered, fenced around, and tended with great care.

And in time a plant did spring up from the fruit, and began to grow into a vigorous young tree. The Raja and the parrot both watched its growth with considerable pleasure and satisfaction.

The tree grew rapidly for it was well nourished and cared for. Fruit began to form upon it. And then a strange thing happened. On a certain night, one of the fruits fell to the ground and was poisoned by a snake which ran its tongue over it. In the morning, the head gardener, not knowing what had happened, chanced to pass by, and seeing one of the precious fruits lying on the ground, picked it up, put it into a basket, and took it straight to the Raja.

The Raja summoned Hiramantota and the prime minister, and said, 'Behold, here is the first fruit of our tree of immortality!'

'Do not eat it, Your Highness,' said the prime minister. 'The first fruit should be dedicated to the gods.'

The Raja was pleased with this advice, and sent soldiers to inform the priests that he would attend the principal temple on the morrow.

The Raja divided the fruit amongst the priests, assigning two pieces to each god.

These portions, of course, the priests took for their own use; and no sooner had they eaten of them than they fell into a profound sleep, from which they never awoke.

The Raja was thunderstruck and immediately consulted his prime minister.

'Their deaths must have been caused by the fruit of immortality,' said the prime minister. 'It appears to me that Hiramantota has done us a great evil by introducing this poisonous fruit into our country. It seems that he intended to kill you and your family in this way!'

The Raja was inclined to believe his prime minister, and summoning Hiramantota, he asked the parrot, 'To whom did you bring back this fruit of immortality?'

'For you, O King,' answered Hiramantota without any hesitation.

Then the Raja said bitterly, 'I have protected you all these years, and placed you in position of honour and trust, and you have repaid me by black ingratitude and most sinister plots against my life and the lives of my family and people.'

And without giving Hiramantota time to say a word in his own defence, he struck the poor bird a heavy blow with a stick, and killed him on the spot.

Then the Raja gave instructions to the head gardener to place a thorny fence around the tree, and ordered that no one was to visit the spot.

Now there happened to be a dhobi—a washerman—connected with the palace, whose married son lived with him. Unfortunately the dhobi's wife and the son's wife could not agree, and were frequently quarrelling with each other. This brought much grief to the dhobi and his wife. So much so that one day they decided that they could stand it no longer, and would put an end to their lives. Whilst discussing the matter, it occurred to the dhobi that some of the poisoned fruit from the Raja's tree would serve their purpose, so at night he stole into the gardens, pushed aside the thorny fence, and taking one of the fruits, returned home. Then he and his wife both ate of the fruit, and lay down—as they thought—to die.

But the result was very different from what they expected, for no sooner had they devoured the fruit than they suddenly shuffled off many weary years and became quite young again!

The dhobi sprang to his feet, exclaiming: 'Isn't this wonderful? I feel almost like a boy again!' And his wife gave a skip and a jump, and screamed: 'I'm a girl, I'm a girl! I can dance and sing again!'

It did not take long for the strange news to spread through the bazaars, and soon all the gossips were talking of the dhobi and his wife who had eaten of the fruit in the Raja's garden, and become quite youthful again. (Needless to say, they no longer wished to die.) In time the news reached the palace, and the Raja was amazed and very troubled when he heard the story. He instantly made enquiries of the gardener, and then learnt for the first time that the fruit the priests had eaten was not plucked

from the tree, but picked off the ground.

'That unlucky fruit must have been poisoned by a snake!' cried the Raja in distress. 'And I sacrificed my faithful Hiramantota due to my own suspicious thoughts and lack of faith. My poor parrot, my best friend! I will rather see you again and beg your forgiveness than live for a thousand years!'

The heart-broken Raja was never seen to smile again. The first lesson he taught his children was that the rulers of states should not lightly order a subject's execution, lest it prove an act of injustice, and bring lifelong sorrow in its wake.

SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN PRINCES

Long, long ago there was a king who had seven sons—all of them brave, handsome and clever. The old king loved them equally, and the princes dressed alike and received the same allowances. When they grew up they were given separate palaces, but the palaces were built and furnished alike, and if you had seen one palace you had seen the others.

When the princes were old enough to marry, the king sent his ambassadors all over the country to search for seven brides of equal beauty and talent. The king's messengers travelled everywhere, saw many princesses, but could not find seven suitable brides. They returned to the king and reported their failure.

The king now became so despondent and gloomy that his chief minister decided that something had to be done to solve this problem. 'Do not be so downcast, Your Majesty,' he said. 'Surely it is impossible to find seven brides as accomplished as your seven sons. Let us trust to chance, and then perhaps we shall find the right brides.'

The minister had thought of a scheme and the princes agreeing to it, were taken to the highest tower of the fort, which overlooked the entire city as well as the surrounding countryside. Seven bows and seven arrows were placed before the princes, and they were told to shoot in any direction they liked. Each prince had agreed to marry the girl upon whose house the arrow fell—be she daughter of prince or peasant.

The princes took up the bows and shot their arrows in different directions, and all the arrows except that of the youngest prince fell on the houses of well-known and highly respected families. But the arrow shot by the youngest went beyond the city and out of sight.

Servants ran in all the directions looking for the arrow, and after a long search found it embedded in the branch of a great banyan tree, on which was sitting a monkey.

The king and his courtiers and the ministers held a hurried conference and decided that the youngest prince should be given another chance with his arrow. But the prince, to everyone's surprise, refused a second chance.

'No,' he said, 'my brothers have found good and beautiful wives, and that is their good fortune. But do not ask me to break the pledge I took before shooting the

arrow. I know I cannot marry this monkey, but nor will I marry anyone else. I shall take the monkey home and look after her as a pet.'

And the youngest prince went out of the city and brought the monkey home.

The six lucky princes were married with great pomp, the city celebrated with lights and fireworks, and there was music and dancing in the streets. People decorated their houses with mango and banana leaves. There was rejoicing all over the city, except in the house of the youngest prince who, though alone and rather sad, had placed a diamond collar around the neck of his monkey and seated her on a chair cushioned with velvet.

'Poor monkey,' said the prince 'you are as lonely as I, on this day of rejoicing. But I shall make your stay here a happy one! Are you hungry?' And he placed a bowl of delicious mangoes before her and persuaded her to eat them. He began to talk to the monkey and spent much time with her. Some called him foolish, or stubborn; others thought he was a little mad.

The king discussed the situation with his ministers and sons, determined to find some way of bringing the prince to his sense and marrying him into a suitable family. But the young prince refused to listen to the advice and entreaties of his father, brothers and friends.

Months passed, and the prince had not changed his mind. Instead, he appeared to grow more attached to his monkey, and was often seen walking with her in the gardens of the palace.

At last the king called a meeting of all seven princes, and said, 'My sons, I have seen you all settled happily in life. Even you, my youngest, appear to be happy with your strange companion. The happiness of a father consists in the happiness of his sons and daughters. Therefore I wish to visit my daughters-in-law and give them presents.'

The eldest son immediately invited his father to dine at his house, and the other sons repeated the invitation. The king accepted them all, including that of the youngest prince. The receptions were very grand, and the king presented his daughters-in-law with precious jewels and costly dresses. Eventually it was the turn of the youngest son to entertain the king.

The youngest prince was very troubled. How could he invite his father to a house in which he lived with a monkey? He knew his monkey was more gentle and affectionate than some of the greatest ladies in the land, and he was determined not to hide her away as though she was something to be ashamed of.

Walking with her in the garden, he said, 'What shall I do now, my friend? I wish you had a tongue to comfort me. All my brothers have shown their houses and their wives to my father. They will ridicule me when I present you to him!'

The monkey had always been a silent and sympathetic listener when the prince spoke to her, but now he saw that she was gesturing to him with her hands. And,

bending over her, he noticed that she was holding a piece of broken pottery in one hand. The prince took the broken shard from her. Written on it in a beautiful feminine hand were these words: 'Do not worry, prince. Go to the place where you found me, throw this shard of pottery into the hollow trunk of the banyan tree, and wait for a reply.'

The prince hesitated at first, but decided that his problems could get no worse if he followed his monkey's advice. So, taking the broken bit of pottery, he went out of the city to the banyan tree.

It was a very ancient tree, hundreds of years old, with its branches and roots spreading out in a wide circle, and its leaves forming many curious little bowers. The trunk, though hollow within, was very wide and thick. Going up to it, the prince threw the piece of pottery into the hollow, and stood back to see if anything would happen.

He did not have to wait long.

A very beautiful girl, dressed in green, stepped out of the hollow, and asked the prince to follow her.

She told him that the queen of the fairies wished to see him in person.

The prince climbed the tree, entered the hollow, and after groping about in the dark, was suddenly let into a dazzling and wonderful garden, at the end of which stood an imposing palace. An army of tall sunflowers bordered the garden. Between the flowers flowed a sweetly-scented stream, and on the bed of the stream, instead of pebbles, there were rubies and diamonds and sapphires. Even the light which lit up this new world was warmer and less harsh than the light of the prince's world. He was led past a fountain of silver water, up steps of gold, and in through the mother-of-pearl doors of the palace. But the splendour of the room into which he was taken seemed to fade before the incomparable beauty of the fairy princess who stood before him.

'Yes prince, I know your message,' she said. 'Do not be anxious, but go home and prepare to receive your father the king and your royal guests tomorrow evening. My servants will see to everything.'

Next morning, when the prince awoke in his palace, an amazing sight met his eyes. The palace grounds teemed with new life. His gardens were full of fruit trees—mango, papaya, pomegranate and peach. Under the shade of the trees there were stalls where fruit, sweets, scents and sherbets were available. Children were playing on the lawns, and men and women were listening to music.

The prince was bewildered at what he saw, and was even more amazed when he entered his palace and found it full of noise and activity. Tables groaned under the weight of delicious foods. Great chandeliers hung from the ceilings, and flowers filled the palace with their perfume.

At this moment a servant came running to announce that the king and his

courtiers were arriving. The prince hurried out to meet them. He took them into the reception hall, which was now beautifully decorated. Here dinner was served. Then everyone insisted on seeing the partner the prince had chosen; they thought the monkey would be excellent entertainment after such a magnificent dinner.

The prince could not refuse their request, and went gloomily through his rooms in search of the monkey. He feared the ridicule that would follow. This, he knew, was the king's way of trying to cure him of his stubbornness in refusing to break his pledge.

The prince opened the door of his room and was nearly blinded by a blaze of light. There, on a throne in the middle of the room, sat the princess whom he had met in the banyan tree.

'Yes, prince,' said the princess. 'I have sent away the monkey and have come to offer you my hand.'

On hearing that his pet had gone, the prince burst into tears. 'What have you done?' he said. 'Your beauty will not compensate me for the loss of my friend.'

Then the princess, with a smile, said, 'If my beauty does not move you, let gratitude help you take my hand. See what pains I have taken in preparing this feast for your father and brothers. Be mine, sweet prince, and you shall have all the riches and the pleasures of the world at your command.'

The prince was indignant. 'I never asked these things of you, nor do I know what plot is afoot to deprive me of my monkey! Restore her to me, and I will be your slave.'

Then the princess left her throne, and taking the prince by the hand, spoke to him with great love and respect. 'You see in me your friend and companion. I took the form of a monkey to test your faith and sincerity. See, my monkey's skin lies in the corner.'

The prince looked, and there in the corner of the room he saw the skin of the monkey.

Both he and the princess seated themselves on the throne, and when she said, 'Arise, arise, arise,' the throne rose in the air and floated into the hall where the guests had gathered. The prince presented his princess to his father, and you can imagine the astonishment of the king and the guests who had come expecting to see a monkey as their hostess. The king gave any number of presents to his new daughter-in-law, and the whole land was soon praising the prince and his beautiful princess.

But who am I to describe the happiness of such wonderful people?

The other princes soon became envious of their youngest brother's good fortune, and began to plan his downfall.

'Brother,' they said to him one day, 'your wife is a Peri, belonging to a race of people who are famous for their fickle and mischievous ways. We know that you

still keep the skin which the princess wore before. Why do you keep it with you? You never know when she might change her mind and become a monkey again! We suggest that you destroy the skin as soon as possible.'

The prince thought over their suggestion, and seeing that they had a point, found the skin and threw it into a blazing fire.

Immediately there were loud cries from the fire, and the princess herself emerged from the smoke and rushed from the palace. And then the entire palace, the gardens, and everything the Peri had brought with her, vanished at the same time.

The prince was heart-broken.

'But how can love exist between a man and a daughter of the air?' asked the king. 'She came from the air, and she has vanished into it. Do not weep for her.'

The prince, however, was not to be consoled, and early one morning he slipped out of the city and went to the old banyan tree, hoping to find some trace of the princess there; but the tree, too, had disappeared. For days and nights he wandered about the countryside, eating wild fruits and drinking from forest pools and sleeping under the stars, and everyday he went further and further away from his city. One day he came upon a man who was standing on one leg (holding the other foot in his hand) and crying, 'Once did I see you, appear once more!'

The prince asked him what was wrong, and the man standing on one leg replied, 'I was hunting in these forests when I saw a very beautiful lady passing this way. She was running and would not stop, though I called to her. I was so struck by her beauty and her sadness that I was unable to move from this place.' And he repeated, 'Once did I see you, appear once more!'

'I am looking for her, too,' said the prince.

Then find her soon. And when you do, please let me see her once more. Take this stick of mine as a token. You may find it useful on the way, and it has the virtue of obeying the commands of its owner.'

The prince now travelled for days through burning deserts, often calling the name of the Peri princess, but getting no response. After bearing many hardships, he found an oasis where he quenched his thirst at a little stream. While he was resting in the shade of a tree, he heard the strains of a guitar, and going in search of the source of this music, he found a handsome youth of twenty bent over his instrument, absorbed in what he was playing. So sweet was the music that even the birds had fallen silent. The young man finished playing, heaved a deep sigh, and said.

'Once did I see you, appear once more!'

He, too, had seen the Peri rushing away, and had been so struck by her beauty that he had been unable to leave the spot where he had been playing his guitar. The musician gave the prince his guitar, and told him that it was capable of charming every living thing within hearing. In exchange, he only wanted to see the Peri again when the prince found her.

The prince carried on with his journey, crossing mighty mountains and glaciers. One day, while he was trudging through heavy snow, he again heard a voice crying, 'Once did I see you, appear once more!'

This time it was a pale and haggard young man, who told the same story of having seen the Peri rushing over the mountains. And here he was, unable to leave the mountain peak until he saw the beautiful princess again.

'Take this cap,' he told the prince. 'It can make you invisible when you put it on, and might be useful in your search for the Peri. But when you find her let me see her again, or I shall surely perish here!'

Carrying the stick, the guitar and the cap, the prince went over the mountains and into a valley where he found a temple of snow—the pillars, the roof, the spires, all made of snow. Within the temple the prince found a yogi, naked except for a loin-cloth, sitting on air some three feet above the floor without any visible means of support. His whole body glowed in the light that filtered through the inner screen of the temple.

The yogi, opening his eyes and looking straight at the prince, said, 'I know your story. The princess you are looking for is the daughter of the king of the Peris, whose palace is on the top of Mount Caucasus. The lady is very ill, so take this pot of balsam, which has healing powers, and these wooden slippers which will transport you wherever you like.'

As soon as the prince put on the wooden slippers, he rose high in the air and was carried at great speed over the mountains to the land of the Peris. He alighted outside a great city where, putting on the cap which made him invisible, he passed unchallenged through the gates.

Once in the city's main square, the prince began playing his guitar and so sweet was the music that all the Peris thronged into the square to hear him play. The king, hearing that a wonderful magician was charming his subjects, came out to meet him. He was so bewitched by the music that he fell on his knees before the prince and said, 'My daughter has been lying ill with a strange fever for many months. Cure her, I beg of you, for she is the light of my eyes and the hope of my old age.'

The prince accompanied the king into the palace, on a golden chair carried by the Peris. He was taken to the princess's apartments, and there he found his Peri princess, sound asleep. He took the balsam the yogi had given him, and told the waiting women to apply it to their mistress's body. As soon as this was done the princess sat up in bed, feeling much better. Recognising the prince, she was about to call him by his name when he put his finger to his lips and with his eyes begged her to be silent.

When the king found that his daughter had been cured, he said, 'Great saint, ask any boon from me.'

'Your daughter's hand in marriage, great king,' replied the prince without any

hesitation.

The king was enraged at the yogi's audacity and ordered his soldiers to seize the mendicant and throw him into prison. But the prince put on his cap and became invisible, and ordered his stick to keep off the soldiers. The king, finding that the prince had vanished except for the stick which was employed on the backs of the soldiers, begged for mercy.

'Forgive us!' he called. 'Show yourself again, and I promise that you will have whatever you desire.'

The prince made himself visible again. 'I am sorry I had to use my powers against you,' he said. 'Now give me one of the flying chairs which only the Peris know how to make, and let it take both me and your daughter to my father's kingdom.'

The king of the Peris at once brought out his daughter, attended by three beautiful Peris. They joined the prince in a handsome palanquin, which rose into the air and carried them back to the prince's country.

He did not forget those who had helped him on his outward journey. The prince took his three friends back with him to his kingdom, where they married the three Peris who had attended on the princess. And they all lived happily ever after.

As for the prince's brothers, when the king, their father, came to know of the mischief they had caused, he was so enraged that he disinherited them all and would have thrown them into prison had not the youngest prince persuaded the king to pardon them. And so they were forgiven, and suitable pensions were settled on them.

Three Tales from the English Countryside

THE TULIP PIXIES

Down in the West, somewhere by the borders of the Tavy, there once lived a kind old woman. Her cottage was near a pixie field, where green rings stood in the grass. Now some folk say those fairy rings are caused by the elves catching colts. They catch them and ride them round and round by night, such folk do say. But this old woman had other ideas about her fairy rings.

Around her tidy cottage was a pretty garden, full of sweet-smelling flowers. Lavender and holly hocks grew there, lilies and rosemary and the sweet briar tree, blue-buttons and gillyflowers, forget-me-nots and rue. But best of all was a big bed of tulips which she tended with special care. Everyone stopped to peep over her gate when the time of tulips came.

How the pixies loved this spot. They liked the kind old woman, and they liked her garden too.

One starry night, as she lay asleep, with the lilac flowers showing white under her window, she was awakened by a strange sound. At first she thought an owl in the elm tree had wakened her, but gradually she realised that it was a sweeter sound than the crack of the churn owl.

'It do sound for all the world like a lullaby,' she thought and lay listening for a while.

Then she got out of bed and peered from the window. There below her in the moonlight all the tulips in their shining colours were waving their heads in tune with the sweet music. It seemed as though they themselves were singing too.

Now when this happened the next night, and the next, the old woman began to understand what had happened. The pixie folk had brought their babies to the tulip bed, and laid each one within a separate flower.

'They be lullin' their babies to sleep, I do declare,' said the old woman, delighted. 'Ssh! I see them now. The pixie babies are fast asleep, and there go the pixie folk themselves to dance in the meadow grass.'

She was right. It was not the catching of colts that made those rings on the green grass, but the dancing of the little folk to their own pipers' tune. But as the first dawn light broke pale in the east back came the pixies to claim their babies from the tulip cradles, where they lay asleep. And, all invisible now, they vanished clean away.

She noticed that the tulips did not fade so quickly as the other flowers in the

garden. Indeed, it seemed as though they would never wither. And one day, as she bent to have a look at them, the old woman noticed that the pixies had made them even lovelier by breathing over them. Now they smelled as fragrant as lilies or roses do.

'No one, shall pick a single tulip, not even myself,' she said. They shall be kept altogether for the pixies' own delight.'

And so it was as year succeeded year.

But no one lives forever, and at last the old woman died. It was a sad day for the garden, and the tulips hung their heads. Well they might, for presently the garden passed into other hands. The new tenant cared nothing for pixie lore. He only cared for the garden at all because of its trees of fruit. Gooseberries and raspberries and greengage-plums made very tasty pies!

'You shouldn't be gatherin' they gooseberries out of season,' a neighbour warned him, 'Tis proper unlucky. The pixies can't abide bein' robbed of their own.'

'Pixies? Pah!' said the man.

'Surely ye aint a-digging up they tulips?' said another. 'Twas the old woman's special delight that bed o' flowers. What be yu puttin' in?'

'I be settin' a bed of parsley, if you must know,' said the man.

'Parsley? Dear soul alive! Don't you know 'tis mortal unlucky to set a parsley bed. Last man as ever I heard of was bedridden ever after.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' snapped the new tenant disbelievingly.

So the enchanted flowers were rooted up, and parsley set instead. But so offended were the pixies that they caused it to wither away. Not only would nothing grow in the gay tulip bed, but the whole garden was soon a waste.

Yet though the lullabies were heard no more from the tulip bed, singing still came from the little folk who dwelt in the neighbourhood. But this time the singing came from the old woman's grave. Sad and sorrowful was the song the pixies sang, and every night before the moon was full they sang it.

No one looked after the old woman's grave, yet never a weed was seen. As she had tended their tulip bed, so now they tended her grave. And though no one was ever seen to plant a flower, somehow her favourites sprang up in the night—rosemary and gillyflowers, lavender and forget-me-nots.

I cannot tell how the truth may be.

I say the tale as 'twas said to me.

THE CLICKING TOAD

Once upon a time—and a very good time it was—when pigs were swine and dogs ate lime, and monkeys chewed tobacco, when houses were thatched with pancakes, streets paved with plum puddings, and roasted pigs ran up and down the streets with knives and forks on their backs, crying, 'Come and eat me!', that was a good time for travellers.

And this particular traveller, who had come to Darlaston on business, betook himself for a walk in the fields beyond the town while he was waiting for his return coach. It was an evening in late summer, still but close. The harvest had begun and the oats were already stooked; and the partridges were feeding in the bond stubble. The thrushes and blackbirds had finished singing, and only the woodpigeons, hidden in the tops of the elms, tried over their unfinished cooings.

The pastures tempted the traveller, for most of his days were spent in towns. He climbed stiles, wandered here and there, meeting nobody but an old gaffer whom he greeted with, 'We've had a lot of rain, I see.'

'I know'd we should,' said the old fellow. 'Saturday moon and Sunday full, alius brings rain.'

The traveller passed on, smelling the late honeysuckle and prying for berries. And he heated himself so much that he grew impatient with his heavy clothes. He took off his waistcoat and threw it over his arm and, as he walked from hedge to hedge and reached now to this bough and now to that, he did not notice his watch slip from his waistcoat pocket and fall without a sound between two tussocks. Not even when he was in the coach, an hour later, and on his way home, did he realise he had lost his watch. While the coach wheels spun merrily over the road, it lay where it had fallen, ticking away to the grasshoppers and the ants and the ladybirds that lived in the grasses around it.

It was a fine watch, with a full white face, slender pointers, and a loud clear tick; and as the evening came on and the day grew cool, and the last birds silenced themselves, its ticking seemed to grow louder and louder, as if the watch were alive: and were asking to be found and taken from its prison between the tussocks. When the first stars began to show themselves, its white face seemed to grow luminous: from a distance it shone like a mushroom or a rare flower that opened only at night.

No one, however, came that way till night. Then, when the Darlaston bells were

ringing curfew and there was no light in the sky except a faint green glimmer in the west, two men came by to look at some snares that they had set. They came guiltily and furtively, for they were poaching; after all, their day was the noon of night. Their ears were open for any strange sound and no sooner had they come within earshot of the watch than they stopped and listened.

'Hark, Bill,' said the first poacher, 'there's something strange here. Hold still and listen.'

'Tis a grasshopper,' replied Bill.

'A grasshopper? I never yet heard the grasshopper that chirped as long as this. Listen to him. He never stops.'

'Tis some thing else then. 'Tis a bird, maybe.'

'If 'tis, 'tis a bewitched bird then,' said Tom, and at that moment a breath of wind carried the ticking towards them and made the sound louder than ever.

'Let's track him down,' replied Bill, and cautiously they quartered the ground till they came to the watch.

'There he is. I can see him shining. He has one big eye. Can you see him?'

'That I can, and I don't like the look on him.'

'No more do I. Look, he's ready to spring. A pound to a penny, 'tis something wicked. Come on, let's be off, or he'll be at our throats and sucking our blood afore we know where we are.'

His friend needed no encouragement. Both took to their heels and did not stop running till they were well clear of the one-eyed monster that lurked among the tussocks and ticked so mysteriously.

Once home they told the story of the strange noise that had alarmed them and by the next morning all Darlaston had heard of the strange creature that lay in the fields, and all Darlaston was curious to peep at it. However, though many peeped, it was a sad truth that not one man, not one woman could tell what it was, for there was no one in Darlaston that had ever before in his life seen a watch. In the end it was agreed that the solution to the problem should be left to a wise old man who had lived all his life in those parts. To Daddy—for so they called him—they sent a deputation; and word soon went round that Daddy was going forth to make a pronouncement on the riddle.

Daddy was a very old man. His face was shrunk like a long-kept apple and covered with small wrinkles that ran together like cracks in a crock. His eyes were light blue and watery, and he kept his mouth open as if it was too much of an effort for him to hold up his jaw. He was too infirm to walk so they put him in an old wheelbarrow and wheeled him off to the field.

When he came near, the circle round the watch opened, let him in, and then closed again. As the wheelbarrow was halted a silence came over the crowd.

Take I right up to this object,' said Daddy.

'Why, you be right up to it now,' called the bystanders.

'Then wheel I round the object,' said the old man, and his wheeler took him up and with great gravity wheeled him round.

'Wheel I round again,' said the old man, and it seemed as if he were enjoying being trundled around so. They made a second circuit. 'Now wheel I round a third time.'

The third circuit was completed, the barrow legs were set down and a great silence fell on the crowd. Then, struggling to his feet, the old man lifted up his arms and cried out in a foreboding voice, "Tis un clicking toad! 'Tis un clicking toad! Lads, arm yourselves with sticks and stones, for the end of the world be coming upon Darlaston!"

When they heard this direful utterance, sticks and stones were the last things that the folks of Darlaston thought of. Instead, with yells and shrieks they turned and ran home as fast as they could. To Daddy, trundled along more quickly than ever he had been wheeled before, it seemed as if his prophecy was coming true more quickly than he himself had realised. Man, woman and child, all fled to their homes and barred, bolted and shuttered every door and window. All that day, and all the next day the streets and fields were empty. All Darlaston was indoors waiting for Judgement Day to come.

Of course, Judgement Day did not come. While the people of Darlaston read away at their Bibles, and gabbled at their prayers, all that happened outside was that a traveller got down from the mail coach just outside the town, crossed the field, picked up the watch he had lost, thanked his good fortune, and went away.

Be bow bend it,
My tale's ended.
If you don't like it,
You may mend it.

THE GREEN LADIES OF ONE TREE HILL

Few will need to be told that the Christmas season consists of twelve days besides Christmas Day, which are commonly spoken of in Shropshire as Christmastide. Preparation for Christmas includes a general house-cleaning: everything is scrubbed to the utmost pitch of cleanliness. The pewter and brazen vessels have to be made so bright that the maids can see to put their caps on in them—otherwise the fairies will pinch them. But if all is perfect, the worker will find a coin in her shoe.

Then the clean cheerful family kitchen must be adorned with holly and ivy. Sprigs of bright-berried holly, alternating with darker ivy, are stuck in the small leaded panes of the window casements, among the willow-pattern plates and dishes on the dark oak dresser.

Christmas fare would consist of new beer, and honey, primrose, elderberry and dandelion wines, with roast and boiled beef, hams, hares, geese and fowls, mince and apple pies, junkets, cinnamon cakes, cider cakes and Christmas cakes. Supper fare consists of meat, pig's puddings, pork pies or mince pies, or else of toasted cheese eaten with beer and toast.

And then there were the stories. Here is one from Baslow in Derbyshire.

There were once three tall trees on a hill and on moonlit nights singing could be heard and three Green Ladies danced there. No one dared go near except the farmer and he only climbed the hill once a year on Midsummer Eve to lay a posy of late primroses on the root of each tree. The leaves rustled and the sun shone out, and he made quite sure he was safe indoors before sunset. It was a rich farm and he often said to his three sons, 'My father always said our luck lies up there; when I'm dead don't forget to do as I did, and my father before me, and all our forbears through the years.'

And they listened, but did not take much heed, except the youngest.

When the old man died the big farm was divided into three. The eldest brother took a huge slice, and the next brother took another, and that left the youngest with a strip of poor rough ground at the foot of the hill, but he didn't say much but set to work about it and sang as he worked and was indoors before sunset.

One day his brothers came to see him. Their big farms were not doing very well and when they saw his rich little barley fields and the few loaded fruit trees, and his

roots and herbs growing so green and smelling so sweet, and his three cows giving rich milk, they were angry and jealous.

'Who helps you in your work?' they asked. They say down in the village there's singing and dancing at night. A hard-working farmer should be abed.'

But the youngest did not answer.

'Did we see you up the hill by the trees as we came? What were you about?'

'I was doing as Father told us years ago. Tis Midsummer Eve,' he said quietly enough then.

But they were too angry even to laugh at him.

'The hill is mine,' cried the eldest. 'Don't let me see you up there again. As for the trees, I need timber for my new great barn, so I'm cutting one down. And you two can help me.'

But the second brother found he had to go to market, and the youngest did not answer. The next day, Midsummer day, the eldest came with carts and men and axes, and called to his youngest brother, who was busy in the herb garden; but he only said, 'Remember what day it is.'

But the eldest and his team went on up the hill to the three trees. When he laid his axe to the first tree it screamed like a woman, the horses ran away and the men after them, but the eldest went on hacking. The wind howled and the two other trees lashed their branches in anger. Then the murdered tree fell down, down on top of him and killed him. By and by his servants came and took the dead man and the dead tree away and then there were only two Green Ladies on moonlit nights.

The second brother came back from market and took both the farms for himself, and the youngest he still worked his little strip of land and took primroses up the hill on Midsummer Eve. But the big farms didn't prosper at all and one Midsummer Eve the second brother saw the youngest brother up by the two trees. He was afraid to go up there, so he yelled.

'Come off my land and take your cows away, breaking my hedges down. I'll build a stout timber fence round my hill and I'll cut down one of the trees to make it with.'

That night there was no dancing together, there was no music but the crying of many leaves, and the youngest brother was very sad. The next morning, the second brother came with an axe and the two trees shuddered; but he only made sure there was no wind to drop the tree his way. The tree screamed like a woman as it fell and the youngest brother watching from the lane below with his cows saw the last tree lift a great branch and bring it down on his brother's head and kill him.

People came and took the second dead tree and man away, and the youngest brother now had all three farms. But he still lived in his little farm near the hill and the lonely Green Lady. And sometimes she would dance alone to a sad little tune on moonlit nights, and he always left a bunch of late primroses at the roots of the one tree every Midsummer Eve and his farms prospered from that day.

There are many people nowadays who won't climb One Tree Hill, especially on Midsummer Eve, and one or two very old people remember being told when they were little children that it must never be fenced because it belonged to a Green Lady.

**Two Japanese Fairy Tales, as told by Lafcadio
Hearn**

THE OLD WOMAN WHO LOST HER DUMPLING

Long, long ago there was a funny old woman, who liked to laugh and to make dumplings of rice-flour.

One day, while she was preparing some dumplings for dinner, she let one fall; and it rolled into a hole in the earthen floor of her little kitchen and disappeared. The old woman tried to reach it by putting her hand down the hole, and all at once the earth gave way, and the old woman fell in.

She fell quite a distance, but was not a bit hurt; and when she got up on her feet again, she saw that she was standing on a road, just like the road before her house. It was quite light down there; and she could see plenty of rice fields, but no one in them. How all this happened, I cannot tell you. But it seems that the old woman had fallen into another country.

The road she had fallen upon sloped very much: so, after having looked for her dumpling in vain, she thought that it must have rolled farther away down the slope. She ran down the road to look, crying: 'My dumpling, my dumpling! Where is that dumpling of mine?'

After a little while she saw a stone *Fizō* standing by the roadside, and she said: 'O Lord *Fizō*, did you see my dumpling?'

Fizō answered: 'Yes, I saw your dumpling rolling by me down the road. But you had better not go any farther, because there is a wicked Oni living down there, who eats people.'

But the old woman only laughed, and ran on farther down the road, crying: 'My dumpling, my dumpling! Where is that dumpling of mine?'

And she came to another statue of *Fizō*, and asked it: 'O kind Lord *Fizō*, did you see my dumpling?'

And *Fizō* said: 'Yes, I saw your dumpling go by a little while ago. But you must not run any farther, because there is a wicked Oni down there, who eats people.'

But she only laughed, and ran on, still crying out: 'My dumpling, my dumpling! Where is that dumpling of mine?'

And she came to a third *Fizō*, and asked it: 'O dear Lord *Fizō*, did you see my dumpling?'

But *Fizō* said: 'Don't talk about your dumpling now. Here is the Oni coming. Squat down here behind my sleeve, and don't make any noise.'

Presently the Oni came very close, and stopped and bowed to Fizō, and said: 'Good day, Fizō San!'

Fizō said good day, too, very politely.

Then the Oni suddenly sniffed the air two or three times in a suspicious way, and cried out: 'Fizō San, Fizō San! I smell a smell of mankind somewhere—don't you?'

'Oh!' said Fizō, 'Perhaps you are mistaken.'

'No, no!' said the Oni after sniffing the air again, 'I smell a smell of mankind.'

Then the old woman could not help laughing—'Te-he-he!'—and the Oni immediately reached down his big hairy hand behind Fizō's sleeve, and pulled her out, still laughing, 'Te-he-he!'

'Ah! ha!' cried the Oni.

Then Fizō said: 'What are you going to do with that good old woman? You must not hurt her.'

'I won't,' said the Oni. 'But I will take her home with me to cook for us.'

'Te-he-he!' laughed the old woman.

'Very well,' said Fizō, 'but you must really be kind to her. If you are not I shall be very angry.'

'I won't hurt her at all,' promised the Oni, 'and she will only have to do a little work for us every day. Good-bye, Fizō San.'

Then the Oni took the old woman far down the road, till they came to a wide deep river, where there was a boat. He put her into the boat, and took her across the river to his house. It was a very large house. He led her at once into the kitchen, and told her to cook some dinner for himself and the other Oni who lived with him. And he gave her a small wooden rice-paddle, and said:

'You must always put only one grain of rice into the pot, and when you stir that one grain of rice in the water with this paddle, the grain will multiply until the pot is full.'

So the old woman put just one rice-grain into the pot, as the Oni told her, and began to stir it with the paddle; and, as she stirred, the one grain became two,—then four,—then eight,—then sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, and so on. Every time she moved the paddle the rice increased in quantity; and in a few minutes the great pot was full.

After that, the funny old woman stayed a long time in the house of the Oni, and every day cooked food for him and for all his friends. The Oni never hurt or frightened her, and her work was made quite easy by the magic paddle—although she had to cook a very, very great quantity of rice, because an Oni eats much more than any human being eats.

But she felt lonely, and always wished very much to go back to her own little house, and make her dumplings. And one day, when the Oni were all out somewhere, she thought she would try to run away.

She first took the magic paddle, and slipped it under her girdle; and then she went down to the river. No one saw her; and the boat was there. She got into it, and pushed off; and as she could row very well, she was soon far away from the shore.

But the river was very wide; and she had not rowed more than one-fourth of the way across, when the Oni, all of them, came back to the house.

They found that their cook was gone, and the magic paddle, too. They ran down to the river at once, and saw the old woman rowing away very fast.

Perhaps they could not swim: at all events they had no boat; and they thought the only way they could catch the funny old woman would be to drink up all the water of the river before she got to the other bank. So they knelt down, and began to drink so fast that before the old woman had got halfway over, the water had become quite low.

But the old woman kept on rowing until the water had got so shallow that the Oni stopped drinking, and began to wade across. Then she dropped her oar, took the magic paddle from her girdle, and shook it at the Oni, and made such funny faces that the Oni all burst out laughing.

But the moment they laughed, they could not help throwing up all the water they had drunk, and so the river became full again. The Oni could not cross; and the funny old woman got safely over to the other side, and ran away up the road as fast as she could.

She never stopped running until she found herself at home again.

After that she was very happy; for she could make dumplings whenever she pleased. Besides, she had the magic paddle to make rice for her. She sold her dumplings to her neighbours and passengers, and in quite a short time she became rich.

THE BOY WHO DREW CATS

A long, long time ago, in a small country village in Japan, there lived a poor farmer and his wife, who were very good people. They had a number of children, and found it very hard to feed them all. The elder son was strong enough, when only fourteen years old, to help his father; and the little girls learned to help their mother almost as soon as they could walk.

But the youngest child, a little boy, did not seem to be fit for hard work. He was very clever—cleverer than all his brothers and sisters; but he was quite weak and small, and people said he could never grow very big. So his parents thought it would be better for him to become a priest than to become a farmer. They took him with them to the village temple one day, and asked the good old priest who lived there, if he would have their little boy for his acolyte, and teach him all that a priest ought to know.

The old man spoke kindly to the lad, and asked him some hard questions. So clever were the answers that the priest agreed to take the little fellow into the temple as an acolyte, and to educate him for the priesthood.

The boy learned quickly what the old priest told him, and was very obedient in most things. But he had one fault. He liked to draw cats during study hours, and to draw cats even where cats ought not to have been drawn at all.

Whenever he found himself alone, he drew cats. He drew them on the margins of the priest's books, and on all the screens of the temple, and on the walls, and on the pillars. Several times the priest told him this was not right; but he did not stop drawing cats. He drew them because he could not really help it. He had what is called 'the genius of an artist', and just for that reason he was not quite fit to be an acolyte; a good acolyte should study books.

One day after he had drawn some very clever pictures of cats upon a paper screen, the old priest said to him severely: 'My boy, you must go away from this temple at once. You will never make a good priest, but perhaps you will become a great artist. Now let me give you a last piece of advice, and be sure you never forget it. Avoid large places at night—keep to small!'

The boy did not know what the priest meant by saying, 'Avoid large places—keep to small.' He thought and thought, while he was tying up his little bundle of clothes to go away; but he could not understand those words, and he was afraid to speak to

the priest any more, except to say good-bye.

He left the temple very sorrowfully, and began to wonder what he should do. If he went straight home he felt sure his father would punish him for having been disobedient to the priest: so he was afraid to go home. All at once he remembered that at the next village, twelve miles away, there was a very big temple. He had heard there were several priests at that temple; and he made up his mind to go to them and ask them to take him for their acolyte.

Now that big temple was closed up, but the boy did not know this fact. The reason it had been closed up was that a goblin had frightened the priests away, and had taken possession of the place. Some brave warriors had afterwards gone to the temple at night to kill the goblin; but they had never been seen alive again. Nobody had ever told these things to the boy—so he walked all the way to the village hoping to be kindly treated by the priests.

When he got to the village it was already dark, and all the people were in bed; but he saw the big temple on a hill at the other end of the principal street, and he saw there was a light in the temple. People who tell the story say the goblin used to make that light, in order to tempt lonely travellers to ask for shelter. The boy went at once to the temple, and knocked. There was no sound inside. He knocked and knocked again; but still nobody came. At last he pushed gently at the door, and was quite glad to find that it had not been fastened. So he went in, and saw a lamp burning, but no priest.

He thought some priest would be sure to come very soon, and he sat down and waited. Then he noticed that everything in the temple was grey with dust, and thickly spun over with cobwebs. So he thought to himself that the priests would certainly like to have an acolyte, to keep the place clean. He wondered why they had allowed everything to get so dusty. What most pleased him, however, were some big white screens, good to paint cats upon. Though he was tired, he looked at once for a writing box, found one, ground some ink, and began to paint cats.

He painted a great many cats upon the screens; and then he began to feel very, very sleepy. He was just on the point of lying down to sleep beside one of the screens, when he suddenly remembered the words, 'Avoid large places—keep to small!'

The temple was very large; he was all alone; and as he thought of these words—though he could not quite understand them—he began to feel for the first time a little afraid; and he resolved to look for a small place in which to sleep. He found a little cabinet, with a sliding door, and went into it, and shut himself up. Then he lay down and fell fast asleep.

Very late in the night he was awakened by a most terrible noise—a noise of fighting and screaming. It was so dreadful that he was afraid even to look through a chink of the little cabinet: he lay very still, holding his breath for fright.

The light that had been in the temple went out; but the awful sounds continued, and became more awful, and all the temple shook. After a long time silence came; but the boy was still afraid to move. He did not move until the light of the morning sun shone into the cabinet through the chinks of the little door.

Then he got out of his hiding-place very cautiously, and looked about. The first thing he saw was that all the floor of the temple was covered with blood. And then he saw, lying dead in the middle of it, an enormous, monstrous rat—a goblin-rat—bigger than a cow!

But who or what could have killed it? There was no man, or other creature to be seen. Suddenly the boy observed that the mouths of all the cats he had drawn the night before, were red and wet with blood. Then he knew that the goblin had been killed by the cats which he had drawn. And then also, for the first time, he understood why the wise old priest had said to him, 'Avoid large places at night—keep to small.

Afterward that boy became a very famous artist. Some of the cats which he drew are still shown to travellers in Japan.