



STORK swept high over the Bohemian forest. It was a most important duty that had brought him from his own marshes into this mountainous region, where far and wide no croak of frog could be heard. In his beak he carried two little children, a boy and a girl, both intended for the knight who dwelt in the gloomy fortress below. Smaller and smaller grew the circles made by the stork in his flight. Lower and lower he sank towards the earth, until at length he rested on the highest chimney of the castle.

But before letting the children slip down the narrow black hole he paused and looked carefully around. While in the air, this old castle, with its round turrets glittering in the rising sun, had appeared to him a most stately edifice. But now, when quite close, the stork discovered many things that did not please him. The walls were sadly out of repair, there were holes in the roof, whilst the courtyard was overgrown with weeds.

"I do not like this," said the stork, looking thoughtfully down his long, red beak. "This place seems to have a very bad landlord. A knight who cannot keep his castle in proper repair certainly does not deserve two children. I will take one away with me.

"Which should he have now, the boy or the girl?" thought the stork. He looked once more thoughtfully down his long beak, and on the two children smiling happily in their dreams. "I think I will give him the boy," he said at length. "He will push his way in

this wretched place better than the girl." With these words he made a movement to throw the little boy down the chimney.

This, however, was not so easy as the stork had thought. In their sleep the little ones had embraced each other, and would not leave go. "I have never had two such obstinate little creatures in my beak before," exclaimed the stork, angrily. Then he began to shake them, at first gently, then harder, and at last so roughly that the children half awoke from their dreams, and looked at each other with blinking eyes. After this the boy would not leave go his companion, and no wonder, for the little girl had shown him a pair of blue eyes of such wondrous beauty, that there were not many like them in the world. But the stork, now thoroughly angry, gave the poor little fellow a kick that sent him head first down the castle chimney.

"Now, what shall I do with the other little thing?" said the stork, thoughtfully, scratching the back of his ear. "Ah! I have it," he cried—the little girl had kept on blinking her eyes, and the stork had also seen their beautiful blue—"I have it," he repeated. "Such eyes can only belong to Norway."

High overhead soared the stork. Powerfully his wings clove the air as he sailed away towards the north.

In the midst of the blue Baltic Sea a little wooded island lay sparkling like a green jewel. Here dwelt Bjorn, a grim old sea-king of Norwegian blood. Every year he and his men ploughed the sea with their swift ships, and very rich was the spoil he brought home to his strong castle that stood in the centre of the island, defended by wall and moat.

To this castle the stork bore the little maiden on his strong wings.

Bjorn and his men were sitting in the spacious hall quaffing from golden cups the sweet wine they had brought back in their ships from the sunny land of Greece. Very wild was their joy when the little maiden came down the chimney, and throughout the whole night their boisterous songs could be heard far across the wide sea.

And the little, sparkling waves sang in reply a rushing, murmuring song, to celebrate the arrival of the young child. "To our sea-king a little daughter has been born," they sang. "A beautiful little maiden, with eyes blue as the sea, locks fair as the sea foam, and lips rosy as the morning red when it gilds the crests of the waves." Even the stupid fishes rejoiced, but as they could not sing they leapt into the air, high up out of the waves, and their scales glittered in the moonlight like gold and silver.

Many days and many nights Bjorn and his crew drank of the pearly wine. Then he could rest at home no longer, so ordered his ships and sailed away, leaving the child, to whom he had given the name of Swanhild, in charge of a faithful nurse.

On this voyage Bjorn encountered more storms and enemies than he had ever done before. Often, whilst on the tossing billows, he thought with longing of the little one at home. Yet many long years passed ere he could at length return home laden with rich spoil.

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As he set foot on the little island he was greeted by a beautiful maiden, with deep blue eyes, rosy lips, and the fair hair of Norway. Full of joy, Bjorn clasped his lovely child to his heart. Then he sat with his men in the castle hall, feasting and quaffing the costly Grecian wine.

Swanhild had never before seen such noisy feasts. Often, on moonlight nights, she would leave the castle and wander alone on the sea-shore.



"WHEN THE MAGICIAN SAW SWANHILD HE WAS MUCH DELIGHTED."

But one evening as she thus wandered, clad in her white garments, and with her fair head bent towards the waves, she was seen by a wicked magician, who had flown thither through the air on a black goat. He came from the cliffs of Norway, where he had been sent to seize the soul of a poor Laplander who had stolen his neighbour's reindeer, and he was now travelling to Blocksberg to take this soul to his master, a powerful evil spirit.

When the magician saw Swanhild he was much delighted. He had never before beheld anyone so lovely. But, alas, while he was lost in contemplation of

her beauty the soul of the little Laplander escaped, and flew away. He let it go. Seeking a secluded spot, he at once summoned a number of crabs and water-beetles, which he placed in three shining mussel-shells. One touch of his staff changed these shells filled with crabs and water-beetles into magnificent vessels full of well-armed men. His black goat became a skald, and played the harp. Then

transforming himself into a handsome young Viking, he ordered the sails to be hoisted, and rounding a wooded promontory, sailed into the bay where Bjorn's vessel lay.

Loudly the sentries on Bjorn's ship blew their horns. Louder yet rang out the answering blast from the castle. Wildly Bjorn and his men broke through the forest. Furious was their war-cry, shrilly clanged their weapons.

The strange Viking stepped forward boldly, and extending his hand to Bjorn in token of friendship, besought hospitality for himself and his men.

Bjorn let himself be persuaded. He led the strangers into his splendid halls, and drank and feasted with them many days and many nights. Then the strange hero ordered rich presents to be brought from his ships: garments studded with gold, gold ornaments, and shining swords. This completely deceived Bjorn and his followers, and when the stranger asked for Swanhild in marriage the Viking readily gave his consent. That Swanhild turned pale no one heeded. Nor did they heed that she wept nightly in the solitude of her chamber.

The marriage day at length arrived. But when everything was ready, and Swanhild, in glittering array, was being led towards the stranger, she, with a quick movement, turned her back on him and fled to her chamber.

Loudly raged the father, his eyes glowing with fury. But wilder still rolled the eyes of the stranger. He broke into a laugh, and cried, with mocking voice, "You shall all pay for this."

One look from those fierce eyes, and his men became a crowd of crabs and water-beetles. The skald threw away his harp, and stood there a black goat with fiery eyes. The stranger shook off his armour, and was a horrible old man.

Bjorn grew pale with terror, his followers began to tremble and shake. Another look from the magician: they all shrank together,

and a crawling mass of frogs covered the floor. Bjorn was the largest of them all. Then opening door and gate, the magician drove them out into the marshy moat—here they dived.

The magician then locked the door and threw the key into the moat. At her chamber windows Swanhild sat weeping. He looked up at her furiously, but she was so



"A CRAWLING MASS OF FROGS COVERED THE FLOOR."

good and pure, his glance had no power over her. He shook his fist threateningly.

"Now sit there all alone," he cried, "since you will not marry me. You cannot escape, and no one can deliver you, for my goat keeps guard."

He flew away whistling. The black goat walked round and round the moat, his eyes gleaming like living coals. The frogs croaked in the evening light, and above, in her chamber, Swanhild wept solitary and forsaken.

In the meantime, the boy left by the stork at the gloomy castle in the Bohemian forest had become a valiant knight, who knew well how to use his sword. Yet so strange a knight as he had never before sat in Walnut-

tree Castle. This was the name of his ancestral home.

Since his father's death Wulf had lived quite alone in the ruined castle, for none of the servants would stay after the old knight died. But this did not trouble Wulf. He did not care to hunt the wild boar through the thicket, or kill the frightened stag. His chief pleasure was to stretch himself on the thick, soft moss, and gaze through the green branches of the forest trees at the blue heavens that smiled here and there in little flocks through the thick foliage. He also loved to seek for forest flowers—the blue were his favourites. Whence this preference he knew not, but he dreamt he had once looked into Swanhild's blue eyes. Or, when tired of these things, he would stand at one of the castle windows, gazing thoughtfully out into the blue distance. "Far away yonder," so ran his thoughts at these times, "where the blue heaven bends down to touch the earth, should I not find happiness there? Were it not better to journey abroad in search of happiness than to remain alone in this solitary castle, through whose walls the wind whistles, whilst owls and bats are now the only occupants of its once stately halls?"

But though longing to go out into the world, Wulf remained in the ruined castle, in obedience to an old command of one of his ancestors.

In the middle of the castle court there grew in the cleft of a rock a gigantic walnut tree. From it the castle had received its name. The nut from which this tree had sprung had been planted in olden times by one of Wulf's ancestors, who at the same time had carved these words on the rock:—

Where flourishes this tree, there shall my house remain.

While it stands, forsake it not to search abroad for fame;

But should the ancient glory from these halls e'er disappear,

Life from this tree shall make it shine once more quite bright and clear.

Their splendour had long since disappeared, and how the tree could restore it Wulf could not imagine; still, he remained obedient to the command.

One evening a mighty storm arose. Black clouds obscured the sky. The lightning flashed; the thunder rolled. The storm raged through the forest. The mouldering stones of the old castle slipped from their places, and the wind whistled through the gaps, and raged through the old rooms and passages. Then a flash of lightning! a clap

of thunder! The castle was in ruins! Wulf escaped into the open air; before him lay the walnut tree, shivered by the lightning.

He immediately saddled his horse. What need to remain here longer? Hastily snatching a few ripe nuts that lay among the shattered branches, he concealed them in his doublet as a remembrance, and then rode away through the gloomy forest.

Far and wide, Wulf wandered over the green earth beneath the blue heavens, encountering many enemies. But in spite of all he kept courageously on his way.

One day his path led through a thick forest of beech trees. He looked around thoughtfully as his horse scattered the fallen leaves at every step. Suddenly he looked up. What was it that shimmered so blue through the trees? Wulf urged his horse forward, but beneath a giant beech at the edge of the forest he halted; the endless sea lay before him.

"Here is blue heaven above and beneath, surely I shall find happiness here?" thought Wulf, as he swung himself to earth. Without a thought he left his horse, and hastened to the shore. On the soft waves a small bark was rocking. Wulf sprang in and loosed the chain. Lightly the waves bore the boat out into the blue distance.

For a long time Wulf lay contentedly in the bottom of the boat. He felt as though he were a little child folded into his mother's arms, safe from all want and danger. And he thought the waves wished to tell him something, but he could not understand their language. Yet he saw that they bore his bark ever more swiftly forward, and he rejoiced at the increasing speed.

There was a grating sound under the keel: Wulf had reached land at last. Before him lay a wooded island. Above the tops of the trees rose the turrets of a stately castle. He hastened forward and arrived at the castle moat. An unearthly stillness reigned over all around. Nothing moved save a swarm of frogs. These swam round and round in the moat, or sat on the leaves of the water-lilies, and croaked in what seemed to Wulf most sorrowful tones. But the largest amongst them behaved in a most extraordinary manner. He was for ever trying to climb up the castle wall, but if after much trouble he managed to get up a little way, he always fell back again. Then he would seat himself on a water-lily, look upwards, and wipe his eyes as though he were weeping.

Wulf also looked up.

"Happiness at last!" he exclaimed. "The

blue eyes!" But he got no further. A violent push from an angry goat sent him flying into the middle of the moat.

Wulf felt himself sinking fast. His feet got entangled among the twisted roots of the water-lilies. With great difficulty he managed to keep his head above the water.

"And here I must die," said he, in anguish.

Then from out his doublet sounded soft little voices:—

The blessing of Urahn to you is near.
Do not despair, for help is present here.

And behold! all around him now began a wonderful rustling and moving. He groped about with his hands, and felt that tender little roots had forced their way through his doublet and were taking root in the slime. And all around him he saw little green walnut-tree leaves rising out of the water. Twigs followed the leaves, and these again became branches. Wulf felt he was being forced upwards; soon he was safely out of the water. Looking up, he saw Swanhild's blue eyes. He stretched out his arms towards her and she smiled.

Higher and higher Wulf was borne. Five strong walnut trees grew beneath him, and bore him up on their branches. Now he could reach up and touch Swanhild's hands. Now he sat by her at the window, and gazed into her blue eyes.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Swanhild," she replied.

"It is a very beautiful name," said

Wulf. "But for my sake you must now be called Little Blue Flower. When I was quite a child I saw your eyes in my dreams. They appeared to me like little blue flowers, and every day I searched for these flowers in the forest, but they were never sufficiently beautiful. Now you shall be my Little Blue Flower." And then he gave her a kiss.

But now a fresh movement began in the moat below. The stout frog was able to scramble up the crooked, rough stems of the walnut tree, better than up the smooth castle wall. Boldly he climbed, and the whole army of frogs followed him. At length he reached the top. Swanhild gently laid her hand on his head, and instead of the frog old Bjorn sat on one of the branches of the walnut tree, and embraced and kissed both his daughter and Wulf. Then the other frogs came, and Swanhild laid her hand on them



"SOON ALL BJORN'S FOLLOWERS WERE SITTING ON THE BRANCHES."

all. Soon all Bjorn's followers were sitting in crowds on the branches, dangling their legs for joy. Full of anger, the black goat ran round and round the castle moat, rolling his great fiery eyes.

Just as the last frog was changed, a mighty rushing noise was heard. The magician flew raging through the air. With his magic staff he struck the poor goat a fierce blow, and then rode back on him to Blocksberg. Here it went very badly with him, because he came without the soul of the little Laplander, and he was severely punished.

Bjorn, with Wulf and all his men, joyfully entered the castle through Swanhild's window. A few days later Swanhild's marriage with Wulf was celebrated with great splendour, and they lived together in peace and happiness to the end of their days.