

A STORY

FOR CHILDREN.

FROM THE FRENCH OF M. DE LA BARRE.

LONG ago there lived in Brittany a King whose kingdom was very small, and whose sole wealth consisted of a pear-tree which grew in his orchard. Each year this tree bore three splendid pears.

It was partly the King's own fault that he never could manage to pick these pears at the right moment. In July the fruit grew riper and riper until it became solid silver. In August it grew still larger, and changed to gold. Just at this changing time the pears should have been plucked, but they always mysteriously vanished the night before the day whereon their owner had intended plucking them. Naturally, the King preferred golden pears to silver ones, but this preference cost him dear, for through it he lost the pears altogether.

The King's children had a personal interest in the wonderful tree. His six daughters,

each of whom looked for a dowry from the precious fruit, were each year bitterly disappointed, as also were their two brothers, Yann and Claudik.

Yann was greedy and selfish, but Claudik was good and brave. One day Yann proposed to his brother that they two should pluck the pears and divide the spoil. This Claudik refused to do. "The pears are not ours," said he; "they belong to our father."

Then Yann went to the King and begged of him to divide the fruit. "If I may have one pear for myself," said the greedy fellow, "I promise to keep watch over the tree, in order to protect its fruit from thieves."

The King, after some demur, yielded to the wish of his self-willed son. It was arranged that Yann should have the pear which grew on the north side of the tree; Claudik was to have the pear which faced the south, while that growing in the centre was to be divided amongst the six sisters.

July was drawing to an end, and the silver fruit was already faintly tinged with gold. Yann, in fulfilment of his promise, mounted guard in the orchard. Nothing happened for two nights. On the third night he foolishly drank an extra flagon of wine. Of course he fell asleep at his post, and the next morning only two pears remained on the tree. The pear in the centre had gone, and the poor Princesses had again lost their dowries.

"Never mind," said selfish Yann, "mine is there still, so what matter? I will keep a better look-out to-night." And for two nights he was watchful and alert, pacing up and down, sword in hand; but on the third night the weather was so hot that he could not resist the temptation to indulge in a double quantity of cider. He awoke in the morning to find that his own pear had vanished. How he stamped and raved at everybody, until the generous Claudik offered to give him half of the remaining pear, which belonged to him.

It was now Claudik's turn to mount guard. He armed himself with a huge and marvelously keen scimitar and, when evening came, took his post beside the pear-tree. He had with him his flute, an instrument which he played with skill, and, as the night grew darker, he played to keep up his spirits.

As the clock struck twelve an owl flew with a screech from the tree. Claudik looked up, and beheld among the branches a big, brawny arm, and an enormous hand clutching at the solitary pear.

"Who goes there?" shouted the youth, raising his scimitar, and dealing a tremendous blow at the robber.

A deafening yell was followed by a violent gust of wind, which shook the tree to its roots—then all was still. On the ground lay a huge hand covered with blood, but still holding the precious pear. The thief was evidently some greedy giant.

Claudik put the pear into his wallet. He thought at first of flinging the hand into the sea, but changed his mind, and determined, if possible, to find its owner.

The moon had risen, and across the fields and over the hills a trail of blood could be distinctly seen. This trail Claudik, carrying with him the giant's hand, carefully followed until he reached the Forest of Kranou, where the traces grew indistinct and finally disappeared.

"Oh," said the young man to himself, as he returned to his home, "I have heard that a horrible ogre dwells in that forest. Well! If I were to take him his hand and offer to

restore it to its proper place I should think he would at least have the grace to spare my life. Perhaps, too, I may regain the stolen pears."

Accordingly, the next day Claudik went to a wizard who knew how to restore lopped-off limbs by means of a wonderful herb-ointment called "Louzou." From him Claudik took a lesson or two, and then, armed with a box of the ointment—an invaluable remedy which had never been known to fail—he made his way to the nearest town.

In the market-place a herald was announcing that the great giant-King of the forest would give the hand of his daughter, the lovely Fleur-du-Kranou, to the man who should heal him of a grievous wound received in battle.

"Not in battle," said Claudik, under his breath; "*in stealing pears.*"

The brave fellow went home again, put the hand into a big bag, which he strapped, knapsack-fashion, over his shoulder, then, taking with him his flute, set out in quest of the ogre. He passed through the outskirts of the forest, and before long came to a deep moat, on the other side of which was a dark and dense wood. He saw also some massive iron gates through which he would need to pass. Beside them stood a little hut, and at its door sat a little old woman, spinning flax.

"Countess of the Portal!" called out Claudik, "will your grace be so good as to unbar the gates? I carry an important message to the King."

The old lady, flattered at being styled a countess, smiled as she said, "Is that really so, my bonny youth?"

"Yes," replied Claudik. "Here in my knapsack I have something of great value which belongs to him."

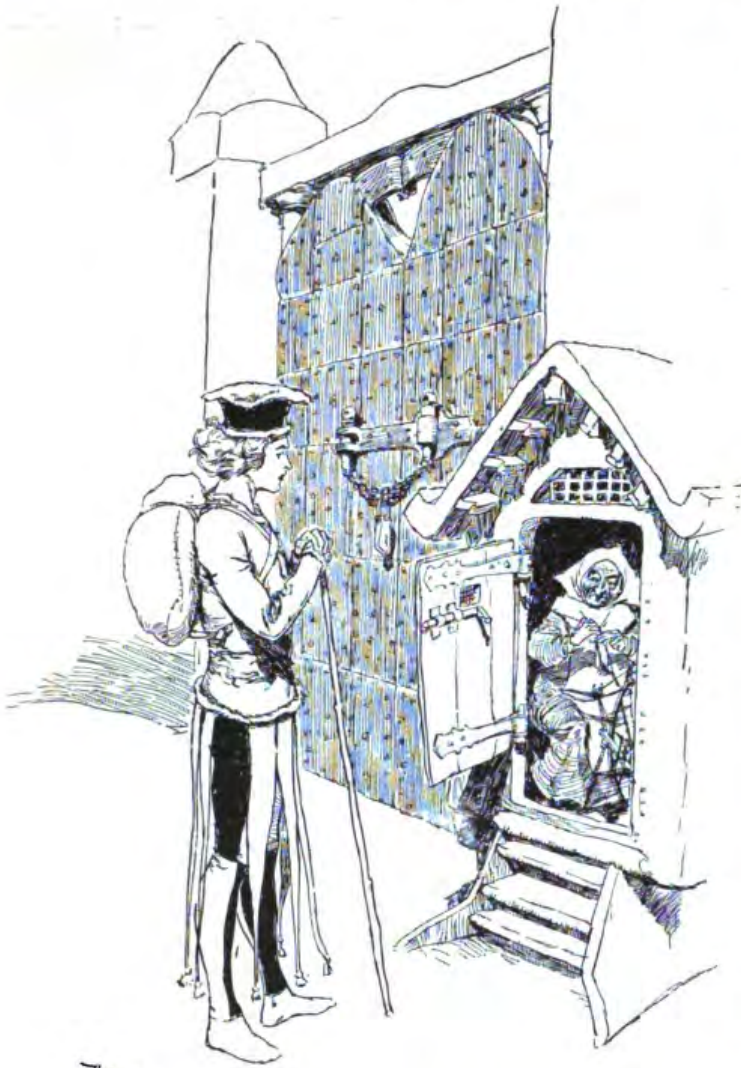
"Listen to me," said the portress, "and be warned in time. All who enter here are doomed to die. I would gladly save you from a cruel death."

"You cannot frighten me back, madam; I *must* reach the castle. I bring to His Majesty a certain cure, and hope to be rewarded with the Princess's hand."

"Are you aware that many skilled surgeons and physicians have already come on the same errand? And of them all, *not one* has returned in safety to his home."

"Not one?" inquired Claudik, doubtfully.

"Not one," replied the woman. "During the King's illness his appetite has grown so voracious that he ruthlessly devours each of his would-be sons-in-law. He gives them no time in which to cure him, but quickly rends



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them in pieces and grills them on an immense gridiron. So insatiable is he, indeed, that by-and-by he will probably eat the Princess herself."

"That we shall see," said the undaunted Claudik. "Now, open the gates for me."

"Very well, my lad; you must have your way," was the reply. The doors swung open and Claudik passed through with his big bag upon his back. The old woman wished to know what was in the sack, and he told her that it contained several marvellous medicines, besides his flute, and a beautiful brocaded silk dress which he would give her when he returned from Court.

The aged porterness leaned towards him and whispered in his ear.

"Listen!" said she. "When you reach that defile in front of you you will see a pretty vista of trees, and on one side a

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narrow, rugged footpath. This path you must take: it will bring you to the back of the manor grounds. Once there, play upon your flute the *jabadao* as they dance it at Guingamp. The Princess, who dotes upon dancing, will come down when she hears your music. Then you must ask her to dance the gavotte with you; after that, you will doubtless know how to act for the best!"

Claudik thanked the old woman and went on his way. When he reached the defile he saw the vista of trees, and was about to turn into the narrow footpath beside it, when he became aware of certain strange shapes and shadows hanging from the boughs and swinging in the wind. Corpses, hanging heads downwards from the trees! Some were mere skeletons, with hideously rattling bones. Claudik shuddered. What if he should be the next to dangle there?

For a moment only he faltered, then he pulled himself together and went bravely forward. Presently the grey towers of the giant's castle came into sight. Claudik approached the wall of the tower and, standing below the casement, began to play the

jabadao as danced at Guingamp. Very soon the casement was unbarred, and the young man, looking up, saw a Princess, fair as dawn, who made signs to him that she was coming down. She came, and, giving him her hand, led him across the turf. They danced the gavotte together in the starlight. Of this occupation, charming though it was, Claudik wearied sooner than the Princess did, for he was tired with his journey and with the weight of his burden. He was compelled to stop. When he had recovered his breath he asked the Princess to conduct him to the King. "Let us finish our dance first," said the lady. "When once my father has seen you there will be no more dancing for us!"

"But," said Claudik, "you do not know what I have in this sack. It is something which will instantly cure the King's hurt; and

then—with your consent, my Princess—I will claim you as my bride.”

“Alas! so many have spoken thus,” stammered the blushing girl; “they all came to do what you intend to do, and yet——”

“And yet you are here waiting for *me*,” went on Claudik, proudly. “Have no fear, only take me to your father.”

The Princess then told him to take off his

magical contents of Claudik’s sack rendered the flames harmless. At this Fleur-du-Kranou rejoiced; it really seemed as if she had found a deliverer at last! Suddenly the giant awoke, and said in a tremendous voice: “Oh, dear, I am *so* hungry! Get me food!” Then he espied Claudik, and roared out, “Ho, there! serve up that young fellow at once. Cook him on the gridiron, and give me some potatoes with him!”



“HE BECAME AWARE OF CERTAIN STRANGE SHAPES AND SHADOWS HANGING FROM THE BOUGHS.”

shoes and to follow her swiftly and silently. He obeyed, and as they passed through the splendid halls, each guarded at its entrance by fierce beasts and brilliantly illuminated with torches of crystal and gold, Claudik observed, hanging in rows around the paneling, scores of glittering pears, which he easily recognised as his father’s missing property.

At length they entered a hall larger but more dimly lighted than the rest. Here the giant lay sick. The Princess signed to Claudik that he should uncover his head. At their entrance two dragons guarding the door shot forth fire from their jaws, but the

Two stout cooks sprang forward, swinging their huge knives, but the blades no sooner touched Claudik’s sack than they were shattered into atoms. Then Claudik put his flute to his mouth and played a merry jig, which set everybody a-dancing.

Fleur-du-Kranou took Claudik as a partner; the cooks whirled and twirled with the gridirons and saucepans; the dragons footed it with the lions, while the dogs and wolves skipped about anyhow. Even the old, hungry, raging giant jumped up and hopped around with the rest.

He still shrieked, “Put him on the gridiron!” but no one paid any attention to him,

and the dance waxed more and more furious. Perhaps it might be going on now had not the weight of Claudik's knapsack obliged him to stop. Then the King sank back upon his couch, and, when Claudik knelt beside him, instantly stretched out his hand to strangle the young stranger. But cunning Claudik had pushed forward the sack, and when the giant touched this his arm

his sack and displaying its contents; "*here it is!* Now, if you will allow me, I will restore it to its rightful place."

Claudik's surgical operation proved a brilliant success. The giant-King, highly



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fell as though paralyzed, and he murmured in an agonized tone, "Oh, if I had but my other hand!"

"Your other hand," said Claudik, undoing

delighted, not only considerably refrained from eating his doctor, but also rewarded him with the fee which he desired—that is to say, the Princess. The wedding was a very grand affair.

After the death of Claudik's father the pear-tree was transplanted to Kranou, and there for many years it continued to yield its wonderful golden fruit.