

Swedish Folk Tales

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Floris Books

The Seven Wishes

Anna Wahlenberg

If you had ever seen Olle Niklasson standing by his bundle of firewood in the forest, scratching his fiery, bristly head, you would probably have laughed until you ached. Olle Niklasson looked so different from other boys. He had hair as brown as a juniper bush burnt by the sun, a nose like a potato, and cheeks like two fat mushrooms.

It wouldn't have been so bad if he had simply been ugly, but he was also so lazy he could scarcely bother to stand up again if he fell down, and so foolish he could not tell a squirrel from a crow.

As he ambled about the forest, with his mouth hanging open and his arms hanging down, he might have been taken for a monkey instead of a boy. He was so ugly and so foolish that even the magpies laughed.

Just now, as we said, he was standing in the forest near his bundle of firewood,



scratching his head. A seven-year-old child could easily have skipped with that little bunch of twigs, but Olle, who was thirteen years old and strong as a bear, had spent the last hour wondering if he could lift it on his back.

He was standing, fidgeting and fussing, when he saw a viper lying on the ground nearby. The viper was sharply and intently eyeing something small not far away. Olle looked more closely and saw a little frog hopping in starts towards the viper's open mouth. If Olle had not been so foolish, he would have realized that the snake, with its keen eyes, had cast a spell over the frog so that it would hop straight forward, right into the viper's mouth.

"Well, well," said Olle, astonished and wide-eyed. But he was too lazy to pick up a stick and kill the viper. Meantime, the frog hopped closer and closer to the viper's poisonous tongue. Finally, stupid as he was, Olle realized that the frog was terrified. It was trembling all over, and now and then it squeaked faintly. Olle opened his silly eyes wider and stepped nearer.

"Listen, you small short fat thing, don't be so silly. Why don't you run away? Can't you see that the long black one wants to catch you?" It was the longest speech Olle had ever made in all his life, and it was so hard for him to make that he took off his cap and mopped the sweat from his brow.

But the frog kept hopping slowly nearer, until finally it was just one hop away from the snake. The snake never moved its eyes from the frog. The poor little frog was shivering. Then Olle lost his temper and picked up a stick and said, "You stupid little wretch. Do I have to help you?" And with that, he poked the frog with the stick and knocked it aside into the grass, where the snake could not see it.

At once the frog jumped up on to Olle's bundle of firewood, where it sat watching him with beautiful, expressive eyes, as if wishing to thank him.

"Have I got to lift you, too?" Olle said crossly. "Don't you think the firewood is heavy enough already?" But the frog just sat there on the wood gazing at Olle. Its look was so bright, gentle, and friendly that Olle was almost spellbound. Lazy and foolish, he stood there without even the sense to shoo the frog away. Meanwhile, the snake had wriggled off into the grass.

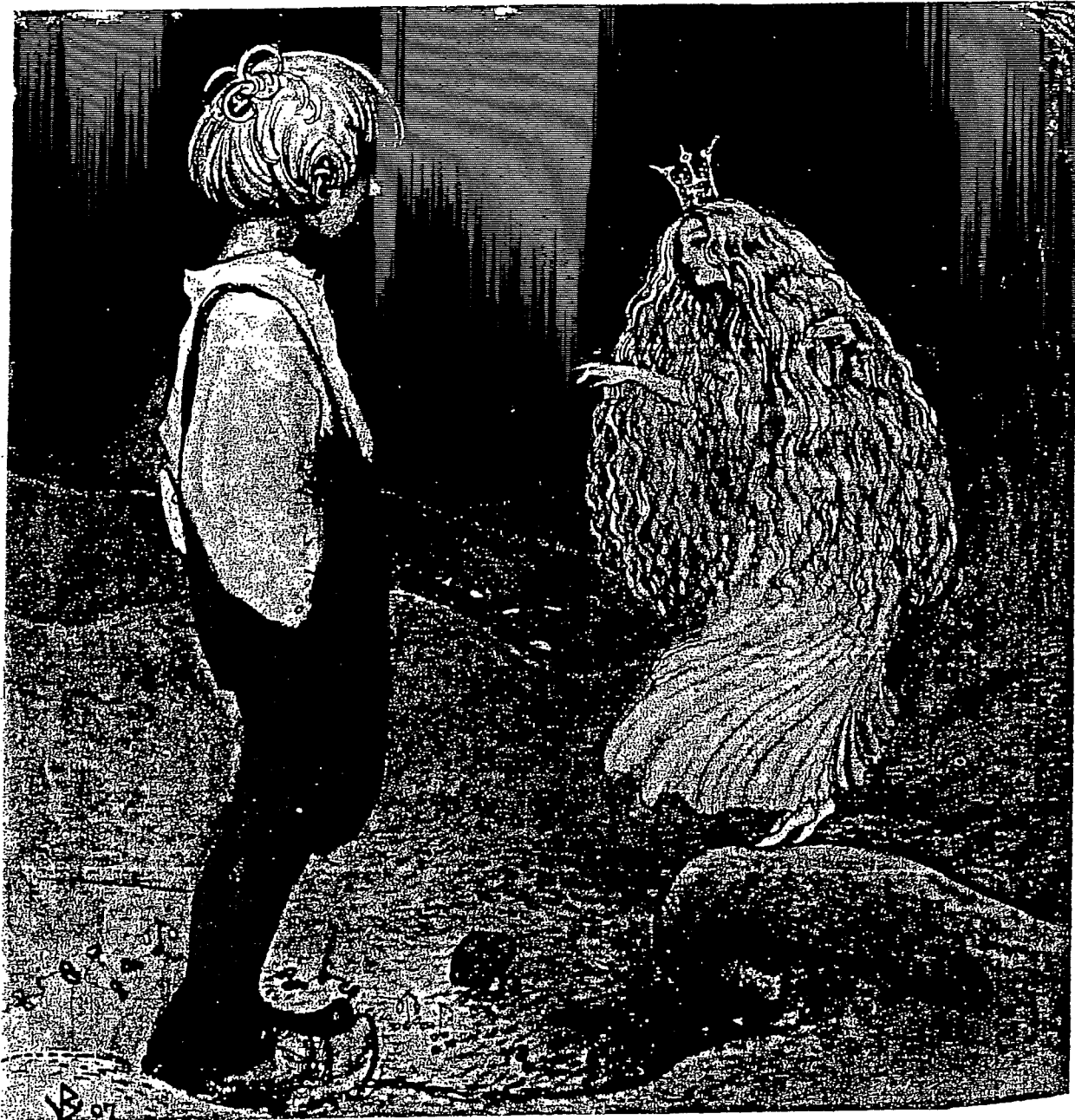
Suddenly the frog laughed, a laugh as clear as silver. It jumped down from the firewood and at that moment became a beautiful fairy girl with rosy cheeks, sky-blue eyes, and curly gold hair.

Olle was so astonished that all he could say was: "Oh."

"Thank you, my friend, for saving my life," the fairy said in a voice as fine as a note from a harp.

"Oh," said Olle again.

"You probably don't realize what you have done for me," said the fairy. "I am not a frog, as you see. I am queen of the fairies. My crystal palace is over there in the small brook that flows through the meadow."



"Oh," said Olle, staring at the beautiful little elf.

"You may be wondering," the fairy went on, "why I was a frog just a moment ago, so I will tell you straightaway. Yesterday around noon I committed a great sin. I laughed at a little frog that was hopping towards a big snake which had its mouth open. I did not realize that the snake had charmed the frog so it couldn't escape, and I laughed at it for not jumping away. That was wicked of me, and so I was punished. I was turned into a frog myself for twenty-four hours. There were just ten minutes left when the viper appeared and charmed me, too — put me under a spell. If you

had not been there to save me, I would have been swallowed up and dead. Now do you realize what a fine deed you have done?"

"Oh, ho," said Olle, staring harder than ever.

"And now I want to reward you for your goodness," the fairy went on. "I will give you seven wishes, and whatever you wish for will be granted. Only be careful and don't wish foolishly, or you will regret it later. Goodbye."

And with this the fairy floated away through the air towards the path that led to the brook.

"Ho, ho, ho," said Olle, rubbing his elbow. "That was fun. But now, what shall I wish for? Oh, yes, I know. I wish the firewood would run home by itself and carry me on its back."

He had hardly spoken before he was thrown on his stomach across the bundle of firewood. It raced through the forest and sent sticks and twigs, moss and pebbles, flying through the air. Olle was terrified, and had to dig his hands into the branches to hold on. The firewood went like the wind, flying wildly between hillocks and groves. It galloped over stones and tree stumps. Olle was tossed and jerked hither and thither, he lost his cap and his wooden shoes, his face was whipped by bushes and branches, and he himself was bellowing like a cow.

In a few minutes the firewood reached the small croft where Olle lived. It tore through the gate and into the yard. At the threshold, it stopped so abruptly that Olle fell headlong through the door and bumped his head so hard, it gave him a sizeable lump.

"Oh, my," said Olle, getting to his knees.

His mother, who believed the pig had slipped into the croft, came rushing from the kitchen with her broom. Olle could say nothing but "Oh, my," and "Oh, oh," for he was so shaken that he quite forgot about the frog and the snake.

The woman felt so sorry for him that she gave him a bag of almond candy. Now, whenever Olle got hold of something good to eat, he could never stop at enough. So now he sat down on the step and gobbled up all the candy in a wink.

"Yum," he said, licking his lips. "I wish I had a pail full of this candy, and could as eat as much as I wanted."

In a moment, a whole pail of candy was dumped in his lap.

"Oh, my," Olle exclaimed delightedly, and began to grab fistfuls of almond candy from the pail. He ate so much and so quickly it would have made you dizzy to watch him. He stared and chewed and swallowed, then ate some more. He hunched over the pail until, in fifteen minutes, it was empty, and Olle was as fat and round as a sausage.

In a little while Olle was lying on the bed wriggling like an earthworm, with his hands on his stomach, and yelling louder than a pig stuck in a fence.

His mother sent for the doctor, who advised a full bottle of stomach bitters. In an hour, Olle had been so sick that he was as empty as a hunting dog. When he felt well

enough to explain what had happened, the wise doctor gave him a sound thrashing with a hazel stick.

A week later Olle's mother sent him out to weed their little carrot patch. Reluctantly Olle went out to do the job, but being lazy, before he began he lay down beside the carrots to rest for a while.

Now it just happened that there was also an enormous cherry tree in the garden, full of the biggest and reddest cherries, but they grew so high up that you could not reach them without climbing the tree. A more sensible boy would have found a ladder to lean against the tree, and that way could be right among the juicy cherries. But Olle was both too silly and too lazy to think of that. So he lay under the tree and got angry with the crows and magpies that flew among the branches, and picked one cherry after another.

"Oh," said Olle, licking his thick lips. "I wish I was sitting up there at the top of the tree."

And just as if a strong wind had lifted him from the ground, in a moment he was flying up into the tree, and there he hung among the topmost branches.

"Oh! Oh!" Olle shouted in delight, and began picking and eating. Now if only he had not been too lazy to close the gate when he entered the garden, everything would have turned out all right. But with the gate open, the pig wandered in and began to scratch its back against the cherry tree. You can imagine what happened next. The tree swayed back and forth with Olle at the top like a magpie on a birch twig in a storm. At last he lost hold and fell down head over heels. Twigs and branches broke as he went, and Olle somersaulted wildly on to the back of the pig.

It is hard to say which if these two cried loudest, Olle or the pig. Certainly, the pig never again dared scratch its back against a cherry tree with a boy in the branches, and for a week Olle went around with cuts on his hands, red scratches on his cheeks, and a swollen nose.

You might suppose Olle would never make a silly wish again, but, like other stupid boys, he didn't remember any of his troubles after they stopped hurting. So it was not more than a few weeks before Olle had another adventure.

On that day, he set out walking to the village. He seldom bothered to walk so far, and when he did, he dragged his feet all the way. He watched a bicyclist pedalling by on the road.

"Oh," said Olle. "I wish I could sit on a bicycle like that and ride all over the countryside."

The very next minute he was astride a bicycle and spurting wildly forward. Where the bicycle had come from, and how Olle got on the seat, he did not know; but he sat there now pedalling and speeding along for all his worth. Olle had never ridden a bicycle before, and he began to shout and yell at the top of his lungs. Nor was the bicycle better behaved, so it raced along frightening both cows and people.

If only the bicycle had kept to the roads, things might have been easier. But the mischievous machine insisted on racing over the countryside, just as Olle had wished, and so it seldom rode on smooth ground.

Olle tried to stop pedalling, but that was quite impossible. Whether he liked it or not, he pedalled, and bumped and jumped along across hills and tufty meadows, through cornfields and potato fields, over fences, ditches, and stone walls. Everywhere people ran from their homes to look at the madly careening cyclist. Olle shouted and thumped, thumped and shouted. "Oh! Oh! Catch me. Stop me!"

The villagers watched angrily as Olle spoiled their crops and ran over their livestock. He rode pell-mell uncontrollably across corn sheaves and over flower beds, pushed piglets aside, and scared horses so they bolted. Sheep jumped fences, and hens flew cackling on to the roofs of barns.

By now the villagers had come out in force, with sticks and poles, to stop Olle. With the town elders in the lead, farmers and farmhands marched towards Olle in a body. Olle's bicycle lunged towards them like a furious bull, knocked off the sexton's hat, skinned the parish clerk's legs, and gave the richest farmer in the county such a solid poke in the stomach that he tumbled over with his heels in the air.

Olle was so frightened he nearly fainted. He simply could not understand what kind of monster he was riding.

"I wish the wretched thing would break into a hundred pieces," he said.

Immediately the bicycle rolled into a stone wall and was smashed to smithereens. Olle himself somersaulted over the wall and landed in a clump of nettles.

Immediately the villagers rushed forward to beat Olle for the damage he had done. Not only were fields and gardens ravaged, but he had run over and killed three pigs and four hens. But when the farmers saw him looking so frightened and exhausted, they lowered their stick and left him in peace. "Poor lad," they said. "It's a pity. He's so stupid he doesn't know what he's doing. And small wonder, he never even learnt how to read."

Olle limped home, aching all over. He began to think about what the villagers had said. "Is it because I cannot read that I am so stupid?" he wondered. "It would be odd, but perhaps it is the reason I am always getting into trouble. I wish I could read."

Well, if that had been Olle's first wish, he would have acted sensibly and avoided a lot of trouble; for the way the fairy's spell worked, if Olle wished foolishly, he got his wish immediately, but when he wished sensibly, it came to him gradually. So he did not learn how to read wonderfully well at once, but he did get such a burning desire for it that he studied both day and night.

Eventually, Olle could read any book he laid his hands on. And the more he read, the better he understood how foolish he had been, and how lazy, idling away half his life. Now he helped his mother with all kinds of chores, and began to be more diligent and industrious.

One day as he was walking in the forest he saw the little fairy queen again. He recognized her immediately, and suddenly remembered his adventure with the frog and the snake, for since he had learnt to read and work, his memory had improved.

"Good day, dear Olle," said the fairy in a mild voice. "You wished foolishly five times, but your sixth wish was a wise one. Now you may have one more wish, but think carefully, for this is the very last one, and after that I will not be able to help you again."

Olle pondered a very long time. Reading and working so much, he had become quite sensible, and that was the reason he was afraid to wish for something silly. He said at last, "I wish to be a good, useful person."

"You couldn't have made a better wish," said the fairy happily. "And therefore I shall grant your wish, but it will come of your own efforts, for what comes other ways isn't worth much. Good-bye!"

The little fairy kept her word. Through study and hard work, Olle became sensible, useful, and good, and everyone like him. And as he became good, he also seemed more handsome, for only the lazy and wicked appear ugly.

Leap the Elk and Little Princess Cottongrass

Helge Kjellin

Have you ever been in a large forest and seen a strange black tarn hidden deep among the tall trees? It looks bewitched and a little frightening. All is still — fir trees and pines huddle close and silent on all sides. Sometimes the trees bend cautiously and shyly over the water as if they are wondering what may be hidden in the dark depths. There is another forest growing in the water, and it, too, is full of wonder and stillness. Strangest of all, never have the two forests been able to speak to each other.

By the edge of the pool and out in the water are soft tussocks covered with brown bear moss and wooly white cottongrass. All is so quiet — not a sound, not a flutter of life, not a trembling breath — all of nature seems to be holding its breath listening, listening with beating heart: soon, soon.

And then a gentle murmur stirs the crowns of the tall firs, and they lean together and begin to sing softly: *Yes, we have seen him, far, far away, and soon he will be here, he is coming, he is coming.* A murmur sweeps through the forest. Bushes rustle and whisper to each other. The cottongrass blossoms bend and bow back and forth: *Yes, he is coming, he is coming,* they say, while the still waters begin to murmur: *He is coming, he is coming.* You hear a few twigs breaking far away. They come closer, come together in a solid noise. It grows: there is a crash of snapping bushes, branches, and twigs; a clatter of fast-moving footsteps coming one after another; and you hear a heavy panting. A large elk has thrust itself through the forest to the bank of the pool, where it stops, swings its panting muzzle, and snuffs eagerly. The majestic crown of horns shakes, the elk's nostrils quiver, and then it stands still for a moment. A second later, with gigantic leaps it is off through the swaying tufts, and disappears into the far side of the forest.

That much is true. Now here is a fairy tale about it.

The sun is shining like gold on the meadow of Dream Castle. It is summer, and the grass has a thousand fragrant blossoms. A little girl, rosy and delicate, sits among all the flowers, combing her long, pale yellow hair. It sifts like summer gold through her small fingers. A golden crown is lying in the meadow beside her.

This girl is the princess of Dream Castle, and today she has slipped away from the

high, stately chamber where her father, the king, and her mother, the queen, sit on golden chairs, with sceptre and orb, to rule their people. She wishes to be alone and free, and has come to the flowering meadow to play. The meadow has always been her playground.

This princess is small and slim, still a child. She sits there in a gown whiter than white, made of silk and satin and muslin as thin as gauze.

Princess Cottongrass — that is what they call her.

She combs her fair hair with small, thin fingers and smiles at the shining hair strands. An elk snuffs and stalks past. She lifts her eyes.

"Oh, who are you?"

"I am Longled Leap. What do they call you?"

"I am Princess Cottongrass." She lifts the crown from the meadow to show that it is so.

The elk stops to look at the princess long and searchingly, then lowers its head.

"You are beautiful, little one."

The princess rises and moves closer. She leans towards the elk's trembling muzzle and strokes it gently. "How big and stately you are. And you have a crown, too. Let me come with you. Let me sit behind your neck, and then carry me out into life."

The elk hesitates. "The world is big and cold, little child, and you are so small. the world is full of evil and wickedness, and it will hurt you."

"No, no. I am young and warm. I have warmth enough for everyone. I am small and good, and want to share the good I have."

"Princess, the forest is dark and the roads are dangerous."

"But you are with me. You are great and strong, and can easily defend us both."

The elk tosses its head and shakes its mighty crown of horns. Its eyes look fiery.

The princess claps her small hands. "Good, good. But you are too tall — bend down so that I can climb up."

Obediently, the elk lies down, and soon the princess is sitting securely on its back.

"I am ready, and now you must show me the world."

It rises slowly, afraid of unseating the little one. "Hold on tight to my horns." And it sets off with leaps and bounds.

The princess has never had more fun. There are so many new and beautiful things to see. She has never been beyond the meadow at Dream Castle before, and now they are running over hill and dale, over plains and mountains.

"Where are you taking me?" she asks.

"To Forest Moss," Leap answers. "I live there. No one comes there and it is a long way off."

Evening is coming, and the princess is hungry and sleepy.

"Are you changing your mind already?" teases the elk. "It's too late to turn round. But don't be afraid. Wonderful berries grow in the marsh where I live. You can eat them."



They travel a while, when the forest begins to thin, and the princess looks out over a mile-long marsh, where tufts of sedge come together in soft hollows and hillocks, and where the little stunted bushes on the bank haven't the courage to follow.

"Here we are," says Leap, and bends down so that the princess can dismount. "Now we shall have supper."

Immediately the princess forgets all about sleep and begins to jump lightly from tuft to tuft, just like Leap, to pick the delicious big berries. She and Longleg Leap share them delightedly.

Leap says, "We must hurry on before it gets too dark," and once again Princess Cot-

tongrass climbs on to his broad back. Leap sets off, surefooted, across the marsh, stepping confidently on the tufts as if he knows they will hold him. After all, he was born there.

"Who is that dancing there?" asks the princess.

"They are the elves. But be careful of them. They seem sweet and friendly, but never trust them. Remember what I tell you: don't speak to them, but hold on tight to my horns and pretend you don't notice them."

Yes, the princess promises, she will.

But the elves have already caught sight of them. They come forward and circle around and dance up and down in front of the elk, floating tantalizingly close to the little princess. But remembering what Leap has just told her, she clings to his horns with all her might.

"Who are you, who are you?" ask the elves.

Hundreds of questions are all around, and the princess feels them like the cold breath of the wind, but she does not answer.

Then the tiny elves, in their white veils, become bolder. They tug at her dress and her long yellow hair. Leap snorts and begins to run.

Suddenly the princess realizes that the golden crown on her head is slipping, and she is afraid it will fall off — imagine what Father-king and Mother-queen, who gave it to her, would say — and she forgets what Leap told her and calls to the elves, at the same time letting go one hand to clasp her crown. At that moment the elves have power over her — not altogether, because she still clings to the elk's horns with one hand; but with joyous mocking laughter they snatch the shining crown from her head and float away over the marsh.

"Oh, my crown, my crown," moans Princess Cottongrass.

"Why didn't you obey me?" Leap scolds her. "You have only yourself to blame. Probably you will never get your golden crown back, but you are lucky it was not worse."

Yet the princess cannot imagine anything worse than what has just happened.

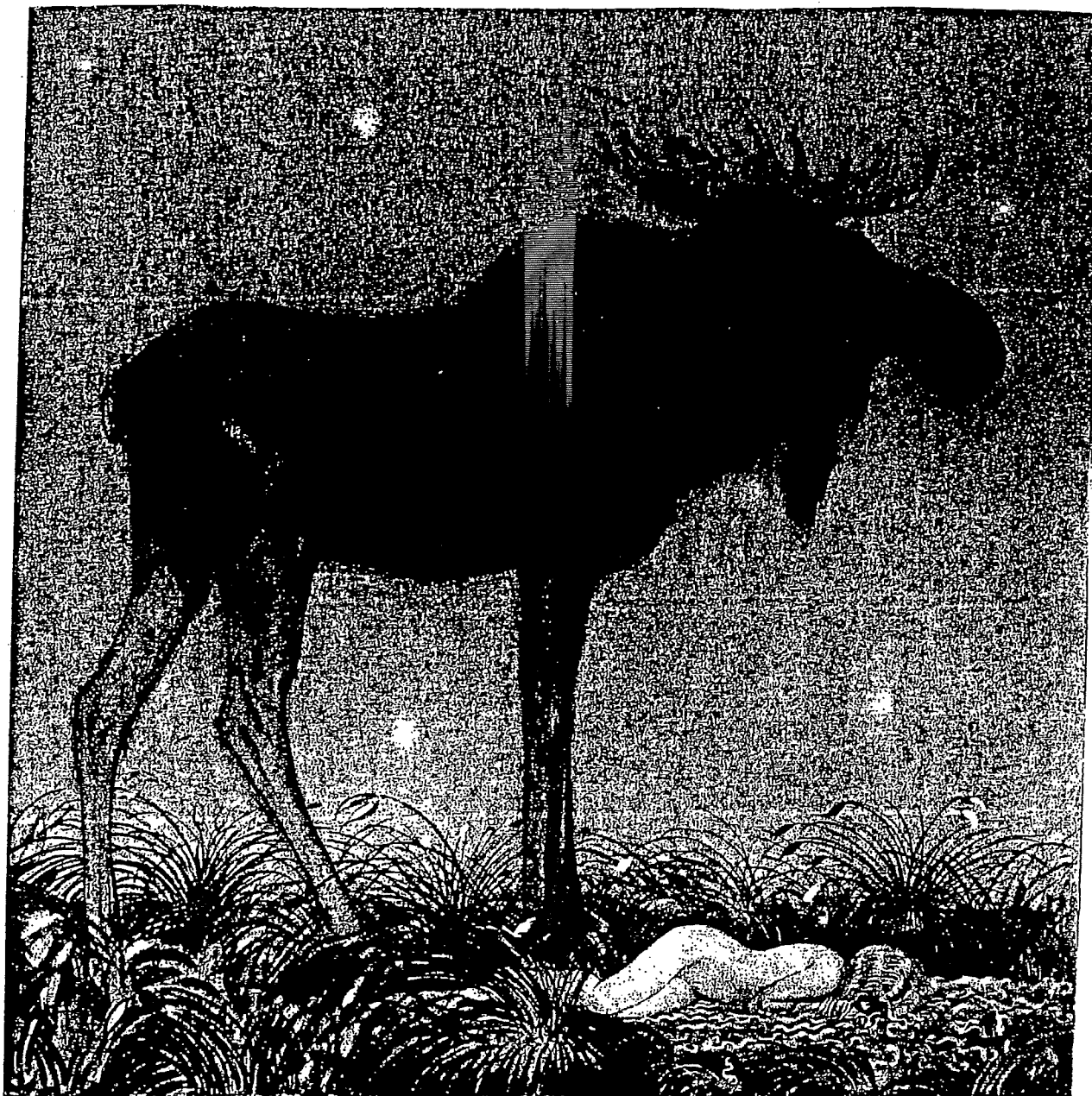
Leap walks on, and soon she spies a clump of small trees on an island in the middle of the marsh.

"Here is where I live," says Leap. "This is where we shall sleep."

Soon they are there. The low hill rises above the marsh, and it is dry and delightful among the fir trees and pines.

The princess kisses her dear friend Leap good-night, undresses and hangs her gown neatly on a branch. She lies down and is soon asleep, with the long-legged elk to stand guard over her. It is almost night, and a few small stars are twinkling in the sky.

Next morning the princess is awakened by the soft touch of the elk's muzzle on her forehead. She jumps up quickly, stretches naked in the golden-red morning light, and then collects some dewdrops to drink in her hands. A small chain, with a golden heart on it, is hanging from her neck and catches the sunlight like fire.



"Today I will go bare," she exclaims. "I will carry my dress in front of me and then you will carry me on your back and show me more of the world."

"Yes," says the elk, unable to deny her anything. It had been awake all night watching over the strange, white little girl on the ground, and that morning there had been tears in its eyes. It did not understand why, except it felt autumn approaching and was seized by a longing to do battle and a desire not to be alone anymore.

Suddenly it dashes away into the forest. The fair-haired princess finds it very difficult to hold on. Branches whip her face and shoulders, and the little golden heart dances on its chain.

But before long, Leap calms down and slackens his pace. Now they are travelling through a large, strange forest. The long branches of the firs are covered with hanging moss, the tree roots bend like snakes, and large, lichen-covered boulders seem to threaten them from the side of the path. The princess has never seen such a queer place before.

"What is that moving deep in the woods?" she asks. "I think I see long green hair and a pair of white arms waving to me."

"It is the witch of the woods," says Leap. "Answer her politely, but by no means ask her for anything, and whatever you do, hold tight to my horns."

Yes, the princess promises, she will hold on tight.

Now the witch glides closer. She does not want to show herself entirely; she always hides halfway behind a tree. Curiously and slyly she peers at the elk and the girl. The princess scarcely dares look that way, but she can tell that the witch has icy green eyes and a mouth red as blood.

Then the witch begins to slither from tree to tree, following the elk as it runs. She knows Leap well, but is puzzled by the little white one with the golden hair.

Suddenly she calls, "What is your name?"

"I am Princess Cottongrass, of Dream Castle," the girl answers shyly, taking care not to ask the witch's name. Of course, she knows who it is.

"What are you carrying in front of you?" the witch asks.

"It is my finest gown," replies the princess, with a little more courage.

"Oh, let me see it," the witch begs.

Of course she may, and the princess lets go with one hand to show the witch her white dress.

She should never have done so, for in a trice the witch has snatched the dress and disappeared into the forest.

"Why did you let go of my horns?" says Leap. "If you had let go with both hands, you would have had to follow the witch, and probably never have come back."

"But my dress, my dress," sobs Princess Cottongrass.

But after a while she forgets it, and the day passes, and that night the princess sleeps under the fir trees with Leap standing quietly beside her to keep watch.

When she wakes in the morning, the elk is gone. "Leap, Longleg Leap, where are you?" she calls fearfully, and jumps up.

Here he comes, breathing heavily, through the undergrowth. He has been on top of a hill, looking east, sniffing the air, and he has scented something. What? He cannot tell, but his coat is wet and his legs are trembling.

He seems to want to move on, and bends down to let the princess climb on his back. Then they are gone in a rush, galloping east. He hardly hears when she calls to him, and rarely answers. As if in a fever he breaks through the tangled forest at a furious rate.

"Where are we going?" asks Princess Cottongrass.



"To the pool," is the answer. "Deep in the forest is a pool, and that is where I go when autumn is coming. No person has ever been there, but you shall see it."

Abruptly the tree trunks open up, and here is the water, shining brown-black with flecks of greenish gold.

"Hold on tight," Leap warns. "There is danger under the water. Watch your golden heart!"

"Yes. What strange water," says the princess, bending forward to look more closely — but oh, dear, at the moment the chain with the golden heart slips over her head and drops into the pool.



"Oh, my heart, the golden heart that my mother gave me the day I was born. Oh, what shall I do?"

She is quite inconsolable. She stares at the water and then begins to wander off over the tussocks to look for her heart.

"Come," says Leap. "It is dangerous for you here. Looking for one thing, you will forget everything else."

But the princess wants to stay. She must find her heart.

"Go, my friend. Let me sit here alone. I know I shall find the heart."

She flings her arms about his bent head, kisses it, and strokes it softly. Then,

small and slim and undressed, she goes and sits down on a grassy hillock.

For a long time the elk stands quite still and looks at the small girl. But when she no longer seems to notice that he is there, he turns and disappears with hesitant steps into the forest.

Many years have passed. Still Princess Cottongrass sits and looks wonderingly into the water for her heart. She is no longer a little girl. Instead, a slender plant, crowned with white cotton, stands leaning over the edge of the pool. Now and then the elk returns, stops, and looks at it tenderly. Only he knows that this is the princess from Dream Castle. Perhaps she nods and smiles, for he is an old friend, but she does not want to follow him back; she cannot follow any more, as long as she is under the spell. The spell lies in the pool. Far, far under the water lies a lost heart.

The Changelings

Helena Nyblom

Once there lived a king and queen who had no children, although they wished for one so much. At last, one summer, the queen gave birth to a daughter, and the king and queen were indescribably happy. The little princess, a beautiful child, was christened Bianca Maria. Her eyes were big and blue, her little mouth turned up sweetly, and her skin was as delicate as the petal of a flower. Naturally, she must have the noblest lady in the land as her governess.

And so the countess of the realm and Mistress of the Robes, Esmeralda, was entrusted with watching over the princess. At night two nurses slept by the cradle, one on each side, and in the daytime Countess Esmeralda looked after the royal infant. All this was very right and proper, for Countess Esmeralda was enormously aristocratic, though she was not at all suited to be a governess in any other way. She was very old, and always sleepy. Time and again she would nod off, although she always said she was only resting her eyes.

At night the princess slept in a big bed chamber; during the day her cradle was carried to an acacia grove near the palace. There a fountain splashed, and tall rose bushes grew all around. The tall acacias dropped their white flowers on the princess's coverlet; the air was mild and fresh; and white pigeons flew from their cote to look at the sleeping child. "She is so sweet," they said, tripping silently around the cradle. "As white and soft as a dove."

But one day something terrible happened.

Behind the castle, in a black forest on the mountain, a troll and his wife lived in a cave. Now this troll wife had also just given birth to a little girl — a small, swarthy baby with keen eyes and matted hair. One day the old troll went to the palace fountain to fetch some water. He padded along quietly — so quietly that no one would hear him. Countess Esmeralda was fast asleep in her big easy chair by the cradle, and the pigeons were tripping over the gravel cooing, "Isn't she lovely? Isn't she as white and soft as a dove?"

The troll crept cautiously up to the cradle and looked through the silk curtains at the sleeping child. Then he went home and told his wife, "Now I have seen the child that I would have liked to have. White and soft as a dove, with the sweetest little mouth."

"You couldn't be the father of that child," said the troll wife, showing all her

green teeth. "A big troll begets a little troll, and must be satisfied with that."

But all the time now the old troll was thinking about the little princess, until finally it was too much for him. "Mother," he said, "let's steal the royal baby. It would be easy. The old crone who watches her is always snoring. We can take the princess and put our troll midge in her place."

At first his wife did not want to agree at all. She was only an ugly old troll, yet she loved her own child. However, her troll husband never left her in peace, until at last she was so tired of his nagging day and night that she pulled the baby troll from its cradle, wrapped it in a rag, and said, "Go along, take your child. But I warn you, don't come back empty-handed."

The old troll ran to the acacia grove as fast as he could. There was the golden cradle. The pigeons were tripping around, the acacias were dropping flowers, and Countess Esmeralda was snoring softly in her deep chair.

In a trice the troll had ripped off the cradle curtains, snatched the princess, put his troll baby in her place, and then run faster than a hare up the mountain with his precious bundle.

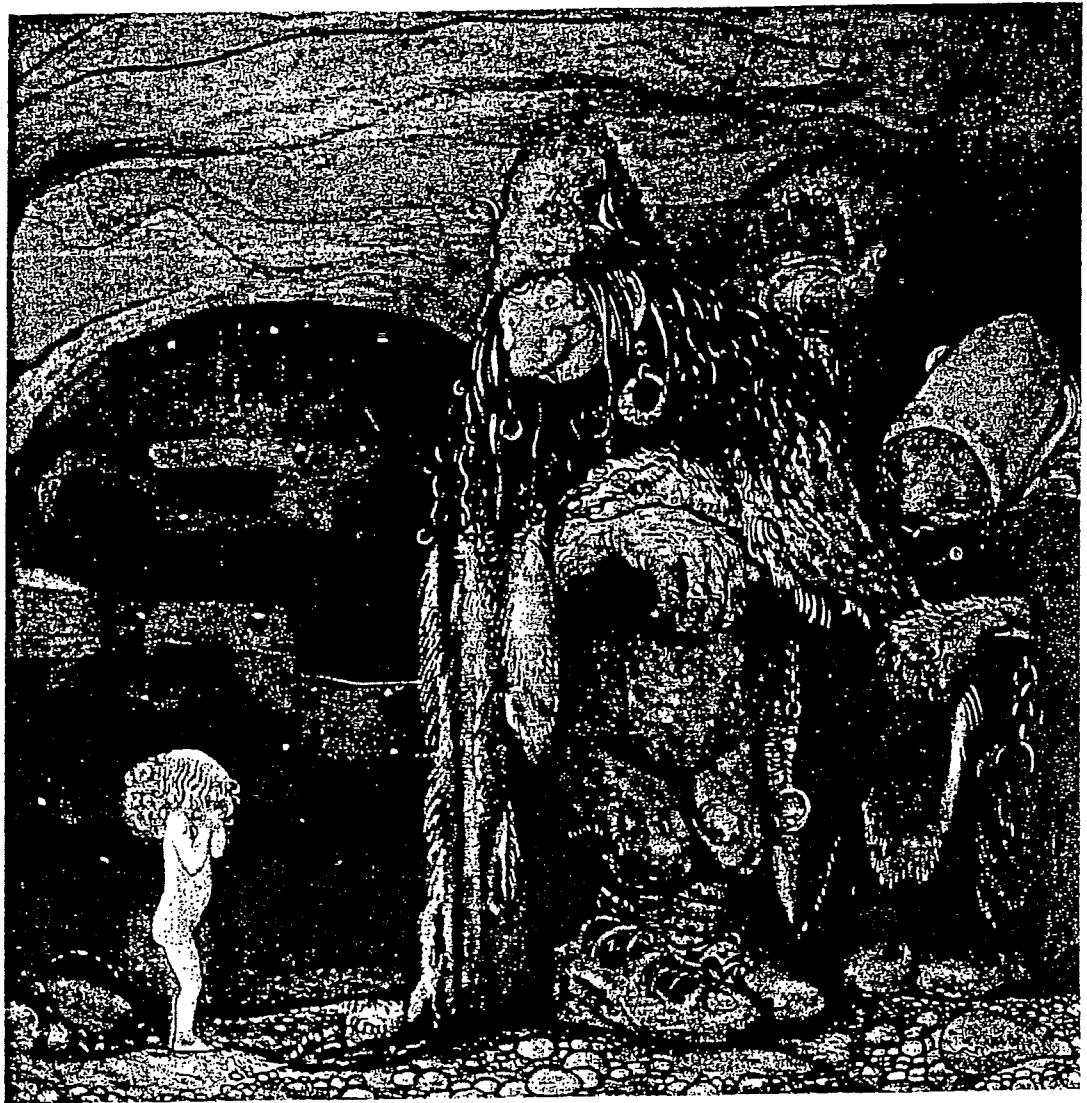
The countess awoke and noticed nothing. She believed the princess was asleep. After a while, the queen came into the grove. She liked to walk there in the mornings and see her baby. Imagine her horror when she leaned over the cradle and found, not dearest Bianca Maria, but a little troll bundle staring up at her with small, evil black eyes. She cried out, nearly fainting, "What is this? Where is my child? This is not my child. This is not the little princess!"

Countess Esmeralda started in terror. "Not Your Majesty's child?" she said. "Who else's child could it be? No one has been here, not a soul. I have been here wide-awake the whole time." Countess Esmeralda did not mean to lie, for really she didn't know how often she fell asleep.

The king and all his court were summoned, and the royal physician was asked for his advice. "A strange case, a very strange case," he said. "I believe it is what is called —" and he mentioned a long Latin name which no one understood. "But it is probably a thing that will pass," he added, and prescribed sweet milk baths. They were to lay the baby on a bed of violets, and then surely it would not be long before she looked the way she did before.

The finest cows were bought and the child was bathed in their warm, creamy milk. The cradle was filled with violets, which smelled heavenly, but the queen did not find her child at all changed. Black she was and black she stayed. Well, not really black, but brown as a hazelnut, with coal-black eyes and hair. All the court, however, said she looked perfectly sweet and enchanting, until finally the queen, too, thought the same. Still, every time she actually saw her, she would sigh and think, "This is not my angelic little Bianca Maria."

In the meantime, the old troll had run home with the little princess to his cave.



"Isn't she sweet?" he asked, opening the shawl he had wrapped her in.

His troll wife threw him a scornful look. "Such a miserable washed-out little thing! She looks like a leek, pale and thin. But you wanted her, and now you have to put up with her."

They laid the baby in the troll child's cradle, but the pillows and mattress were stuffed with coarse straw, into which a thistle or two had also found its way. When Bianca Maria felt this hard and prickly bed, she began to cry bitterly.

"Why is she crying?" the troll wife asked.

But her husband had already run down to a peat bog. There he gathered cotton-grass, and then, on the mountainside, he picked wild thyme. With these he

stuffed a new mattress for the cradle, and when once again everything was soft and fragrant around the little one, she stopped crying immediately and fell quietly asleep.

In the castle the troll princess grew up into a very strange child. We call her the troll princess because she had no other name. Troll children are not baptized. They arrive in the world and their father simply spits on their neck and says, "Out with you into the world, you little cribble-crabble." And that's all there is to it.

But the queen could not bring herself to call the changeling Bianca Maria; she only called her Black Eye, for the troll baby had a pair of flashing black eyes.

"Where did our daughter get her strange black eyes?" asked the king, staring at the queen.

"Yes, who can explain it?" she said, and sighed. "When she was born she had eyes as blue as yours and mine."

Nor was little Black Eye easy to manage. She gave them all trouble, the king and the queen and the whole court. When she didn't get what she wanted, she lay on the floor on her back and kicked her feet in the air and screamed until they had to close the windows to keep her from being heard outside. If she had a new dress, she found it funny to pour soup all over it, or else to pierce it with a poker and make a big hole. Then she looked out of the corner of her eye at the queen to see how angry she would get.

She behaved worst, however, to the old countess Esmeralda. She could not stand the countess, and would sprinkle sand in her hair when she fell asleep in her chair, or hide her shoes in a bush where the old lady could not find them. Sometimes she hid, too, and had a wonderful time of it when the countess woke from a little nap and could not find her. She would creep behind bush after bush for hours on end while the Mistress of the Robes tottered about with her cane, trembling and out of breath from looking for her so frantically.

For a while the king spanked the troll child when she was naughty, but then she became so furious and looked like such a little wild beast, purple in the face and shrieking horribly, that even the king was frightened. From then on he did not beat her any more. Surprisingly the king had something of a soft spot for this obstinate child, which she soon enough took advantage of.

She was not more than eight years old when one day at the dinner table, after listening to something the king had said, she pulled his beard playfully and said, "Is that so, old Father King? I suppose some might think so." The queen became quite red and looked at her husband in alarm. But the king put his arm around the girl's waist and laughed, "You are the worst little troll child in the whole world."

Among the trolls up in the mountain, Bianca Maria was also eight years old. She was tall and thin for her age, and had beautiful yellow hair. She obeyed the trolls in every-

thing for she believed they were her parents, although she often felt in her heart that she did not love them as much as she should. To the old troll, she was still the very sweetest thing imaginable.

"Such white fingers," he would say. "And such silky skin and such wonderful yellow hair." He became affected when he talked with her: he would cock his head, kiss her finger, and squeak like a little rat.

"Don't be silly, you ugly old scamp," his wife said, and smacked his hand hard. She had no soft spot for the king's daughter. Indeed, it annoyed her when Bianca Maria was always so mild and obliging, and said Yes to everything you asked her to do.

One day the troll wife called to the girl angrily, "Yes this and Yes that, you always say Yes. Can't you say No, you wretch?" But Bianca Maria did not mind. She went quietly about her work, and said nothing in the face of scolding.

Even as a little child she was given work to do. She went on bare feet deep into the forest to a bubbling well to fetch water for the kitchen. The well never ran dry, winter or summer; and in the forest, birches rustled in such a friendly way, and the pine trees murmured so courteously that Bianca Maria made all the trees her friends.

And how she loved all the forest animals! Little squirrels darted up with their tails in the air to stare at her. "Out so early?" they said, sitting on their hind legs. "Do you by chance have some nuts or something good in your pocket?" And Bianca Maria had always brought nuts or acorns, which the squirrels ate from her hand.

She knew every bird in the forest, and could have told you immediately if it was a chaffinch or a siskin chirping in the branches. She stood still and listened to the song of the thrushes, the quiet cooing of the wood pigeons.

It was not only forest animals that Bianca liked; she was as good and friendly to such unpleasant ones as the big toads that waddled into the mountain cave. Bianca knew the old troll woman would kill any toad she caught sight of, so she hurried to pick them up and carry them away to safety. They were heavy and wet, and unpleasant to touch, but Bianca Maria would take each one carefully between her small fingers and whisper, "Poor thing. You can't help it if you are ugly and clumsy. But don't come in here, or they will kill you with a broomstick." And she set the toad down in the grass. She did not even mind rats. She saved grain in an old earthenware jug which she put on the floor behind her bed, and at night the rats came running, and squeaked, "Now we are having a party! Now we are having a party!"

One day the old woman caught two wood pigeons. She killed them and plucked their feathers and put them in a pot. Bianca stood by and wept. The troll wife became very angry. "Well I never!" she cried. "To set up a howl over a couple of miserable pigeons. You will never be a big daring troll child. I cannot understand where you came from."

Of course, the troll woman knew very well, but the old troll had strictly forbidden her, by the slightest word or sign, ever to let Bianca know she was the daughter of a King.

Years passed, and before long the two girls were each seventeen years old. The troll princess had become strangely handsome. She was not tall, but she was slim and comely. Her skin was not as dark as it had been as a baby; her hair was raven black and fell in waves and curls about her face. And she had a pair of big black eyes that probably would have been beautiful had they ever expressed a little friendliness and kindness, but instead they stared crossly at everyone. When she was angry, her eyes flamed so, people were afraid to look at them. And when she was pleased, they seemed to express ridicule and scorn. She appeared to look down on everyone, and the older she grew, the meaner she became. She boxed the servants' ears and stuck pins into her maid when she was being dressed. If old Esmeralda dared to scold her, she would reply, "Why should I listen to you? You're too old. Sit still and go to sleep in your chair and leave me alone. I am going to do exactly as I like."

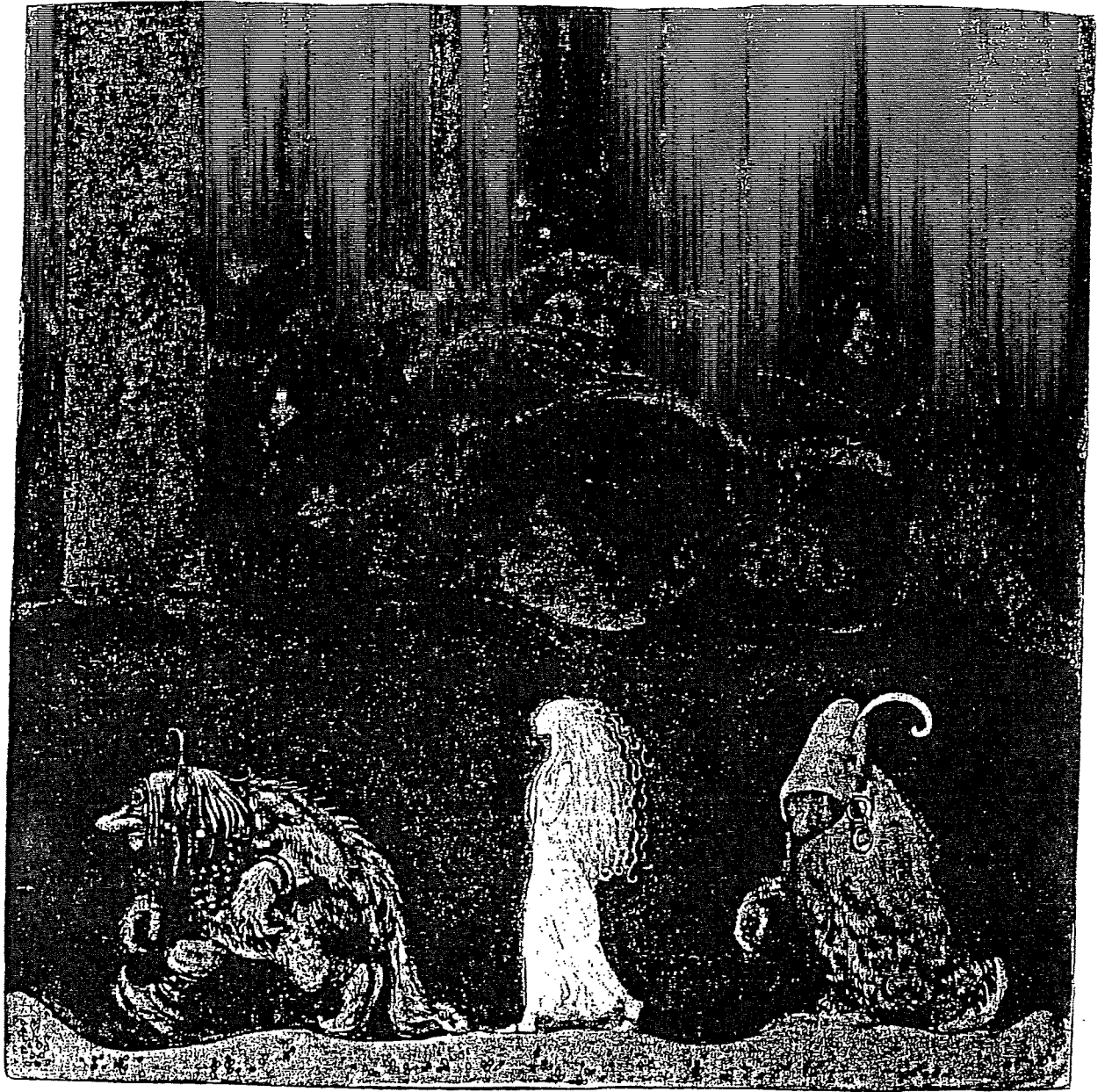
And so she had all her own way. Sometimes she did not want to get up, so spent the whole day with a blanket pulled around her ears. If someone tiptoed into her room to see if she was awake, she would shout, "Get out of here and leave me alone!"

Sometimes she rose before sunrise, while the mist still covered the meadows and the morning star was still in the sky. Then she walked to the stable, woke the groom by pulling his hair, and made him saddle the wildest horse. She rode out alone. "I don't want a lout like you at my heels," she told the groom as she swung into the saddle. She neither trotted or cantered, but galloped so fast she swept through the forest like a whirlwind. As she rode, she hallooed and shouted so loudly that all the hares and foxes and deer and squirrels fled before her.

One day the troll princess came home so wet and red in the face from her headstrong ride that the king asked her earnestly to be more careful. At this she became so angry that she cracked a large mirror with the handle of her riding crop. The broken glass rained down like icicles, and the king paled and left the room. Neither he nor the queen could manage her, and they decided to marry her off as soon as possible. "Perhaps she will be a better wife than a daughter," said the king, though the queen herself did not see much hope for it.

So they chose a bridegroom for her, the noblest and handsomest young duke in the realm. Of course, he was enormously flattered to take the king's only daughter to wife, and it wouldn't have done for him to ask questions. So he bowed deeply and said, "My most humble thanks." Besides, the princess liked the young duke. She found him handsome, and she was so sweet and mild in his presence that he thought she was an angel. In time, preparations began for the wedding.

It was not long, however, before she began to show her true character. The young duke was amazed. He had never expected to see a princess slap her servants and cuff the ears of her ladies-in-waiting, and one day she even stuck out her tongue at old Countess Esmeralda in front of him. "Princess!" he said with dismay in his voice, and his eyes flashed angrily.



But Black Eye turned on him and cried, "Princess and princess! As if a princess is not permitted to do as she likes. You can't expect me always to go on tiptoe for that old scarecrow. And don't pull a long face. Remember, I am of better birth than you."

Eventually she became more and more capricious before her young betrothed. Sometimes she turned her back on him, and said, "Go away! I can't bear the sound of your voice." At other times she found a thousand faults with him, or his coat or doublet. If they went riding together, it amused her to gallop so fast that he could not possibly keep up. She would wait for him at the castle gate and laugh as he returned: "Poor boy, haven't you ever been on the back of a horse before?"

The next day butter wouldn't melt in her mouth and there were not enough beautiful and kind things she could say to him. "Little sweetheart, darling, handsome, charming duke's child!" she would murmur, and flash her black eyes at him. "You are like a honeycomb and I could eat you up." And she would open her mouth as if she wanted to bite him.

The young duke became more and more nervous about his royal bride-to-be. He would have liked to run away, but his father would not permit it. "Even if she were the meanest old troll witch," the father said, "it is a rare honour to be chosen as the bridegroom of the princess. She is, after all, the king's daughter."

By now Bianca had also grown into a young maiden, and one day the old troll said to his wife, "It is time to present our daughter at the troll court. I am very proud of her and want all the trolls to see what a beautiful daughter we have."

"If only they don't notice that you stole her, for she looks no more like you or me than a wood pigeon resembles a toad."

But the old troll was firm, and one midsummer evening they went with Bianca deep into the forest to a big mountain cave, where the king of the trolls lived and was holding a great ball. The sun had just set as they came to the troll king's mountain cave. The ball was so crowded and smelled so pungently of trolls that Bianca, standing at the entrance, stepped back. But she had been seen already. The troll woman gave her a shove and said, "Don't be coy now. Show a little troll sense."

And so Bianca entered the hall. The king and queen sat on thrones at the back of the cave. They were decked out with so much glitter and gold that they could hardly move. The queen looked a little like a large toad, and the king was as old and wizened as some strange wind-bent tree, and he had a long and magnificent tail decorated with gold tassels and precious stones. Their only son, the crown prince of the trolls, stood next to the throne. He was thin and spindly. When he saw Bianca, he smiled and showed two rows of pointed yellow teeth.

Trolls of all sizes and shapes stood along the walls. Some were furry as bear cubs, others pale and miserable looking, and some had the bulging eyes of a fish. There were trolls transparent as green glass; others that had no heads but spoke from their stomachs; but all of them were in high spirits. They laughed and shouted and made as much noise as a cat-fight at night, and then the music began.

The musicians could not be seen — that would not have been considered elegant — but you could hear them just the same. Trumpets blew and drums rolled, and the shrill notes of the flutes rang through the air like the pangs of a toothache. It was absolutely magnificent.

At first the trolls danced rather quietly, but it was not long before they all began to jump up and down, do somersaults, or wiggle as wildly as any snake. They thumped about in such a jumble that Bianca could hardly tell one troll from another.



Suddenly the crown prince came towards her, bowed deeply, and asked her to dance. He began to jump and leap like a grasshopper, flapping his big troll ears and grinning to show his teeth. Bianca turned cold with fear. The mountain cave became warmer and warmer, and soon she felt so dizzy she sank to the floor in a faint.

"Wake up!" shouted her troll mother, splashing water on her face. "Think how happy you will be. The crown prince has approved of you and if you become his bride, one day you will be queen of all the trolls in the forest."

She was quite right. The crown prince of the trolls had fallen head over heels in love with Bianca, and before the summer was out their wedding was set to take place.



You can imagine how sad this made Bianca. She was not an assuming girl, with fancy notions about herself, but to be the wife of the troll crown prince! Imagine living in a horrible cave with such a misshapen monster; it was too terrible to think of, and from that day on Bianca only thought and thought of ways to get away. She did not know where she could go, but she knew that she must escape.

The troll princess felt the same way. She was tired of her fiancé, the duke, and he was more afraid of her than ever. When he had introduced her to his noble parents, she had behaved so badly and yawned so loudly at table, then danced so wildly in the

evening, kicking her legs in the air and letting out shrill hunting calls, that the duke and duchess were very angry. She herself was so bored with them that she decided then and there never to marry into this noble family that stared at her whenever she moved and was embarrassed by her every whim. She, too, wanted to go out into the wide world and discover new and exciting things far from the king and queen and the royal court.

Her wedding day was set for the middle of August, the same day that Bianca was to become the bride of the troll prince. Early that morning, when the grass was still covered with dew, both girls slipped into the forest. By chance, they passed each other in a certain grove of hazel bushes, yet they did not meet. Bianca had heard something rustle in the grove, and thought, It is a fox sneaking through. The troll princess had stood still and listened as Bianca made her way through the brush, and thought, It is a wood pigeon fluttering there. And thus they missed each other.

Bianca followed the road until she came to the acacias in the palace garden where the trolls had stolen her. The queen was standing by the fountain watching the splashing water, but her thoughts were far away. She was remembering her dear, sweet little Bianca Maria, and what a happy mother she had been then.

Suddenly, before the queen stood a girl so like herself at seventeen that she uttered a cry of surprise and Bianca realized almost at the same time that this was her own mother holding open her arms to her.

"My own Bianca Maria," said the queen.

Bianca threw herself into the queen's arms and for the first time knew what it was like to be hugged to a mother's heart. Then she told the queen of her life among the trolls, and the queen realized what had happened. But they could no longer ask old Countess Esmeralda about it, for she slept deeply now, too deeply for snoring — she was dead. Yet neither the king nor anyone else could doubt that Bianca was the queen's own daughter. She resembled the queen down to her fingertips and delicate ears.

In the forest the troll girl came to the cave of the old troll. The old troll mother was chopping wood. It was hard, green wood, and Troll Mother swore terribly as she chopped. Standing there, the troll girl burst out laughing. "That's right," she called. "That's how things ought to be: when you don't like something, say so."

The troll mother looked up and caught sight of the girl. Immediately she realized it was her own daughter. "My own wild baby!" she cried, holding out her arms. And lovingly the troll mother began to rumple the girl's hair. "See here," she said suddenly. "Here is the twisted little curl no human being can comb straight. Isn't it so?" And the girl laughed, for she remembered all the trouble they had gone to at the palace to try to comb the one little twisted tuft of hair that lay hidden under all the rest. "Let me kiss you, my chick," said the troll mother, giving her daughter a hearty smack.

So it came about that the young duke took Bianca as his bride at the same time as the troll girl married the troll prince, so that she would one day be queen of all the trolls. Both weddings were celebrated with great magnificence.

That evening as Bianca and her bridegroom, followed by their retinue, rode through the forest to the duke's castle, they saw a large fire burning deep among the trees. Smoke and sparks whirled into the night sky, and wild cries and shouts rent the air. They rode on, out into open countryside, and behind them the fire slowly died away and the sparks disappeared. But high above in the sky, millions of stars shone on, never to be extinguished. At the castle, the duke lifted his young bride from the saddle and walked hand in hand with her towards their life together.

The Boy and the Trolls, or the Adventure

Walter Stenström

Once there was a clever and lively boy who wanted an adventure, so he took the shortest possible cut to adventure: right through the deep forest. "Hello!" he called. "Hello! Where can I find an adventure? It is so boring at home, and nothing ever happens. Well — except that the good queen died and all the country mourned. The king and the princess mourned and the people mourned. But then the princess got a stepmother, and now it is she who rules. Everybody believes she is a witch, but nobody knows for sure."

And the boy wandered deeper and deeper into the forest.

"Hello!" he called. "Hello! Where can I find an adventure? Mother gave me seven sandwiches when I started out, but now there are only two left. Won't an adventure come soon?"

It grew late in the day, and the boy trudged even deeper into the dark forest.

"Adventure!" he called. "Come on, adventure! There is nothing but sadness and sorrow at home. A few days ago the princess disappeared. She was picking flowers in the meadow, and suddenly she was gone. Some believe that the queen bewitched her and spirited her away, so that her own daughter might be the princess of the realm. But nobody knows for sure."

Dusk was falling by then, and the boy had eaten his last sandwich. He was tired from his walk, and sat down on a stone to think.

There was a rustle among the twigs and leaves. But he was not afraid. He sat waiting for the adventure he had gone out to seek.

Then a troll came lumbering by with a sack on his back. It was the Big Brother troll, the oldest of three brothers. He was as ugly as sin, and the ugliest part was his long, hairy ears that almost dragged on the ground. "Klafs, klufs, klafs, klufs," the troll panted as he walked along.

"Good evening, Uncle," the boy greeted him. The troll stopped, flapped his ears, and squinted at the boy.

"My, a dwarf!" he said

"I'm not a dwarf, I'm a boy."

"My, what a boy! Such ugly little ears you have. Look at mine. Those are what I call ears! How could the princess turn me down when I have such beautiful ears. What ugly little ears you have!"



"I like what I have," said the boy. "What do you have in your sack?"

"This sack is full of silver I have been collecting, and in addition I have a delicious snake for the princess to nibble on."

"Which princess is that?"

"Do you think I'd tell you?" The troll flapped his ears and looked slyly at the boy. "I could change you into a black raven if I wanted to," he said. "But I suppose you'll just have to stay as ugly as you are. If you see my brothers, tell them I've gone home to the mountain. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Uncle," said the boy.

The troll left the boy sitting by himself on the stone. How the twigs and leaves rustled and crackled! But he was not afraid.

Another troll came plodding past with a sack on his back. It was the middle-sized troll. He was as ugly as sin, and the ugliest part of him was his warty chin, so long it almost touched the ground.

"Klafs, klufs, klafs, klufs," he panted as he walked along.

"Good evening, Uncle," said the boy.

"What! A little tomte," said the troll. He put his chin to the ground and squinted his eyes.

"I am not a tomte. I am a boy."

"A boy!" said the troll. "What an ugly little chin you have! Look at mine. It is fine and well shaped. How could the princess turn me down when I have such a beautiful chin! Now *yours* is what I call an ugly chin."

"I'm content with what I have. But what do you have in your sack?"

"This sack is full of gold that I have been collecting, and in addition I have a fine green frog for the princess to nibble on."

"Which princess is that?"

"Do you think I'd tell you?" said the troll, squinting his eyes cunningly. "Have you seen my big brother?"

"Yes, indeed. He asked me to tell you he had gone home to the mountain."

"Then I must hurry," said the middle-sized troll. "If I had time, I would change you into a crow, but I'm afraid you will have to stay as ugly as you are."

The troll lumbered on, leaving the boy sitting by himself on the stone. The leaves and twigs rustled and crackled again.

A third troll appeared with a sack on his back. It was the littlest brother troll. He, too, was ugly as sin, and the ugliest part of him was his long blotchy nose. "Klafs, klufs, klafs, klufs," he panted as he walked along.

"Good evening, Uncle," said the boy.

"What a little hobgoblin," said the troll, sniffing with his long nose.

"I'm not a hobgoblin, I'm a boy."

"A boy indeed!" said the troll. "What an ugly little nose you have! Look at mine. That's how a nose *should* look. The princess couldn't turn me down with such a beautiful nose. That is an awful little nose you have."

"I'm content with what I have," said the boy. "What do you have in the sack?"

"This sack is full of precious stones that I have been collecting. And in addition, I have a juicy, fat toad for the princess to nibble."

"Which princess is that?"

"Do you think I'd tell you?" replied the troll, squinting slyly. "Have you seen my brothers?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the boy. "They asked me to tell you that they have gone home to the mountain."

"Well then, I must hurry," said Little Brother troll. "A pity it's so late, or I would

change you into a magpie. But you will have to stay as ugly as you are." And so this troll, too, clumped off.

Adventure, thought the boy. It's beginning. And if I follow the trolls, I will probably find more of it. So he crept off after them as carefully as he could. My, how the twigs and leaves rustled! But the boy was not afraid.

The trolls' castle was on a grey mountain in the very midst of the forest, and a princess was being held prisoner in one of its chambers. It was the same beautiful little princess who had disappeared while picking flowers in the meadow.

The chamber opened on to a balcony that had stairs leading up to it. High up on the wall was a single small window through which a star twinkled. The princess sat on a couch of soft moss, which seemed hard enough to one accustomed to sitting on silk and eiderdown. In front of her was a table laden with food — dragon blood pudding, mud soup with frogs' legs, roasted bats' ears, and porridge made of poisonous black henbane. The princess could eat none of this, of course, and would not even touch it.

She did not dare to speak out loud, but whispered to the star over and over, "When are the elves coming? Are the elves coming soon?"

Yes, they were. Now a whole flock of elves flew through the narrow window and kissed the princess on her eyes and cheeks. They had brought her fruit and berries to eat, as much as she wanted. Then they floated away, taking the terrible troll food with them.

Now the hinges of the chamber door squeaked, and old Mother Troll scurried into the room. She was uglier than you can imagine for she had ears as long as the big troll's, a chin like the middle-sized troll's, and a nose like the little troll's.

"Ugh!" she said. "Fresh air! I must hold my nose. Why don't you close the shutters, or else come to my room. The air there is wonderful. The shutters have not been opened for a thousand years."

"I like to look at the stars," said the princess. She did not dare say that thousand-year-old air made her choke, for that was something Mother Troll did not like to hear.

"Looking at the stars!" exclaimed the troll mother. "What foolishness. What is there to see? My room is full of silver and gold and precious stones. They shine more brightly than any star."

"Did you like your meal?" she continued, looking at all the empty dishes. She fluttered about the room, laughing raucously. She did not know that the elves had brought the princess berries and carried off the troll food.

Suddenly there was a bang on the door.

"That sounds like my big son," said the troll mother, and went to open the door.

The big troll entered, said good evening, and put down his sack. "Here, Princess, I have brought you something to nibble," he said, holding up a snake.



There was another knock on the door. "That sounds like my middle son," said the troll mother, and went to open the door.

The middle-sized troll entered, said good evening, and put down his sack. "Here, Princess, I have brought you something to nibble," he said, and held up the frog.

There was a third knock on the door. "That sounds like my little son," said the troll mother, and went to open the door.

And the littlest brother troll entered, said good evening, and put down his sack. "Here, Princess, I have brought you something good to nibble," he said, and held out the toad.

The princess had to say thank you and accept what they offered her.

The elves will be back soon, she thought. They will come and take away these horrid snakes and frogs. I'd rather die than eat them.



The troll mother was flying around the room, still laughing uproariously. "I am so happy, I am in real troll spirits," she said. "Let's announce the engagement tonight. The princess is going to marry one of my sons. She can pick the one she wants. Or perhaps she wants all of them, but she can only have one." And she laughed so hard that she had to hold her sides. The troll brothers smiled broadly, pleased because each of them believed the princess would choose him.

The princess herself felt afraid and sad. She had no friends near her. The elves were gone, and only the star twinkled in the sky.

"Look at them," the troll mother urged. "Look at my sons. Handsomer trolls can't be found this side of the moon. But then, of course, they take after their mother. Look at them, little princess."

But with tears in her eyes the princess gazed at the star. No one could have been more unhappy, and she did not know how to escape. There she was, imprisoned among trolls in a castle on a mountain.

Outside the small window another troll was nodding at her. He looked a little like a boy, but the princess was sure he was a troll.

"Well, which one do you want?" continued the mother. "I don't care which one you pick, but choose well. They all know troll magic, and they are all marriageable age. Little brother, who is the youngest, will be 947 years old next week. And with luck, they will all live thousands of years more. Trolls have only one thing to fear."

"What is that?" asked the big brother troll.

"Haven't I told you?" said his mother. "Well, it is high time you learned. There is a rhyme that can destroy us, and I always feel ill when I say it:

Come, fresh winds, and blow away
Long ear, huge chin, big nose.
Come, west wind, and sweep away
All these trolls from mountain grey.

"Ugh!" said the troll mother. "It makes me feel sick. But I'll feel better soon. Don't be afraid, my sons. It doesn't work when just anybody says it."

"Who has to say it to make it dangerous?" asked the middle-sized troll.

"Don't you know that either?" said the mother. "When a boy who is not afraid of either darkness or trolls says it, then it is dangerous. But I have never met such a boy, and don't expect to either. And if you meet one, all you have to do is cast a spell on him and change him into something else before he has a chance to open his mouth."

"I met a boy in the forest this evening," said the big troll.

"I did, too," said his little brother. "And he was not afraid of trolls."

"Or darkness," added the middle-sized troll.

"You're frightening me!" cried their mother, jumping about the room. "Why didn't you cast a spell on him?"

"We were in a hurry," said the sons. "We wanted to come and see the princess."

"I feel ill," complained the troll mother, "but I hope it will pass. Of course, we have nothing to fear because that boy does not know the formula. Now I feel better." She laughed loudly again, and moved around the room.

"But we are forgetting the engagement," she continued. "Has the princess made up her mind yet?"

But the princess was still looking at the star. Big tears rolled down her cheeks. She was the saddest princess in the world, with not a friend to turn to. Outside the window, the troll looked at her kindly and nodded in a friendly way. Indeed, it was

strange how much he resembled the gatekeeper's son at the castle, with whom the princess had often played. Of course, she told herself, she was only dreaming. No one could save her now.

"Well, why don't you answer?" said the mother. "Are you asleep? I'll give you a little pinch to wake you up." And she pinched the princess so hard on the arm that she had to scream aloud.

"Is the princess too shy to choose?" asked the mother. "Well, then, I shall make up her mind for her. She will marry my big son because he is oldest. Will that do?"

"No," said the princess. "No, no. I won't marry any of you ugly trolls. I want to go home. I don't want to eat snakes and frogs, and I don't want to breathe thousand-year-old air."

"So! So!" screamed the troll mother. Her face turned green with anger, and she spat out her words. "Is that so! Well, you will never return home. My sister is queen of the castle now, and she is as powerful a troll as I. She sent you here, and she does not want you back. A troll child is going to be princess and inherit the realm. Ha, ha, ha! You will never go back."

"And now," she added, "you stay with me in my room. The air is lovely there — just right for a princess. Then you will marry my big son. But first you must learn some manners. You need a pinch or two and a taste of the switch I have in there." With that, she gripped the princess's arm hard, and pulled her behind her. "Get to my chamber," she shouted. "You won't sit on soft moss there."

At that moment, however, something unusual happened. A voice was heard from outside the window. It was an ordinary boy's voice, but the troll mother let go of the princess's arm at once, and she and the other trolls stood as still as if they had been turned to stone.

Come, fresh winds, and blow away
Long ear, huge chin, big nose.
Come, west wind, and sweep away
All these trolls from mountain grey.

And a fresh wind came and blew the door wide open. The troll mother and her big son, middle-sized son, and little son were whisked out so fast you could not tell where they went. Yet the wind never touched the little princess.

A moment later, a boy stood at the door. It was the gatekeeper's son from the castle, the boy who had set out in search of adventure. He greeted the princess politely.

"Don't be afraid, Princess," he said. "The trolls are gone now, and will never return. We can go back to the castle and take all the gold and silver and precious stones with us."



"Thank you, dear boy," said the princess. "I have been sad and frightened. And I thought you were a troll."

The boy laughed loud and long, and when he stopped he sighed and said, "At last, a real adventure." He sounded so pleased.

Back in the kingdom, in the palace and the city, everyone was astir, for the queen announced an end to the mourning for the old queen and the lost princess. That same day all the realm would learn that there was to be a new princess: she was the new queen's daughter and the king's stepdaughter.

The old king was sitting in a corner playing with his sceptre and orb. Sorrow had weighed so heavily on him that he had become like a child again. All the king did

Are they really cheering for me? wondered the queen. For me and the new princess?

Then she caught sight of the long procession, which had stopped at the main gate. Of all things! she thought. There sat the real princess whom her troll sister had imprisoned on the grey mountain. How had she ever come back? The queen's face turned green with rage.

Then the gatekeeper's boy began to speak. "My King and all your people, good morning. I've brought back the princess, and I have had a real adventure."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted the people.

"The queen on the terrace," the boy went on, "is really a witch. She is sister to a troll in grey mountain. And her daughter is really a troll child."

"Just as we had always thought," exclaimed the crowd.

At that instant something very strange happened. The old troll and her daughter suddenly looked different, or else people at last saw what they had not seen before. Both of them now had hairy ears so long they almost touched the ground, and their chins and noses were so large and ugly, it was enough to frighten you. They were fluttering about, flapping their ears like wings, and hissing through their teeth with rage. It was horrible!

In his confusion, the king dropped his orb and sceptre, and the courtiers yelled and hid under the chairs. The soldiers forgot their courage and prepared to run away, and the king's subjects huddled together in fear, hiding behind each other.

The only one who was not afraid was the boy who had gone out looking for adventure. He knew what to say, and he said it:

Come, fresh winds, and blow away
Long ear, huge chin, big nose.
Come, west wind, and sweep away
All these trolls from mountain grey.

Then a wind came rushing past, and caught the trolls by their large ears, and in a twinkling they were gone! It happened so fast that no one knew where they went. But the wind did not touch anyone else — not the king or the princess or the boy or the courtiers or the soldiers. All around, people cheered and laughed. The soldiers, straight-backed once again, presented arms, and the courtiers crept out from under the chairs and began to discuss the weather as if nothing had happened.

The old king took his daughter in his arms and wept with joy. He seemed now to have regained his reason, the spell was broken. Now he would no longer sit playing idly with his sceptre and orb.

He kissed the princess on the forehead and embraced her again. Then he gave the boy a good hug, as indeed he deserved.

"Long live the King!" shouted the crowd. "Long live the Princess! Long live the boy who went out looking for adventure!"

"Yes, it was a fine adventure," said the king so loudly and clearly that everyone could hear him. "It was a fine adventure, and a fine adventure deserves a fine ending. I can see that the Princess feels the way I do. This boy shall have the Princess's hand as his reward, and inherit the realm after me. He is not afraid of trolls or darkness, and he likes fresh air and baths. I am sure he will make a fine king."

The boy thanked him politely and did what he thought was most fitting: he kissed the king on the hand and the princess on the lips. "I shall be kind to you, little Princess," he said. "I will take care of you and protect you from trolls, and while I rule, you will always sit on eiderdown and silk."

And so one adventure ended and another began, just as it happens in life.