



King Reinhold

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German

Intermediate
25 min read

There are villages in the heart of the Taunus Mountains that are little altered by this progressive age; no railway, not even the post-chaise reaches them, and motor-cars are only to be seen as they whirr past occasionally on the high road.

Such a village is Elhalten; it lies in a green valley, rich with many flowers; a lovely little brook runs through it, disappearing suddenly under houses to reappear again triumphant farther down the road. This brook is called the Silber Bach or Silver Brook, on account of the clearness of its water. On either side of the valley rise up steep mountain-slopes with wild woods and rough pathways. One good road joins the village with Vockenhausen, and so with the well-known town of Eppstein.

On the farther side of the Küppel (the steep peak that rises behind Elhalten) is a forester's cottage, a lonely and deserted-looking dwelling in the middle of the forest. There I once nursed a huge friendly cat who was so delighted to see a stranger that she quite persecuted me with her affection.

On the top of the Küppel is an airy tower; anyone who wishes to try what flying is like, and cannot afford to go in the Zeppelin airship, can form an idea of it here. There is a most expansive view of the Taunus Range, and very little underneath the feet.

In the forester's hut lived a little boy named Hugo. He was the son of the forester, a fine little fellow of nearly six years. Hugo had few story-books; but he did not need them; for he lived in the forest, and the forest tells its

own tales to the children who live there. The birds would chatter to him, and tell him their family histories; the silent, sweet-eyed deer came to the forestry to be fed in the cold winter, and so he learnt to know their ways. The little flowers would whisper tales of the strange sights they had seen in the forest, when they had by chance forgotten to close their petals for the night.

Hugo had seen much for a five year's old boy; but he longed to see more. He had heard stories of wood-goblins, of fairies and nixies, and of the busy dwarfs who live underground. He thirsted for adventure.

Now I must tell you that just about this time the news had come from Elhalten that a child had been lost from the village, a dear little girl of four years. She had strayed by herself in the woods of the Küppel, and though her parents and Hugo's father, indeed all the villagers had sought for her, no trace could they find, save strips of her little blue pinafore, and a hair ribbon on the brambles in a remote spot near an old quarry. You can imagine what a stir this made in the quiet life of the neighbourhood.

Some people spoke of gipsies, some of deep holes or pools in the woods; others did not say much, but they thought of the wood-spirits and fairies and shook their heads. Hugo had many a time played with pretty baby Elsa; her father and the forester were friends, and she had spent the day sometimes in the forestry on the Küppel. You may imagine that the children were more strictly watched over than usual. Hugo's mother kept a sharp eye on him; for she knew that his little head was full of all sorts of queer notions.

It happened that, about a fortnight after these events, Hugo's father went out for a night's hunting. His mother had been busy all the afternoon; the weather was hot and sultry. At last drowsiness overcame her and she fell asleep with her head on the kitchen table. Now she was certainly not given to falling asleep in the afternoon, she was generally much too busy for that; so I really think she must have been bewitched. The fairies sometimes put sleeping draughts into people's coffee; then it is all up with them.

Now was Hugo's opportunity. He hastily took up the brown (or grey as it is called in Germany) rye-bread and sausage that stood ready for his supper, packed it into a beautiful green case, with two May-bugs painted on it, snatched up his toy gun in case of accidents, and set out with a brave heart to look for little Elsa.

I must tell you that he had dreamt of her repeatedly since her disappearance. She seemed to look at him with her wistful blue eyes, and to implore his help. A rhyme rang constantly in his head that seemed to have reference to her; but he could not quite make out what it meant:

“King Reinhold found a little maid
Alone within the forest glade;
She wept and cried in sore distress,
All torn and tattered was her dress;
He set her on a golden throne,
He gave her playthings for her own.
But still she wept the livelong day,
She would not laugh, and would not play.
‘This is most tiresome to behold;
What shall I do?’ said King Reinhold.”

The little maid was probably Elsa; but where was she? Who was King Reinhold? How could Hugo deliver her? He could not answer these questions. “I must trust to luck, and hope that the fairies will help me. Heigho for adventures!”

It was the twilight hour; the sky was of a delicate grey-green tint, the birds called to their roving mates to come home to bed, a few faint stars appeared in the sky; mystery hung in the air.

On Hugo went—following a circle of green and gold that was marked on the trees and seemed to show him the way. He sang and shouted merrily to keep up his spirits; it was supper-time, and the night air had made him hungry; so he unpacked his bread and sausage and made a good meal. The moon had risen, and threw a glimmer of light through the trees; the lingering shades of twilight vanished. On one side of the little path was the dark fir-wood, impenetrable in its gloom, on the other, beeches and oaks. Little harebells, and pink centaury bordered the pathway. There was a lovely woody smell in the late summer night, a smell of damp earth, and fungi and flowers, or rather a combined perfume still more subtle and indescribable.

The stillness and loneliness began to oppress our hero a little for the first time. If he had been a town child he would have been horribly frightened long before this; but he was as used to the silence of the woods, as you may be to the noise and bustle of the street.

Suddenly a muffled sound broke the silence: knock, knock, knock, like the blow of hammers when the workmen are busy at some distance. Hugo's brave little heart began to beat; for he knew that the noise must be made by the Kobolds at work on their anvils deep underground.

Then he was aware of footsteps behind him: tramp, tramp, tramp. Was it his father come to fetch him home? He rather hoped that it might be so; but when he plucked up courage to turn round, there was no one there! An owl screeched; a bush rustled near him; he turned round sharply, and there he saw a little old man with a huge key in his hand sitting on a felled tree-trunk. His bright blue eyes gleamed strangely in the moonshine, and his shaggy grey hair stood up on either side of his red-peaked cap. He wore a jacket of green, lined with scarlet, and had on heavy wooden shoes such as the peasants wear in some parts of Germany. He plucked a dandelion clock that grew by the way and held it up to the moon.

"One, two, three," up to nine the little man counted.

"Nine o'clock! Come along hurry up," said he, and he took Hugo by the hand.

Instantly the child was able to see many things in the forest which he had not observed before; strange fairy forms came floating by and gazed at him with sad, sweet eyes; then a stream of laughing elves passed him in wild frolic. Yes, once he thought that through the trees he saw the gigantic form of the Old King himself, throned on his mountain.

Down, down a narrow bypath they clambered, over stones and through brambles, and interlaced branches. Then they crossed a trout stream silver clear in the moonlight. The trout were asleep; but when the dwarf leant over the little stone bridge and whispered a few words—flash and they were off, far far down the stream; they hid under the rushes and tree-roots by the banks and quaked for fear. They dreaded the dwarfs and with reason.

"Boiled trout with a fine butter sauce, that is my favourite dish," said the little man to Hugo and smacked his lips greedily.

They walked along the beautifully overshadowed pathway by the trout stream, watching the moonlight on the rippling water, till they left the brook behind, and came to a green meadow in the centre of which stood a venerable oak-tree, which still bore green leaves though its trunk was completely hollow.

The tree was lit from within by a brilliant glow of rosy light. The dwarf approached on tiptoe, taking off his clumsy shoes, and beckoning to Hugo to follow him quietly. They peeped through the holes in the trunk of the tree, and O what a sight they saw!

Twenty or more of the tiniest children, scarcely bigger than my finger, sat or danced or rolled on the green mossy carpet of the tree-room. These were the fairy babies, and this was the fairies' nursery. Each little girl had a dolly made of the loveliest flowers, and a cradle of green oak leaves, sewed together by grass blades.

The tiny Fee babies lay on their backs and kicked and crowed for joy, and the biggest of all the fairies present gave them their bottles, filled with moonshine and honey-dew on which the babies thrive. The boy elves made the most noise; they had captured a field mouse, a huge creature it seemed in comparison with them, and they were all trying to ride on its back at once.

Hugo was so delighted with the lovely sight that he could not resist calling out "Oh!" in tones of ecstasy. In an instant, puff! the light went out; a cold fog arose; Hugo saw his dwarf companion change into a big black bear terrible to behold. Just as our hero thought he was going to be eaten up, the Kobold resumed his natural form.

"Be silent if you would be wise," he said, and that was all.

They followed the little pathway further through the meadow and into the woods again, until they came suddenly on a great pile of rocks, picturesquely heaped up amongst the trees, such as are so common in the Taunus Mountains. The dwarf went up to the rock, key in hand, and searched about until he had found a secret door. Then he fitted the key into the lock and turned it, then tugged and tugged to open the door. Suddenly it swung open, creaking noisily, and the dwarf lay on his back. Up he got grumbling and scolding. "They ought to have oiled the hinges, the lazy louts," he said.

As the door opened, Hugo saw a long corridor before him, lit by stars of light, and countless mirrors reflected the stars in every direction. The effect was rather too dazzling after the dark night, and Hugo's eyes blinked. Down, down, down, the corridor gradually descended and seemed never-ending. "However shall I get out again?" thought Hugo anxiously. He did not know you see that there are many ways out of magic land.

At last they came to another door, made of crystal glass, and entered a large hall with a sparkling roof of rock crystal. In the centre was a fountain, a more wonderful creation fairyland does not contain. Hugo held his breath for fear of saying "Oh!" again. Strange gnomes and fairies seemed to be alive in it, and the element it

contained, was not water, but fire. The most marvellous display of fireworks that you have ever seen, would be nothing in comparison.

Sometimes it illustrated well-known fairy tales: Snowdrop in her glass coffin, Cinderella trying on the shoe and so on. Hugo could have watched it for ages, and left it reluctantly, looking back all the time. Then they passed through an arched doorway, and a new scene met their view.

Multitudes of little dwarf men dressed in Court attire stood round the room. Facing them, on a throne of gold, with a tiny crown of gold starred with bright-eyed diamonds on her head sat a real little human girl, with a shabby old dolly in her arms. She was a very pretty little girl, grandly dressed in a frock of blue silk embroidered with white daisies, little blue socks and shoes with diamond buckles. But her face was sad and pale, and her eyes red from crying, and her fair hair hung in tangled locks over her shoulders. She held her dolly clasped tight in her arms and repeated over and over again: "I want my mamma, I want to go home to my mamma."

As the dwarf, followed by Hugo, entered the room the dwarfs or Kobolds, as they are also called, bowed down with their heads to the ground, and sang in a gruff chorus:

"Hail, thrice hail, to King Reinhold,
We his subjects true and bold
Bow in homage to our king,
Each his cap on high must fling!"

With that each Kobold threw his peaked cap up to the roof and caught it again on his head, or his foot, or on his nose as the case might be. Then they all shouted "Hurrah!" and it was as if a mighty flock of ravens were to croak all together. The little girl put her hands up to her ears, and was about to cry again when she saw Hugo. Then she jumped up eagerly with a cry of joy and sprang down the golden steps.

"O you dear, good Hugo," she said, "have you come to fetch me home? I knew you would come," she continued, "for I have dreamt of you so often."

Hugo looked into the sweet little face before him and, in spite of her fine clothes and diamond crown, he recognised little Elsa, his lost playmate. He remembered his dreams, and all seemed to grow clear. He felt himself very big and strong and important all at once. Putting his arms protectingly round the little girl, he said facing the whole assembly: "I have come to take this little girl, Miss Elsa, home to her mamma."

King Reinhold (for it was the king of the dwarfs himself who had accompanied Hugo) took up a heavy crown that lay on a cushion beside him, put it on, and then took it off again, grumbling that it was too heavy and did not fit him properly.

Then he cleared his throat and addressed his courtiers in these words: "Hum! Hum! Hum! My esteemed subjects! I found this little girl some weeks ago in the woods, within the magic circle of my domain. She was crying bitterly, and seemed very frightened. I comforted her as best I could. I gave her strings of pretty beads and a tiny fan of blue jay's feathers. I promised to take her with me, and give her a crown of gold, to set her on a golden throne, and make her Queen of all the dwarfs. I even condescended to offer her a kiss; but I am sorry to say the ungrateful child smacked me in the face (cries of "shame.") There she sits, look at her! how has she repaid me for all my kindness and for all the honours I have conferred on her?" (Here Elsa began to cry again and to clutch tight hold of Hugo's hand.) "She does nothing but blubber all day, and cuddle her dolly, and say she wants to go home to her mamma! I appeal to you, my Kobolds, is such a baby worthy to be Queen of our realm, of a people more ancient than the mountains, older indeed than mankind; for we were the first inhabitants of the earth, we are Primitive Man!"

A roar of applause met this speech and cries of "She is not worthy, let her be deposed," were heard. "She is really too young, she is but a baby still," said one kindly looking old grandpapa Kobold.

King Reinhold raised his hand to command silence, and continued in a loud, harsh voice: "When she is older, she will become too big for us; mortals have the strange habit of growing. No, I have thought the matter over. Young birds are after all safest in the nest. But this baby would never be able to find the way home, not even down her own street. So I have chosen this brave young man to take her home." Here he gave Hugo a slap on the back that nearly knocked him down, for dwarfs are very strong in spite of their smallness, you know.

Elsa's face began to beam, and she would have danced for joy; but the King's uncomplimentary remarks hurt her a little. She was quite sure that she could find her way home, a big girl of four years ought certainly to know her own house. She knew exactly where it stood. Near the rushing silver brook, a low, red-roofed house, and a

barn with black beams, also cocks and hens and geese strutting about in the little yard. It was quite near the water-mill; she could hear the rushing of the water as she lay in her little bed under her big feather sack, with only her little nose and ears peeping out. A fir-tree with a very tall stem and a thick bushy head stood at the back of the house.

Yes, she was sure that she could find it.

Meanwhile some of the dwarfs were marshalled off to get the carriage ready for the children. Then Hugo summoned up courage to address the King.

“O King!” he said, “I have heard of the wonders of your kingdom and of the marvellous skill of you workmen”—here he stammered a little and his oratory gave way—“I should so much like to see something of it,” he said shyly.

“Certainly, certainly, with the greatest pleasure,” said King Reinhold, and looked much gratified. “Intelligent child,” he muttered. “Ho, Dickkopf, bring me a torch, and lead the way to the workshop,” he said.

Off he marched with majestic tread, and Hugo followed with Elsa, her little warm hand clasped tight in his own; through dark passages and caves lit by a pale light; through store-rooms where masses of minerals were piled up gleaming in wonderful colours; through the treasure-houses containing gold and silver and precious stones in huge quantities.

The children’s eyes grew round in their heads as they saw all this wealth; but they did not understand much about the value of these treasures; toys or sweeties would have been more to their taste.

At last they reached a long, narrow hall where thousands of little men, with leather aprons on, sat busy at work. Each was employed in adorning and completing some work of art: costly goblets, beautiful chain rings, and necklaces were there, such as were never seen in the finest shops of Paris, Berlin or London.

The “joy of the making” was written on every countenance; for the artist is always happy when at work.

One dwarf was illuminating a book, and a beautiful design of grasses and butterflies grew up under his clever fingers.

“Take the book,” said King Reinhold to Hugo. “It is only a tiny chapter from the great book of Nature that has neither beginning nor end. But if you study it carefully and earnestly, it will always bring you hope and

happiness, whatever your learned men may say to the contrary. Hold the pages to the light, and you will see that they are transparent.”

As Hugo did so with the deepest interest, behold! the pictures became alive; the butterflies changed into fairies and laughed, and nodded at him in a friendly way.

“Look through the book of Nature till you find the soul of things,” said King Reinhold.

Although this sounded very deep and mysterious, Hugo seemed to understand. Do you, I wonder, little children, who read this story? Or are you like the boy in the kindergarten to whom I was telling a fairy story and who interrupted me contemptuously with the remark: “Fairies don’t exist!”

“O don’t they my little man!” said I. “Well you think so.”

Presently we read of a ball that grew, and he spoke again with great energy: “Balls don’t grow.”

“Oh, Oh!” said I, “Have you ever seen a little green apple.” Then I tried to show him what wonderful things are always happening in this world of ours, if only we have eyes to see them. I do not think I convinced him; for he was very pig-headed and had a great opinion of himself; and such people big or little are very difficult to argue with.

To Elsa, Reinhold gave a handful of exquisite roses. “In fairyland roses mean love and happiness,” he said.

“Little girls should be happy all the day long, and not wet the world with their tears. There are tears enough already”—he said ponderingly—“tears in the centre of the earth.”

Opening out of the hall on either side were huge furnaces. Here the Kobolds were busy smelting the ore, and preparing the materials for the more skilled workmen. Here too were little cupboards with shelves into which the costly vases were put, in order to be burnt hard like china.

The heat was so intense that Hugo and Elsa could only just peep in. It seemed to them as if the little men must be roasted alive; but the Kobolds were used to it, and found it quite cool and pleasant. They swung their hammers and chattered away at the same time, the busier the merrier; they were never idle or tired of their work.

A young dwarf page entered the hall and announced that the carriage was ready. In another moment Hugo and Elsa found themselves standing in the forest in the moonlight. A carriage stood ready for them drawn by six

stags. King Reinhold had dispensed with the ceremony of leave-taking; he hated fusses, and wanted to smoke his pipe in peace.

Hugo recognised the stags; he had fed them in the winter from the windows of the forestry; they knew him too, and nodded their gentle heads.

O what a ride that was home through the warm September night! They saw neither spirit nor goblin; no fairy marvel was revealed to them; only the strong, sweet scent of the firs, the dark, weird shape of the trees, and the stars that shone through the branches!

They held one another tight by the hand, and leaned back on the soft cushions; they said nothing, they felt as if they were in a dream.

Presently they heard the noise of a little brook that was hidden in the dark trees, and shortly afterwards they turned a corner and saw the little village of Elhalten before them, peaceful and still in the early morning light.

Elsa recognised her home after all, and called to the stags to stop. Then she kissed Hugo and laid her little cheek against his and said: "Good-bye, darling," and then she slipped into her house, and it all seemed quite natural. You may imagine how delighted Elsa's mother was to have her baby girl in her arms again. There was such a kissing and hugging as never was before!

Meanwhile Hugo drove up the steep side of the Küppel in the rosy light of the early morning; luckily he met no one on that lonely way. Once he thought he saw a white form standing at the end of the path, like a tall woman who waved her arms and beckoned. But when he looked more closely, it was but the growing light of day through the trees, and not Mother Holle, or the Wood-woman, as he had imagined. The stags galloped along swiftly in spite of the rough road, and soon stopped before the door of the forestry. There everyone seemed still asleep; not a sound was to be heard. Hugo stroked the gentle heads of the stags and bade them good-bye, and they vanished suddenly in the thicket of the Küppel.

With the first rays of the sun Hugo's mother awoke, and was most astonished to find that she had slept all night in the kitchen.

“That’s what happens, when one’s husband is away,” she said stretching herself and shaking her clothes. “What has become of Hugo?” she thought suddenly, and felt anxious. She went quickly upstairs to the bedroom, but there lay Hugo snugly curled up in bed with rosy cheeks and tumbled curls, his nose buried deeply in his pillow.

As she came in, he roused himself and said: “Mother, I have been to fetch little Elsa. She is home again”—then he turned round and fell fast asleep.

The next day the news reached them that little Elsa had really been found.

“Why, how curious, my boy dreamt it last night,” said Mrs Forester.

“She was left at her parents’ house at about four in the morning, so I heard,” said her husband, who had just come home.

Elsa’s parents always believed that she had been stolen by the gipsies; it was strange that they should have sent her back so soon, without asking for a reward. Moreover the child was richly dressed; that was also a queer thing; her clothes were the wonder and admiration of the whole village. A blue silk frock, and shoes with shining buckles; never had such a finely dressed child been seen in Elhalten before.

The simple folk never dreamt that the buckles were real diamonds and worth a large sum of money.

When Hugo and Elsa met again on the following Sunday, you may be sure that they had much to talk about, at least when they were left alone undisturbed by grown-ups!

Although the fairy gifts were invisible to all save the children themselves, it seems that they had an influence on them as they grew older.

Elsa became a sweet, loving little person, the sunshine of her home—so she was called—and very, very seldom did anyone see her crying.

Hugo was a quiet, shy boy; but he seemed to observe everything and people said of him: “Hugo has his eyes open; he will make his mark in the world some day.” So the children grew up happy and good, and what can you want to know more about them than that?

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