



The Elves

Folk-Lore And Legends: German

German

Intermediate
5 min read

The happy day at length arrived on which Count Hermann von Rosenberg was married to his beloved Catherine, a princess of the house of Gonzaca. The event was celebrated by a magnificent banquet and festival, and it was late before the Count and Countess could leave their guests. The young Countess was already asleep, and Hermann was sinking into a slumber, when he was aroused by hearing the sounds of soft and gentle music, and, the door of his apartment flying open, a joyous bridal procession entered the room. The figures engaged in this extraordinary scene were not more than two or three spans high. The bride and bridegroom were in the centre of the procession, and the musicians preceded it.

Hermann rose up in bed, and demanded what brought them there, and why they had aroused him, whereupon one of the company stepped up to him, and said—

“We are attendant spirits of that peaceful class who dwell in the earth. We have dwelt for many years beneath this thy birthplace, and have ever watched over thy dwelling to preserve it from misfortune. Already have we taken good care of the ashes of your forefathers that they should not fall into the power of hostile and evil spirits, and as faithful servants we watch over the welfare of your house. Since thou hast this day been married for the continuance of thy name and ancient race, we have represented to you this bridal ceremony, in hopes that you will grant us full permission to keep and celebrate this joyous festival, in return for which we promise

to serve you and your house with the greatest readiness.”

“Very well,” said Hermann, laughing; “make yourselves as merry in my castle as you please.”

They thanked him, and took their departure. Hermann could not, however, banish from his mind this remarkable scene, and it was daybreak before he fell asleep. In the morning his thoughts were still occupied with it, yet he never mentioned one word of the occurrence to his wife.

In the course of time the Countess presented him with a daughter. Scarcely had Hermann received intelligence of this event before a very diminutive old crone entered the apartment and informed him that the elfin bride, whom he had seen in the miniature procession on the night of his nuptials, had given birth to a daughter. Hermann was very friendly to the visitor, wished all happiness to the mother and child, and the old woman took her departure. The Count did not, however, mention this visit to his wife.

A year afterwards, on the approach of her second confinement, the Countess saw the elves on the occasion of her husband receiving another of their unexpected visits. The little people entered the chamber in a long procession in black dresses, carrying lights in their hands, and the little women were clothed in white. One of these stood before the Count holding up her apron, while an old man thus addressed her—

“No more, dear Hermann, can we find a resting-place in your castle. We must wander abroad. We are come to take our departure from you.”

“Wherefore will you leave my castle?” inquired Hermann. “Have I offended you?”

“No, thou hast not; but we must go, for she whom you saw as a bride on your wedding-night lost, last evening, her life in giving birth to an heir, who likewise perished. As a proof that we are thankful for the kindness you have always shown us, take a trifling proof of our power.”

When the old man had thus spoken, he placed a little ladder against the bed, which the old woman who had stood by ascended. Then she opened her apron, held it before Hermann, and said—

“Grasp and take.”

He hesitated. She repeated what she had said. At last he did what she told him, took out of her apron what he

supposed to be a handful of sand, and laid it in a basin which stood upon a table by his bedside. The little woman desired him to take another handful, and he did once more as she bade him. Thereupon the woman descended the ladder; and the procession, weeping and lamenting, departed from the chamber.

When day broke, Hermann saw that the supposed sand which he had taken from the apron of the little woman was nothing less than pure and beautiful grains of gold.

But what happened? On that very day he lost his Countess in childbirth, and his new-born son. Hermann mourned her loss so bitterly that he was very soon laid beside her in the grave. With him perished the house of Rosenberg.

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