

The Engineer and the Dwarfs

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German

Intermediate

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A tunnel had been dug through a crag which had hitherto been considered as a serious obstacle in the railway route; the light now shone through at the farther end. There was a shout of joy from the tired workmen. The air had been stifling in the tunnel; the work was hard and dangerous; several men had been killed in detaching portions of rock that had been loosened by dynamite. It was a great relief to have got through. Now the walls would have to be made smooth with cement—indeed the men had already begun this work at the other end—and the tunnel tested for greater security. Then the express train could run through directly, instead of being obliged to shunt backwards and forwards in a way that made it very uncomfortable for people who did not like sitting with their backs to the engine.

The young engineer, Karl Hammerstein, who had been supervising the men's work, was glad enough to find himself in the fresh air. His head ached violently, the oppression of the atmosphere had well-nigh overpowered him.

The mountain was clothed on this side with tall forest trees; the drooping firs offered an inviting shade. It was seven o'clock in the evening, the men were packing up their tools to go home. They would be obliged to march back through the tunnel; for there was no way round, except through the wildest forest with a tangled undergrowth of brambles and ferns. But they had their lamps, and did not mind the tunnel; it was familiar enough to them, who had worked in it for months.

Meanwhile Karl, who was dead-beat, stretched himself out under the trees, covered himself with his cloak, and fell fast asleep, meaning only to rest a minute or two, before he also set off home.

It was late when he awoke; the full moon was shining. He felt quite dazed. Where could he be?

He had slept in many queer little rooms when he was travelling; but they always had a window and a door. Where was the window? Ugh—he shivered—it was cold. Then an unreasoning terror took hold of him: he was only half-awake as yet. What could that dreadful gap be in the wall of his room, blacker than the darkness? Surely it was a bogey hole leading down to the bottomless pit? The next minute he laughed at his fears, as we usually do when we come safely out of nightmare land and feel the earth—or bed beneath us again.

He saw that it was the mouth of the tunnel, and glancing up he saw the giant fir-tree under which he had been sleeping with outstretched arms above him in the light of the moon.

“Well—I never! what a dunderhead I am!” he said to himself—“fancy sleeping like that, why such a thing has never happened to me before! I had meant to go to have supper and stay the night at the new hotel in Elm. I have heard the landlord’s daughter is an uncommonly pretty girl!”

“Heigho!” he went on, stretching himself, “there’s nothing for it, but to walk home. I might wait a long time before a motor-car came to pick me up here!”

Then he remembered with a sudden start that there was only one possible way back to Elm, and that was through the tunnel. It was not a very pleasant idea to walk back alone through the dark, oppressive tunnel at midnight; luckily he had his lantern with him.

“How could I have been such an idiot!” he muttered to himself again. He found some bread and cheese in his pocket, which he ate with a good appetite. His headache had gone, and he felt much refreshed after his sleep. Then he put on his cloak, lighted the lantern, and set out cheerfully to walk through the tunnel.

He had not gone far into the black darkness, when he thought he heard voices whispering and talking not far away from him; then he distinctly felt something or somebody brush past him.

“Hullo, who’s there?” he called out. Complete silence. He was not easily frightened; but his heart began to beat quicker than usual. “Well, if it’s robbers or tramps, they won’t find much to rob on me,” he thought; for he had only a few shillings in his pocket for his night’s lodging.

It was probably a bat that had strayed in at the opening, he decided. Suddenly he came to a standstill. Right across the way was a mass of freshly fallen earth and rock that quite obstructed his further progress. “Well this is a pretty fix to be in. How aggravating!” he said to himself, and leant for a moment against the wall of the tunnel, to consider what would be best to do. The wall instantly gave way, he stumbled, bruised his arm against a sharp corner of the rock, and his lantern went out. At the same time he heard a sound resembling the slamming of a door. “Donnerwetter!” he exclaimed—a mild German swear which means literally “thunder-weather!”—“whatever shall I do now?” He had a box of matches in his pocket and soon succeeded in relighting the lantern.

“There is nothing for it, but to go back again to where I started from, and wait for daybreak,” he thought.

By this time he had become confused, and had lost the sense of direction; but there could be only one way back. So he tramped along a long winding passage that he took to be the excavated tunnel. “How curious, I could have been certain that the tunnel was much wider, and more direct than this. Can I be still dreaming?” he thought.

Suddenly he was startled and astonished to come on a flight of steps leading downwards. There had certainly been no stairs in the tunnel! He saw too that the walls were painted in a decorative way like some of the Catacombs in Rome; only these were far more elaborate. “I’m in for an adventure, I must be lost in the heart of the mountain,” he thought. “Perhaps I shall come upon a robber’s cave, or gipsies may be hiding in these rocks; it is a good thing that I have this pretty little fellow with me,” and he touched the revolver in his breast pocket. He then observed in front of him a faint light, other than that of his lantern and whistled softly with astonishment, as he saw that the way opened out into a cave or vault. A few steps more, and he found himself in an exquisite, though tiny hall, with an arched ceiling supported by pillars of red granite. The walls and ceiling were beautifully inlaid with mosaic work in gold and coloured stones, like the interior of St Mark’s, Venice, and seemed to be of great antiquity, though of this he could not be certain.

The light was so dim that what might have been the brilliant effect of the whole, was lost, and the young engineer thought to himself involuntarily: “This ought to be lit up by electric light—it would look quite

different then!" As he was deliberating how electric light might be laid on, a door in the wall opened, and a number of little dwarf men trooped in. They did not see him at first; for he was standing behind a pillar. They settled themselves down on benches that were arranged in a semicircle, and one of them with an important air mounted a raised dais facing them. He was just beginning to speak with the words: "Gentlemen of the Committee," when they caught sight of the stranger standing in the centre of the hall, lantern in hand. They gave a cry of alarm, and were just going to scuttle away like frightened rabbits, when Karl called out, "Hi—Ho there—Gentlemen of the Committee—good Sirs—don't run away. I won't harm you—Christmas Tree."

Now Christmas Tree is the most solemn oath among the dwarfs—it is equivalent to swearing on the Bible with us. How Karl knew this, he did not know; it came to him on the inspiration of the minute. Perhaps his grandmother had told him stories in his childhood about the dwarf men, in which it occurred.

It had an instantaneous effect on the dwarfs who stood still at once. "But you are one of the bad men who are building the tunnel," they cried out. "Aha—we can spoil your little game, my good fellow, we can smash you and your snorting old dragon who is coming here to devour us, into pieces. We can throw rocks on the line—Aha!"

"We have often watched you—though you were not aware of our presence," said the chairman. "We had just called a committee meeting to decide what is to be done about this matter of the tunnel."

"Now you know it is all nonsense about the dragon," said Karl persuasively, as if he were talking to children. "You have heard of trains, haven't you? You are not so behind the times as all that!"

"Some of us have seen the dragon and even ridden in him," said Mr Chairman. "There is a famous story about that; but the majority still look upon the railway with suspicion and even distrust. We only ask to be let alone, and not be interfered with by meddling mortals," he said in a gruff voice. "What do we need with you? Our civilization and our history are more ancient even than that of India or Egypt, and from us the human race is descended."

"I tell you what," said Karl, "I could put you up to a thing or two for all that. We live in Modern Europe, you know, and not in ancient Egypt. Now, for instance, why is this beautiful hall, a perfect work of art in its way, so badly illuminated!"

"Badly illuminated! Why, what do you mean?" cried the little men indignantly. "Do you not see our glow-

worms hanging in festoons on the walls?”

“O, I say, glow-worms! in the twentieth century, that’s rather strong, you know! what you want, is electric light.”

“What’s that?” said the dwarfs curiously.

“You have only to press a little button on the wall, like this,” he pressed his thumb on the wall—”and the whole place is lit up almost as if it were day.”

“We don’t believe it—we don’t believe it,” said the little men.

“But it’s true, I assure you, Christmas Tree,” said Karl.

“Wouldn’t it make our eyes blink?” said one thin little fellow.

Karl noticed that the dwarfs’ eyes were small and their faces pale. Most of them had quite white beards and hair.

“That comes of living so long underground, it is a loss of pigment,” thought Karl. “Like a geranium that has been kept in the cellar! Now I could fix it up for you,” said the young engineer, always keenly on the look-out for a job. “We are going to have it laid on in the tunnel.”

“How much would it cost?” inquired the dwarfs.

“O, a thousand pounds or so!” said Karl carelessly. He had heard that dwarfs were very rich, and he was a good man of business, and had his eyes open to his interests.

“That’s a great deal of money, a great deal of money!” said the little men in chorus.

“O, as for that I am sure we could come to an agreement,” said Karl. “By the way,” he went on—”do you happen to have a telephone here? I should like to ‘phone to a friend of mine and tell him where I am. It would be such a joke.”

“What’s a telephone?” asked the dwarfs.

“You don’t know what a telephone is! Himmel! you are old-fashioned down here—you are only half civilised!”

“Half civilised, half civilised!” repeated the dwarfs angrily, “let us repeat our civilisation——”

“I’ll tell you what a telephone is,” said Karl, interrupting this burst of eloquence. “It is a little tube connected with a wire, you put one part of it to your ear, and then you put your mouth to the tube and say: ‘No. 1280,’ and then listen, and your friend will speak to you from miles and miles away, and you can answer him.”

“We don’t believe it, we don’t believe it!” said the unbelieving dwarfs.

“It’s true for all that, Christmas Tree,” said Karl. “I could fix that up for you too, if you have any connection with the outer air. You must have,” he continued, sniffing, “for the air is nice and fresh here, quite different to that in the tunnel. Have you a ventilating shaft?”

“O yes,” said the little men, “we can show you that!” And they led him out of the hall. In the passage outside was a great cleft or crevice in the rocks such as we call in England a chine. Above it the moon shone full and bright. A waterfall rushed down on one side; he saw ferns and dear little plants leaning over the water, growing between the cracks of the rocks. There were also glow-worms cunningly arranged in groups that looked like fairy stars. On the other side, he observed to his joy rough steps leading upwards cut in the solid rock. He sighed a sigh of relief, here at least was the way out.

He regarded the pretty sight with the eye of the professional engineer, rather than that of the artist. “That must be a stiff climb for you little men up there,” he said. “Now if you had a lift!”

“What’s that?” asked the dwarfs eagerly.

“It’s a little room that goes up and down when you pull a wire rope.”

“We don’t believe it, we don’t believe it,” said the sceptical gnomes again.

“It’s true nevertheless; now wouldn’t it be fun to have a ride in it? I could fix that up too, you know, if you gave me time and helped a bit yourselves,” said Karl.

“Really you poor things,” he went on, “You do not seem to have heard much of modern technical progress down here in this rabbit-burrow. I beg your pardon I’m sure”—as they looked displeased again—“Now I am really curious to know—have you heard of Zeppelin?”

“Zeppelin, no!—is he the King of Germany?” said the dwarf who had been in the chair.

“Ha! ha!—King of Germany—well he is nearly, in some people’s eyes,” said Karl. “He has built an airship; it is the most wonderful of all new inventions, it floats in the air like a boat does in the water.”

“Close by it passes, by soft breezes fanned,
Like a great steamboat straight from fairyland.”

he went on in an enthusiastic way. “You can go for a ride in it any day in Frankfurt, providing the weather is fine and you can afford to pay £15!”

“Just listen to him, just listen to him!” said the dwarfs. “We don’t believe a word you have said. You are imposing on our credulity, you bad man,” and thereupon they flew at him and began to beat him with their clubs, which were heavily weighted, and to pinch him with their long fingers.

It might have gone hardly with him, but quick as thought Karl flashed out the little revolver from his pocket. They seemed to know the meaning of that modern toy; for they crouched back trembling, and not daring to move.

“Now stop it, will you,” he said, “or I shall have to shoot you, and take you home with me to be stuffed or put into the National Anthropological Museum. They would give me a good price for you,” he said musingly—“they would think you were The Missing Link.”

“O please, Mr Hammerstein, don’t shoot us—(“however did the little chaps find out my name!” thought Karl) we will believe all you say, even if it seems the greatest nonsense to us. After all birds fly, bats fly and fairies fly, why should not ships and trains fly?” said the spokesman, who, I must tell you, was a relation of King Reinhold in the Taunus Mountains and was proud of belonging to a royal family.

Karl called him Mr Query, because he was so fond of asking questions, but so slow to take in a new fact, as indeed were all the dwarfs.

“You promised us Christmas Tree not to harm us,” said Mr Query, reproachfully.

“Well, I didn’t hurt anyone, did I, but how about your treatment of me? That wasn’t in the contract either,” said Karl.

Meanwhile Karl looked about him curiously. He had never been to dwarfland before, and might never have the chance of visiting it again, and he did not wish to lose the opportunity of seeing all he could.

“Are there any more of you?” he asked the dwarfs.

“I should think so,” they answered. “Hundreds and thousands of us live under this mountain.”

Karl noticed passages running in all directions, and low caves which seemed to be dwellings, many of them richly ornamented and furnished. In one of these caves he observed a looking-glass, and wondered which of the dwarf men trimmed his beard before it. He met a great many little men scurrying about, who cast anxious glances at the giant who had strayed among them. Karl had frequently to stoop; the ceilings seemed very low to him, although they were high enough compared to the dwarf men.

“Where are the female dwarfs?” he asked abruptly.

“Dwarfs have no womenfolk,” Mr Query replied. “We did away with them long, long ago!”

“That was rather rough on them, eh?” said Karl.

“Well it happened so many centuries ago that we have forgotten all about it, and so are unable to gratify your curiosity. Perhaps if you care for antiquities and were to study the pictures on the walls, you might find out.”

“Not my line,” said Karl shortly.

“As we have no women,” Mr Query continued, “we never quarrel and have no differences of opinion.”

“I expect no lady would care to live down here with you in this dark hole,” said Karl, thoughtfully. “But to whom does the looking-glass belong?”

“A fairy comes to visit us occasionally; she makes herself useful and tidies up the place a bit for us,” said the dwarf. “She’s here now—would you like to see her?”

“Of course I should,” said Karl, his heart beating fast at the thought of meeting a real fairy—perhaps she was a princess in disguise, and he might be chosen to win her.

The dwarf drew back the curtain that hung before a beautifully furnished cave, and there Karl saw a young girl who was busy dusting and arranging handsome gold vases on a carved bracket. Even by the pale light of the

glow-worms and the lantern which he had not yet extinguished, he could see that she was very beautiful. She had a mass of red-brown hair, that waved in tiny curls about her forehead, and hazel eyes with dark eyelashes. As to her figure, she was small and slight, so that she did not look quite so monstrous in that little world as Karl did. She had a big holland apron on, with a gaily embroidered border. When she saw Karl, she laughed. "To think of meeting a young man in this old hole—how funny," she exclaimed.

"Are you a fairy?" said Karl, bewildered by her beauty.

"Do I look like one?" she answered with a toss of her bronze curls.

"Not exactly," said Karl, "but then I have never seen a fairy; you are pretty enough for one!"

She made a little curtsy in acknowledgment of the compliment. "I'll have finished my work soon," she said, "and then we will go home together."

"That will be delightful," said Karl.

The dwarfs were looking on.

"You may go," said Mr Query. "You have worked enough for to-day." He handed her several pieces of gold. Her eyes sparkled with glee as she pocketed the coins; she was proud of having earned some money.

"Follow me," she said to Karl, "and I will show you the way home. You would never be able to find it alone."

"The dwarfs have burrowed here like moles," said Karl aside to the girl, "and I believe they are almost as blind and ignorant."

"Do not speak disrespectfully of moles," said a dwarf who had overheard the last part of this remark. "They belong to the most intelligent of all creatures; who can build a fortress like the mole?"

"Norah," said the dwarfs, "Norah, when are you coming again?"

"Very soon," she said, "I'll bring some metal polish with me, and make your vases shine!"

"Norah," thought Karl, "so that is her name. I wonder where she lives?"

Norah led the way back through intricate passages until they came to the open space where there was the staircase leading up to the outside world. “Good morning,” she said to the dwarfs.

Karl pulled out his watch—yes—the night was already past, it was four o’clock.

“I’ll drop in again soon, and see about your little commissions,” he said to the dwarfs. “Electric light you want, telephone and lift, it will be rather a big job.”

“And what about the airship?” asked Mr Query.

“O I can’t rig that up for you; you must go to Frankfurt and see that for yourselves. Good morning,” and he turned to follow Norah, who was already some way up the stone staircase. From a distance she really looked like a fairy. The light of dawn shone on her wonderful hair; she had taken off her apron, and had on a white dress trimmed with gold, that fluttered as she mounted the steps. At the top she waited to take breath, and Karl easily caught her up. They gazed down into the depths beneath them, but no trace of dwarfland could they see. Even the glow-worms had vanished, and the rough steps looked like natural niches in the rock. They were on the top of the mountain. Near by stood a grove of firs, the trees were so gnarled and stunted from their exposed position that they looked like a dwarf forest, and seemed appropriate growing there.

“Your name is ‘Norah’,” said Karl boldly, “but that is all I know about you!”

“I am no fairy princess, alas,” said Norah, “but only a poor landlord’s daughter. My father and I have the new hotel in Elm!”

“O you must be the pretty innkeeper’s daughter then of whom I have heard so much,” said Karl. “Now isn’t it funny, I had meant to stay the night at your hotel on the chance of seeing you, and now we meet under the earth in dwarfland—romantic I call that! Why do you work for those little beggars?” he continued.

“For the same reason that you have proposed doing so,” she answered, “to earn money. I was picking bilberries on the mountains and strayed into their land by chance one day. I found them busy at work spring cleaning, and helped them a bit, and that was my first introduction to the dwarfs. They pay me well for little work, and starting an hotel costs a great deal of money you must know. I am glad to be able to help my father.”

“You do not come from this part of Germany, you speak quite differently to us,” said the young man inquiringly.

“My home is over the seas,” said Norah. “My father is an Irishman; but we found it hard to get on there, and meant to emigrate to America. Then father changed his mind, and we came to Germany. My mother died some years ago,” she said sadly.

“Poor child,” said Karl in a deep, sympathetic voice, “there must be a good deal of responsibility on your young shoulders.”

“I should just think so,” said Norah with a sigh, “but our hotel is going to be a tremendous success!” As she spoke, she led the way through a little narrow path, that crossed a heath where heather grew, and great masses of yellow starred ragwort. “Ah! me beloved golden flower,” she cried, pointing the plant out to Karl, who had passed it by a thousand times as a common weed, but to whom it seemed from this day forth to be alive and full of meaning. “We call it fairy-horses in Ireland,” she said, with a rapt look on her face, “sure and I can see my native mountains when I pluck it”—and her eyes filled with tears.

She wanted no consoling however, her mood changed quickly enough. “Do come here,” she called out to Karl, “and see what I’ve found now!” She showed him a clump of pure white heather; “it is tremendously lucky,” she said, “and you shall have a bit too.” So saying she stuck a piece of white heather in his buttonhole—real white heather, not the faded flowers which children sometimes mistake for it. Karl treasured the spray carefully.

“And how did you come to be among the dwarfs?” said Norah. But their further conversation was checked by a little brook that ran straight across the path. Now Norah usually took off her shoes and stockings and waded over this stream; but she did not like to do so with Karl looking on. Karl would have liked to pick her up in his arms and carry her across like a true hero of romance; but he was shy of proposing it. So he fetched some large flat stones, placed them dexterously in the stream, and sprang across himself, then he held out a hand to Norah who stepped over as quickly and gracefully as a young deer.

“Now I will tell you how it was you found me in dwarfland,” said Karl as they walked on together. “I was at work on the new tunnel——”

“You’ll not be telling me that you are a working man?” said Norah.

“No I am an engineer. I was on duty looking after the men, then, somehow or other I fell against the wall of the tunnel and hurt my arm”; he showed her his torn coat as a proof of the story.

“Poor thing,” she interrupted, “did you bind it up properly?”

“O, it was a mere nothing,” said Karl. “Well—I found myself in a strange winding passage that led right down into the central hall of the dwarfs.” He did not wish to say that he had been asleep; he thought that would sound so silly. “Queer little fellows they are, those dwarfs,” he continued, “awfully ignorant too. Now will you believe it they had never heard of the Zeppelin airship?”

“We’ll really have to give them lessons,” said Norah, laughing, “but perhaps they are not so stupid as they make themselves out to be!”

Climbing over boulders and stones, laughing and talking the while like two children just out of school, they reached the bottom of the mountain and saw the village. It could hardly be called a town as yet, though Norah’s father hoped that the new railway station would speedily convert it into one.

“Do you know where our hotel is?” said Norah. “It is at the other end of the village; we will go round through the fields; the village folk stare so; they are up at five o’clock to do their field-work.

“There it is!” she called out proudly, pointing to a large white house with green shutters on which the words “Hôtel Fancy” were written in large gold letters.

“What a queer name for an hotel!” said Karl.

“Yes, don’t you think it is original and attractive?” said Norah. “There are so many hotels called Hôtel Hohenzollern’—or ‘The German Emperor’ and so I thought we would have a change.”

“It is a splendid idea,” said Karl, who was over head and ears in love with Norah by this time and thought that everything she did and said, was perfect. Still, like a prudent German, he wondered to himself if she would make a good housewife. He knew she must be good at cleaning or the dwarfs would hardly have employed her, but her dainty little hands did not look like cooking.

“What would it matter, if the dinner were burnt sometimes,” he thought, “if I could have such a pretty, fascinating little girl to marry me?”

“Will you come in and have some breakfast?” said Norah as they approached Hôtel Fancy.

“Rather,” he said, “I must own that I am famished. I only had a dry bit of bread and cheese for supper, and that is a long while ago.”

It was early still, Norah’s father was not yet up; so she set to work and lit the fire, and soon had the water boiling for coffee. She set a fine breakfast before him, ham and eggs and sausage and rolls. I am bound in strict veracity to say that love did not prevent his consuming a large amount. He changed his mind about her cooking, and thought that she could do everything well and was a model of perfection.

“Do have some, too, yourself,” he said, and Norah soon joined him with a hearty appetite.

Mr O’Brian, for that was the name of Norah’s father, was astonished to find them at breakfast when he entered the comfortably furnished parlour.

“An early guest, father,” said Norah. “He is going to put up here for the present; he is an engineer at work on the tunnel; good thing for us”; she whispered the last sentence. “I will see about getting your room ready,” she said, turning to Karl.

“Please do not trouble,” said he. “I’m due at the tunnel again at 7 a.m. and it is 6 o’clock now. I hope to return to-night about 8 o’clock; then I shall be glad of a room,” he said, with a hardly suppressed yawn. “Pray excuse me, I had rather a bad night,” he added with a twinkle in his eyes that only Norah perceived.

As soon as he was gone, Norah handed some gold pieces to her father.

“And do you think that I am doing right in taking this money from you, Norah?” he asked.

“Why of course father! I’m telling you that it’s fairy gold, and will bring us luck,” she replied.

The Irish have a great respect for luck and omens; many of them still believe in the good folk, and Mr O’Brian, who was of a very easygoing disposition, was quite satisfied with this explanation.

Some weeks passed. Karl and Norah became better friends every day. All Karl’s previous notions of the

universe had been knocked on the head by his visit to dwarfland. He had thought that he knew almost everything that there was to be known, but now he was always on the look-out for surprises. Moreover his love for Norah had opened his eyes. Every bush seemed ablaze with fire, and the roses and pinks in the gardens smelt as they had never smelt before.

Norah was like a fairy princess; she was not easy to win, she loved her freedom, and wished to call no man lord and master. Because she was such a wild bird and of a poetic and dreamy temperament, Karl's practical mind appealed to her. He possessed that which she and her father lacked. She was tired of her father's promises and castles in the air, which usually ended in bitter disappointment. How many guests had they had since Hôtel Fancy had been opened? She could almost count them on her fingers. The peasants frequented the old inn that they were accustomed to in the village, and very few strangers came their way.

"I will play waiter on Sunday and help you," said Karl one Saturday evening when he had returned from his work.

"Indeed and you'll not need to," said Norah with a pretty Irish lilt in her voice, "it's not many people that will be coming! It will be different of course when the new station is built; then we shall be flourishing," she continued.

It was a fine Sunday afternoon. Karl and Norah sat in the garden under the plane-trees which made a chequered pattern in shadow on the ground, and sipped glasses of Apfelwein or cider in German fashion.

"It was a queer thing that we two should meet in the little people's land. It seems as if we were meant to pull together, doesn't it?" said Karl with an effort.

Norah jumped up immediately, saying that she must see if the water was boiling for coffee.

"No, no," said Karl catching her by the hand; "you are not going to run away like that; you've just got to listen to me, Norah; for I can't keep it in any longer. You are my fairy princess—I love you with all my heart, and I want you to promise me to be my little wife—will you?"

"You don't know me yet," said Norah blushing like a rose. "I've got a most awful temper!"

"I'll risk it," said Karl laughing, and they plighted their troth under the trees in the garden with no one but the empty chairs and tables looking on, that were spread in anticipation of the guests who had not arrived.

So Karl and Norah were engaged to be married and were as happy as ever it is possible to be in this world! They

did not celebrate the event in the usual ceremonious German fashion; for Norah's friends and relations were in Ireland and she had only a few acquaintances in Germany as yet. Karl's mother was a widow, and lived with her married daughter in Pomerania; so she could not come so far south for anything less than a wedding or a funeral.

Now Karl began to consider the material side of the question. "Will the love that we are rich in, light the fire in the kitchen, and the little god of love turn the spit O!" What had they to live on? He was a young man, and his income was very small; it takes many years in Germany to make a career as engineer, unless you are exceptionally lucky and have influential friends.

Hôtel Fancy was rather like its name and did not pay at all as yet. Now Karl had not forgotten the dwarfs, and Norah began to miss the gold pieces which had disappeared fast enough in the last few weeks.

"I tell you what," she said, "we will go together to dwarfland. You can arrange about the electric light, and I will do some metal polishing; we will meet afterwards and come home again together, it will be splendid fun!"

"How can we get there?" asked Karl somewhat dubiously.

"Why, the same way as we came out—through the rocky gap; I know the way as well as anything, I have been there frequently," said Norah.

It was early autumn; the evenings had begun to close in. Karl had managed to get off earlier than usual; still it was almost dusk as the two set out to go to dwarfland. The sun was setting and threw a wonderful golden glow over the world that was reflected in the hearts of the young lovers.

"My stones must be there still," said Karl as they came to the little brook, "for who could have taken them away?" Yet to his surprise there were no stones there; neither were any to be found in the neighbourhood. There was nothing for it, but to carry Norah over. He did not feel so shy and embarrassed this time, as he picked up his little sweetheart laughing and struggling in his arms.

"You are as light as a feather," he said as he set her down again.

"A feather bed, you mean," she said, "and they are a pretty fair weight. I shall never get used to German feather beds," she continued. "I can't even get them to look right when I make them and shake them!"

"You need to be born and brought up to them to appreciate them," he replied, "but never mind, what does it

matter, what is a feather bed in comparison with our love?" They laughed for pure joy and good humour as they walked along; ah how quickly time passes when one is so happy! The sunlight gilded the rocks before them, till they looked as if they contained streaks of gold ore. They crossed the little moor, and clambered over the rocks till they reached the stunted fir-grove.

Looking back they saw that the sky had become a glowing red as it often does just before the light dies out; seen through the dark, twisted trees the wood appeared to be on fire. The lovers sat down and gazed for a few moments in silence till the glory faded from the sky.

"Now for it, Norah," said Karl getting up and offering her a hand, "the way down into dwarfland must be quite near here!"

"Of course I know, I can find it at once," she answered.

They searched carefully around for the great crack in the rocks, but could find nothing in the least resembling it.

"How absurd; how can we miss it when it is certainly not more than a yard or two away," said Norah.

"The steps were not so easily recognisable, if I remember rightly," said Karl, "but we are sure to find them in a minute."

It grew darker and darker; the mountain was covered with boulders of stone, juniper bushes and stunted trees; but no trace of the great rent in the mountain-side could they discover.

"Did we dream it all?" said Karl.

"Impossible, why I have been down there many times," said Norah beginning to feel bitterly disappointed.

"Supposing I were to fetch some of my men here and blow up the rocks with dynamite; we must be able to get in then, for the mountain is as full of dwarfs as bees in a hive," said Karl, who was getting in a temper.

"And do you think they would reward you handsomely for your services," said Norah sarcastically, "and O the poor little men, they always treated me with the utmost kindness and politeness, and gave me far more money than ever I bargained for!"

“They nearly pinched me black and blue, till I frightened them with my revolver,” said Karl.

“The wretches!” said Norah, “but why?”

“Because I was silly enough to tell them about the airship, and they thought I was humbugging them.”

“How absurd!” Norah exclaimed. “But what are we to do now, Karl?” she continued in a doleful voice. “I must have some money; we are still in debt for the greater part of our furniture; and the house is heavily mortgaged.”

“If I could only get a good post!” said Karl sighing deeply. “I had reckoned on those dwarf chaps!”

“We shall never be able to marry,” said Norah, now in the depths of despair; “our house will have to be given up, and our things sold by auction, and I, O I shall have to marry a horrid, rich old peasant who will treat me as a servant, and father will be obliged to work in the fields.” With this she burst into tears.

It was quite dark now save for the new moon whose pale crescent shone in the sky. Norah observed it in spite of her tears.

“The new moon!” she exclaimed. “O do let us turn all the money that we have in our pockets. How much have you got Karl?”

“About 10 shillings,” he replied.

“O you are richer than I am; I have only 8d. in my purse; nevertheless let us turn what we have, and it will be sure to bring us a fortune.”

Karl laughed. “You little fairy,” he said, and looked at her with admiration; then involuntarily his eyes strayed in the direction of the fir-grove. He thought he could see something moving there. Norah looked too. “Karl,” she said excitedly, “I do believe it is the dwarf men after all; who else could it be?”

At the same moment they caught sight of a queer form with a turned-up nose and peaked cap clearly outlined against the sky, and recognised Mr Query.

“Hullo!” said Karl.

“[text missing in original] to you,” he said in a droll manner.

“Now, Mr Dwarf,” said Karl, anxious to proceed to business, “what about our little agreement as to electric light, etc.?”

“The committee has decided against it,” said Mr Query emphatically. “What do we want with your new-fangled inventions; you would bring your workmen with you; they would discover our treasures, and turn the whole place into a mine, and of course we should be obliged to decamp.”

“Well, there is something in what you say,” said Karl to whom this idea had already occurred, “but we could avoid that catastrophe!”

“As for you,” continued the dwarf turning to Norah, “we have discovered that you are a human being also, and no fairy; therefore we shall not require your services any longer.”

“What a horrid way to give me notice, as if I could help not being a fairy!” said poor Norah weeping bitterly.

The little fellow was much distressed; he could not make out what was the matter with her.

“Don’t cry, little Fräuleinchen,” he said, “I am sure we never thought you were so fond of us as all that; it is very gratifying, but it is too late now to alter our decision; the way down into our kingdom is sealed for ever!”

“I could soon open it again,” said Karl wrathfully.

“As for that, it would not be quite such an easy matter as you think,” said Mr Query mockingly. “However we are willing to offer you terms,” he continued, “if you will leave us alone and protect our secrets.”

“What terms?” said Karl and Norah eagerly.

“You shall see,” said the dwarf, “follow me to the fir-trees.” So saying he sprang down from the stone on which he had been sitting and came up and shook hands with them.

“We are going to be married! what do you think of that?” they informed him.

“Humph! Your taste, not mine,” said Mr Query. “However Norah will be able to clean your gold and silver dishes capitally; that’s a comfort for you.”

“We haven’t got any gold and silver dishes to clean, alas!” said Norah.

“Poor things,” said Mr Query, “well we’ll see.” He proceeded to the fir-trees where the Gentlemen of the Committee were again assembled, standing in a solemn semicircle. “If you will sign this contract, we are willing to give you a reward. I speak in the name of the Gentlemen of the Committee,” said Mr Query, and the little men nodded their heads in assent. He drew out a roll of parchment from a bag he carried with him and handed it to Karl. Norah looked over his shoulder.

On the parchment was written the following:

We,

Karl Hammerstein,
Norah O’Brian,
pledge our solemn oath Christmas Tree, that we will not attempt to visit dwarfland again, or molest the dwarfs in any way, by offering them modern inventions for which they have no use, etc., etc., or by revealing their secret chambers to the glaring light of day.

Signed.....
.....

“We are willing enough to sign,” said Karl, “but what are your terms, old man; we want to know that first. You offered us a bribe, you know.”

“All in good time,” said Mr Query. “Gentlemen of the Committee, display the treasure!” The dwarf men formed themselves into a ring, in the centre of which Norah and Karl could see masses of what looked like solid gold. “You may take as much of this as you like,” they said, “and we warrant you on our solemn word of honour Christmas Tree that it is pure, unalloyed gold.”

“We’ll sign anything you like, dear little men,” said Norah, joyfully, “and I invite you all to my wedding!”

“Three weeks from to-day,” said Karl.

But Norah was too excited to notice what he was saying.

“I shall always believe in the new moon,” she repeated again and again. “How shall we carry it?” she exclaimed suddenly. “I have not even got a basket with me.”

“My men shall trundle it along for you in wheelbarrows,” said Mr Query. “No please, do not say ‘thank you.’ I have a great objection to being thanked.”

Karl and Norah now signed the document with joyful hearts. Norah professed herself very sorry not to see her dwarf friends again. She had a real affection for the droll little men.

“You may come across us sometime again, who knows,” said Mr Query. “We make excursions into your world from time to time. It is improbable but not impossible that we may meet again. Good-bye!” A brilliant flash as of lightning shot from under the ground; the earth trembled and shook. Norah clung to Karl in terror; for she thought that the earth would swallow them up too. Then Mr Query and the dwarfs disappeared underground calling out as they did so: “You see we have our lift and our electric light too, Mr Engineer—ha! ha!—we are not quite so behind the times as you thought us—ha! ha!”

Norah and Karl stood still in speechless astonishment; then they looked anxiously for their gold, fearing that the dwarfs might have played them a trick after all. But no, there were two jolly strong-looking little fellows with wheelbarrows. “We’ve got the gold all right,” they said. “Don’t you be afraid. We’ve put some dirty old potatoes at the top,” they continued with a cunning expression on their faces, “just in case we meet anyone on the way you know—we should have to hop skip and jump—one, two, three and off, and it might look awkward for you.”

“I am sure it’s very kind of you,” said Norah, “and we can never thank you enough,” and off they all set down the mountain. It was a troublesome job to get the heavy wheelbarrow over the stream. Norah declared afterwards that some of the gold was lost there; but they found no trace of it again if it were so. They did not feel safe until they reached the gate of Hôtel Fancy.

“Shall we put it in the back yard or in the stable?” said the little fellows in a hoarse whisper.

“Put it in the corner of the stable,” said Norah, “as we have not got a horse no one goes in there. We will manage the rest, thank you so much.”

“Please don’t thank us,” said the little men, “dwarfs are not used to that, and it hurts their feelings.”

“Well, here is something for your labours,” said Karl, and he gave the little men a handful of silver. They turned it over and over and seemed to regard it as a great curiosity. Then they heard a movement in the house, and quick as lightning they were off before Karl and Norah could say good-bye.

Mr O’Brian was pacing up and down in a great state of agitation; it was nearly midnight and he feared they might have met with an accident. “There’s no depending on the fairies,” he said to himself, “and dwarfs are said to be treacherous,” so you see he knew something of what Norah was up to.

His joy was the greater when Norah and Karl rushed in and dragging him to the stables showed him the pile of gold. “I’ll be for taking it to the bank at once,” he said, “you never know but what it may melt away, or turn into a heap of leaves, I’ve read stories like that.”

“Our wedding shall be next week,” said Karl, joyfully.

“And aren’t you going to give me any time to get my trousseau?” said Norah with a dancing light in her eyes that made her look more enchanting than ever. “Sure and I’ll be wanting the finest trousseau that ever a princess had.”

“We’ll turn Hôtel Fancy into a palace,” said Mr O’Brian.

The wedding was celebrated three weeks from this date, as they had agreed. Norah wore an exquisitely soft cream silk gown, embroidered with real gold; it was said that the embroidery was a present from the dwarfs. Certain it is too that she wore an old pearl necklace of such marvellous workmanship that the like was never seen before.

The tale was whispered that a little deformed man had been seen to slip a parcel containing the necklace into the letter-box.

Norah’s relations came over from Ireland to be present at the wedding, and you may be sure that Karl’s mother arrived too all the way from Pomerania to share the festivities and the cake. Hôtel Fancy was crammed with guests; every available room was occupied; there was some talk already of enlarging the house.

One of the presents that the bride had from her husband, was a looking-glass, set with precious stones. People

thought that it was a curious wedding-present, and wondered if Norah were exceptionally vain. But Karl declared that if it had not been for a looking-glass he might never have known his wife, a remark which sounded more mysterious than ever.

Many conjectures were made concerning it, but none of them were half so strange as the truth. Another present was a brooch set in diamonds in the shape of a crescent moon.

As they were now wealthy, Karl was able to indulge his passion for mechanical inventions, and Hôtel Fancy was full of the most delightful surprises: fountains in unexpected places in the spray of which little balls danced up and down, a rare gramophone that played the most soft and pleasant music, every variety of electric light and so on.

Norah was a little disappointed that her friends the dwarfs did not come to the wedding; but what could she expect if her mother-in-law and uncles and aunts and cousins were all asked as well! Could she expect that the dignified Mr Query would condescend to become an object of general curiosity? I have heard that the little men called and left their cards some days after the wedding, when Norah and Karl were away on their honeymoon, and that Mr O'Brian treated them as royal visitors, and that they left charmed with his hospitality, and astounded at the many entertaining and marvellous things that were to be seen in Hôtel Fancy.

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