

The Jezinkas

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Intermediate
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There was a poor orphan lad who had neither father nor mother, and was compelled to go out to service to get his living. He travelled a long way without being able to obtain an engagement, till one day he came to a hovel all by itself under a wood. On the threshold sat an old man, who had dark caverns in his head instead of eyes. The goats were bleating in the stall, and the old man said: 'I wish I could take you, poor goats, to pasture, but I can't, I am blind; and I have nobody to send with you.' 'Daddy, send me,' answered the lad; 'I will pasture your goats, and also be glad to wait upon you.' 'Who are you? and what is your name?'

The lad told him all, and that they called him Johnny. 'Well, Johnny, I will take you; but drive out the goats for me to pasture first of all. But don't lead them to yon hill in the forest; the Jezinkas will come to you, will put you to sleep, and will then tear out your eyes, as they have mine.' 'Never fear, Daddy,' answered Johnny; 'the Jezinkas won't tear out my eyes.' He then let the goats out of the stall, and drove them to pasture.

The first and second day he pastured them under the forest, but the third day he said to himself: 'Why should I be afraid of the Jezinkas? I'll drive them where there is better pasture.' He then broke off three green shoots of bramble, put them into his hat, and drove the goats straight on to the hill in the forest. There the goats wandered about for pasture, and Johnny sat down on a stone in the cool. He had not sat long, when all of a sudden, how it came about he knew not, a beautiful damsel stood before him, all dressed in white, with her hair—raven-black—prettily dressed and flowing down her back, and eyes like sloes. 'God bless you, young goatherd!' said she. 'See what apples grow in our garden! Here's one for you; I'll give it you, that you may know

how good they are.'

She offered him a beautiful rosy apple. But Johnny knew that if he took the apple and ate it he would fall asleep, and she would afterwards tear out his eyes, so he said: 'I am much obliged to you, beautiful damsel! My master has an apple-tree in his garden, on which still handsomer apples grow; I have eaten my fill of them.' 'Well, if you'd rather not, I won't compel you,' said the damsel, and went away.

After a while came another, still prettier, damsel, with a beautiful red rose in her hand, and said: 'God bless you, young goatherd! See what a beautiful rose I've just plucked off the hedge. It smells so nice; smell it yourself.' 'I am much obliged to you, beautiful damsel. My master has still handsomer roses in his garden; I have smelt my fill of them.' 'Well, then, if you won't, let it alone!' said the damsel, quite enraged, turned round, and retired.

After a while, a third damsel, the youngest and prettiest of them all, came up. 'God bless you, young goatherd!' 'Thank you, beautiful damsel!' 'Indeed, you're a fine lad,' said the damsel, 'but you'd be still handsomer if you had your hair nicely combed and dressed. Come, I'll comb it for you.' Johnny said nothing, but when the damsel came up to him to comb his hair, he took his hat from his head, drew out a bramble-shoot, and pop! struck her on both hands. The damsel screamed 'Help, help!' began to weep, but was unable to move from the place. Johnny cared naught for her weeping, and bound her hands together with the bramble.

Then up ran the other two damsels, and, seeing their sister a captive, began to beg Johnny to unbind her and let her go. 'Unbind her yourselves,' said Johnny. 'Alas! we can't, we have tender hands, we should prick ourselves.' But when they saw that the lad would not do as they wished, they went to their sister and wanted to unfasten the bramble. Thereupon Johnny leapt up, and pop! pop! struck them too with a spray, and then bound both their hands together. 'See, I've got you, you wicked Jezinkas! Why did you tear out my master's eyes?' After this, he went home to his master, and said, 'Come, daddy, I've found somebody who will give you your eyes again.'

When they came to the hill, he said to the first Jezinka, 'Now tell me where the old man's eyes are. If you don't tell me, I shall throw you at once into the water.' The Jezinka made excuse that she didn't know, and Johnny was going to throw her into the river, which flowed hard by under the hill. 'Don't, Johnny, don't!' entreated the Jezinka, 'and I'll give you the old man's eyes.' She conducted him into a cavern, where was a great heap of eyes,

large and small, black, red, blue and green, and took two out of the heap. But when Johnny placed them in the old man's sockets, the poor man began to cry: 'Alas, alas! these are not my eyes. I see nothing but owls.' Johnny became exasperated, seized the Jezinka, and threw her into the water. He then said to the second: 'Tell me, you, where the old man's eyes are.'

She, too, began to make excuses that she didn't know; but when the lad threatened to throw her, too, into the water, she led him again to the cavern, and took out two other eyes. But the old man cried again: 'Alas! these are not my eyes. I see nothing but wolves.' The same was done to the second Jezinka as to the first; the water closed over her. 'Tell me, you, where the old man's eyes are,' said Johnny to the third and youngest Jezinka. She, too, led him to the heap in the cavern, and took out two eyes for him. But when they were inserted, the old man cried out again that they were not his eyes. 'I see nothing but pike.' Johnny saw that she, too, was cheating him, and was going to drown her as well; but the Jezinka besought him with tears: 'Don't, Johnny, don't! I will give you the old man's proper eyes.' She took them from under the whole heap. And when Johnny inserted them into the old man's sockets, he cried out joyfully: 'These, these are my eyes! Praise be to God! now I see well again!' Afterwards Johnny and the old man lived together happily; Johnny pastured the goats, and the old man made cheeses at home, and they ate them together; but the Jezinka never showed herself again on that hill.

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