

The Ramapo Salamander

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A curious tale of the Rosicrucians runs to the effect that more than two centuries ago a band of German colonists entered the Ramapo valley and put up houses of stone, like those they had left in the Hartz Mountains, and when the Indians saw how they made knives and other wonderful things out of metal, which they extracted from the rocks by fire, they believed them to be manitous and went away, not wishing to resist their possession of the land. There was treasure here, for High Tor, or Torn Mountain, had been the home of Amasis, youngest of the magi who had followed the star of Bethlehem. He had found his way, through Asia and Alaska, to this country, had taken to wife a native woman, by whom he had a child, and here on the summit he had built a temple. Having refused the sun worship, when the Indians demanded that he should take their faith, he was set upon, and would have been killed had not an earthquake torn the ground at his feet, opening a new channel for the Hudson and precipitating into it every one but the magus and his daughter. To him had been revealed in magic vision the secrets of wealth in the rocks.

The leader in the German colony, one Hugo, was a man of noble origin, who had a wife and two children: a boy, named after himself; a girl,—Mary. Though it had been the custom in the other country to let out the forge fires once in seven years, Hugo opposed that practice in the forge he had built as needless. But his men murmured and talked of the salamander that once in seven years attains its growth in unquenched flame and goes forth doing mischief. On the day when that period was ended the master entered his works and saw the men gazing into the furnace at a pale form that seemed made from flame, that was nodding and turning in the

fire, occasionally darting its tongue at them or allowing its tail to fall out and lie along the stone floor. As he came to the door he, too, was transfixed, and the fire seemed burning his vitals, until he felt water sprinkled on his face, and saw that his wife, whom he had left at home too ill to move, stood behind him and was casting holy water into the furnace, speaking an incantation as she did so. At that moment a storm arose, and a rain fell that put out the fire; but as the last glow faded the lady fell dead.

When her children were to be consecrated, seven years later, those who stood outside of the church during the ceremony saw a vivid flash, and the nurse turned from the boy in her fright. She took her hands from her eyes. The child was gone. Twice seven years had passed and the daughter remained unspotted by the world, for, on the night when her father had led her to the top of High Torn Mountain and shown her what Amasis had seen,—the earth spirits in their caves heaping jewels and offering to give them if Hugo would speak the word that binds the free to the earth forces and bars his future for a thousand years,—it was her prayer that brought him to his senses and made the scene below grow dim, though the baleful light of the salamander clinging to the rocks at the bottom of the cave sent a glow into the sky.

Many nights after that the glow was seen on the height and Hugo was missing from his home, but for lack of a pure soul to stand as interpreter he failed to read the words that burned in the triangle on the salamander's back, and returned in rage and jealousy. A knightly man had of late appeared in the settlement, and between him and Mary a tender feeling had arisen, that, however, was unexpressed until, after saving her from the attack of a panther, he had allowed her to fall into his arms. She would willingly then have declared her love for him, but he placed her gently and regretfully from him and said, "When you slept I came to you and put a crown of gems on your head: that was because I was in the power of the earth spirit. Then I had power only over the element of fire, that either consumes or hardens to stone; but now water and life are mine. Behold! Wear these, for thou art worthy." And touching the tears that had fallen from her eyes, they turned into lilies in his hands, and he put them on her brow.

"Shall we meet again?" asked the girl.

"I do not know," said he. "I tread the darkness of the universe alone, and I peril my redemption by yielding to this love of earth. Thou art redeemed already, but I must make my way back to God through obedience tested in trial. Know that I am one of those that left heaven for love of man. We were of that subtle element which is flame, burning and glowing with love,—and when thy mother came to me with the power of purity to cast me out of the furnace, I lost my shape of fire and took that of a human being,—a child. I have been with thee often,

and was rushing to annihilation, because I could not withstand the ordeal of the senses. Had I yielded, or found thee other than thou art, I should have become again an earth spirit. I have been led away by wish for power, such as I have in my grasp, and forgot the mission to the suffering. I became a wanderer over the earth until I reached this land, the land that you call new. Here was to be my last trial and here I am to pass the gate of fire.”

As he spoke voices arose from the settlement.

“They are coming,” said he. The stout form of Hugo was in advance. With a fierce oath he sprang on the young man. “He has ruined my household,” he cried. “Fling him into the furnace!” The young man stood waiting, but his brow was serene. He was seized, and in a few moments had disappeared through the mouth of the burning pit. But Mary, looking up, saw a shape in robes of silvery light, and it drifted upward until it vanished in the darkness. The look of horror on her face died away, and a peace came to it that endured until the end.

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