



The two brothers IV

Description

Chapter IV

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The young prince and his wife lived very happily, and, as Gottlieb, being a prince, had not forgotten his old profession, he often went hunting, and always took great pleasure in this exercise. It goes without saying that whenever he went hunting, his guests accompanied him. Only, there was, to some leagues of the city, a forest which passed for gameful, and which at the same time enjoyed the worst reputation; one had seen there to enter many hunters, never one had seen to leave; what they had become, nobody could say. However, every time the young prince passed in sight of this forest, he stopped, shaking his head and saying:

– I shall not be content until I have entered that forest, and know for myself what is going on there.

This desire became so great that Gottlieb did not give the old king any rest until he had granted him the permission he requested.

One morning, he set out on horseback accompanied by a large escort; when he reached the edge of the wood, he saw a doe as white as snow.

– Wait for me here,» he said to his escort, «I want to hunt this magnificent animal.

And he entered the wood, followed only by his faithful animals. His people waited for him until the evening; but, not seeing him return, they went back to the palace, and told the young queen what had happened.

The poor princess, who adored her Gottlieb, fell into a terrible sadness. The young prince, however, had pursued the white doe, not losing sight of her, but unable to reach her. This pursuit had been going on for five hours, when suddenly the animal vanished like smoke. Only then did he realize that he was well ahead in the forest. He took his horn and blew it with all his might, but he listened carefully and heard only the echo that answered him. In this situation, and as night fell, he resolved to remain in the forest until the next morning, thinking that it would be impossible for him to find his way back.

He therefore dismounted, lit a fire at the foot of a tree and prepared to bivouac. He had already stretched out near his fire, as well as his animals, and he could only see in the ray of light projected by this fire, when he thought he heard a human voice complaining. He looked around, but saw no one. A second groan was heard: this one was certainly coming from above. Gottlieb raised his head, looked up and saw an old woman perched on top of a tree.

– Hoo! hoo! hoo! said the old woman; hoo! hoo! hoo! how cold I am! The young prince looked at her with astonishment, and although she looked more like an owl than a woman, he felt sorry for her.

– If you are so cold, mother,» he said, «come down and warm yourself.

– No,» said the old woman, «your animals would bite me. Then she repeated:

– Hou! hou! hou! I am freezing here.

– My animals do not harm anyone,» replied Gottlieb, «so do not fear them at all, and come and sit by my fire. But the old woman, who was a witch, said to him:

– No, I am too afraid, I will not come down, unless, however, you already want to touch the backs of your animals with the branch that I am going to throw to you, in which case I will come down. Gottlieb laughed, and as he saw no problem in doing what the old woman, whom he thought was crazy, asked him:

– Break your branch, send it to me, and I will touch the backs of my animals with it, he answered her.

He had not finished these words when the branch fell at his feet. He picked it up without defiance and

touched his animals with it, who, at this contact, remained completely immobile; they were turned into stone.

While Gottlieb looked with amazement at the prodigy that had just taken place, the old woman let herself slide along the trunk of the tree, and came from behind to touch the young prince with her wand, who was at once petrified like his animals. Then she dragged him and his five animals into a cave, where there were already many other people turned to stone by her curses.

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Several days passed, and the young princess, not seeing her husband return, became more and more sad. This happened, fortunately, just when the brother of the prince, the one who had taken to the East, returned to the kingdom. He had been looking for service, and when he didn't find any, he had been walking his animals and making them dance in the markets and fairs.

But finally, one day, as if inspired by heaven, he felt like going to look at the knife they had planted in a tree, and when he reached the tree, he saw that the blade of the knife was shiny on the side he was coming from and rusty on the side his brother had taken. Only it was only half rusted. He was frightened and said to himself:

– It must be that a great misfortune has befallen my brother; but perhaps I can still save him, since half the blade remained white.

He therefore immediately took the road to the west, without losing a minute, and when he arrived at the gate of the capital, the officer on guard at the gate asked him if he wished his wife to be informed of his arrival, the princess having been for some days in mortal anxiety, convinced that he had perished in the enchanted forest. The officer, indeed, believed to be dealing with the young prince himself, so great was the resemblance between the two brothers. Add to this the fact that, like the young prince, he was followed by a lion, a bear, a wolf, a fox and a hare.

The newcomer understood that it was, in all probability, a question of his brother; he thought that it was better to pass himself off as him, and that this error would probably contribute to saving Gottlieb. He therefore had himself accompanied and led to the palace, where he was received with great joy. The young princess, for her part, firmly believed that he was her husband and asked him why he had remained absent for so long.

– I was lost in the forest,» he answered, «and I have been until today without being able to find my way back.

In the evening he was taken to his brother's bedchamber and invited to lie down in the royal bed, but as he lay there he put a double-edged sword between himself and the young princess; she did not know what it meant, and dared not ask. For two days Wilfrid inquired about all that was said about the enchanted wood, and on the third he said:

– Decidedly, I must go back to the forest to hunt.

The old king and the young princess did all they could to dissuade him, but he persisted, and the next day he set out, followed by the same escort that had accompanied his brother. During the whole of the road, he chatted skilfully with the officer who commanded it, so that, although the officer thought he was talking to the young prince, he had told Wilfrid everything the latter wanted to know. When he arrived at the wood, he saw the white doe that his brother had seen, and, like his brother, he said to his escort:

– Stay there, I want to hunt this beautiful animal alone.

Guido Hammer

And he entered the forest, followed only by his animals, pursued the doe without being able to reach it, saw it faint at the moment when he thought he was forcing it, and, as night came, he found himself forced, like his brother, to sit in the woods. Having, like his brother, lit a fire, like him he heard, above his head, moaning.

– Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!» said a voice, «it's cold here!

He looked up and saw the old hag with the owl's eyes.

- If you are cold up there, good mother, » he said, « come down and get warm.
- I don't care, » replied the witch, « your animals would eat me,
- My beasts are not mean, they will not do anything to you; come down.
- I'll throw you a stick, she said; and, indeed, if you hit them with this stick, they won't do anything to me.

On hearing these words, the hunter showed some surprise and said:

- When I answer you for my beasts, that must be enough for you; come down, or else I will go and fetch you.
- Bah! » said the old woman, « come and fetch me; when you would, you could not.
- That's what we'll see, said the hunter; and, to begin with, I'll send you a bullet.
- I don't care about your bullets, said the witch; try it, and you'll see. The hunter laid her at gunpoint and sent a bullet at her.

But, as a witch, she was bulletproof!

- You are not very skillful! » said the witch, laughing.

And she threw her lead ball back at him.

Seeing this failure, the hunter, who so rarely missed his shot, had no doubt about the one he was dealing with. But he tried another way, and, reloading his gun, he slipped one of the silver buttons of his suit into the barrel, and, as the witch was not proof against silver bullets, he broke her thigh, so that the witch tumbled down the tree.

The hunter put his foot on her chest and said:

– Old rascal, if you do not tell me at once what you have done with my brother, I will take you with my hands and throw you into the fire.

She was afraid and asked for mercy.

– Where is my brother? » the hunter asked even more imperatively than the first time.

– Your brother is in a cave, » she answered; « he and his animals have turned to stone.

He forced the witch to lead him to the cave, which she did by hopping on her leg; and when they got there :

– Now, old witch, » he said, « you will not only call back to life my brother and his animals, but also all the people who are here petrified.

The witch, seeing that it was necessary to obey, took a wand and touched each stone with it, and the young prince and his animals rose, as well as a crowd of people, travelers, merchants, craftsmen, soldiers, who warmly thanked their liberator, and went away each one to his place.

When the two twins recognized each other, they threw themselves into each other's arms, rejoicing with all their hearts at having been so miraculously found. Then they seized the witch, and, so that she would not do to others what she had done to them, they threw her into the fire, where she was burned

like the evil magician that she was.

As soon as she had breathed her last, the enchanted forest disappeared like a vapor, and the two brothers could see not only the city but also the king's palace from where they stood. They immediately set off for the castle, and as they walked, they told each other about their adventures. Gottlieb told his brother how he had become the king's son-in-law and governor general of the whole kingdom.

When he had finished his story, his brother spoke in turn:

– I knew it well, he said, smiling; for when I entered the city everyone took me for you, and gave me the royal honors; not even your wife was mistaken, so that I had to sit at table beside her and sleep in her bed.

When the young prince heard this, jealousy seized him and blinded him to such an extent that he drew his sword and, with one blow, cut off his brother's head.

But as soon as this murder was committed, he threw himself on the decapitated body, pulling out his hair and giving the marks of the deepest despair. Then the bear, who, in the most serious circumstances, did not lose his presence of mind, approached him and said:

– Do not be distressed, master, everything can be repaired; the head is very cleanly cut and can resume. The hare knows the root of life with which we have glued yours back together, and he will certainly not ask for anything better than to do you the service of fetching it for you.

– Oh, my little hare! » said Gottlieb, clasping his hands together.

But the hare was already far away; he ran so fast that he could hardly be followed with his eyes. After twenty hours, he returned, so diligent had he been. The body was put upright, the head placed back on the neck, the root of life placed between the teeth, and the head recovered so completely, that the elder brother was still unaware of what had happened and thought he had fallen into a sleep which he attributed to the great fatigue he had taken.

But, as he was perfectly fresh and ready, he set off again at once, and two hours later they arrived in the vicinity of the town. Then Gottlieb said to his brother:

– You look just like me; you have royal clothes like me, your animals follow you like me. Let us enter the city each by an opposite door, and let us arrive at the same time at the royal castle. This proposal smiled at the elder; they thus separated. Arrived at the city, each one presented himself, as it was agreed, at the opposite door. Immediately the officer of guard set out, and, as there was one at the door where the young prince appeared, and another at that where his brother appeared, both presented themselves at the palace at the same time, announcing each the arrival of the young prince with his animals.

Hendrick Ambrosius Packx

– Oh, that is not possible, said the old king. How can my son-in-law be at the North Gate and the South Gate at the same time? The two gates are a league apart.

At this moment, and on opposite sides, the two brothers arrived. They dismounted in the courtyard, each on one side of the stoop, and went up together to the reception room.

– My faith, my daughter, said the old king to the princess, see which of the two is your husband; as for me, I lose myself there.

The young princess remained in a great perplexity, when, suddenly, she thought of the gifts which she had made to the animals. Behind Gottlieb were the lion with his emerald necklace, the bear with his diamond earrings, the wolf with his pearl bracelet, the fox and the hare with their rings, one of sapphire, the other of ruby. She extended her hand to Gottlieb and said:

– Here is my husband.

– It's true, Â Â» said the young prince, laughing.

And everyone sat down to eat.

The meal was merry, and when evening came, and Gottlieb accompanied his wife to the bedroom:

– Why did you put a double-edged sword between us during the last night,» the young princess asked him. I was very afraid at first, thinking that you wanted to kill me.

Then the young prince recognized how faithful his brother had been to him.

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