

## THE TRAVELLING COMPANION

Poor Johannes was so wretched, for his father was very ill and did not have long to live. There was no one but the two of them in the small living room; the lamp on the table had burnt low, and it was quite late in the evening.

‘You have been a good son, Johannes!’ his ailing father said, ‘The Good Lord will help you on your path through the world!’ and he gazed with serious mild eyes on him, took a very deep breath and died; it was as if he was asleep. But Johannes wept, now he had no one in the whole world, neither father nor mother, sister nor brother. Poor Johannes! He knelt down by the bed and kissed his dead father’s hand, cried so very bitterly, but finally his eyes closed and he fell asleep with his head against the hard bedpost.

Then he dreamt a strange dream: he saw how the sun and moon bowed down before him, and he saw his father hale and hearty once more and heard him laugh as he always did when he was really delighted. A beautiful girl, with a golden crown on her long, lovely hair, held out her hand to Johannes, and his father said, ‘do you see what a bride you have got? She is the most beautiful in all the world.’ Then he woke up, and all that was lovely had vanished, his father lay dead and cold in his bed, there was no one else there at all – poor Johannes!

The following week the dead man was buried; Johannes walked close behind the coffin, was no longer able to see the good father who had been so fond of him; he heard how earth was scattered onto the coffin below, now glimpsed the last corner of it, but with the next scoop of earth that too was gone; then it felt as if his heart would break, so wretched did he feel. Around him a hymn was being sung, it sounded so beautiful and tears came to Johannes’ eyes, he wept and that consoled him in his grief. The sun shone delightfully down on the green trees, as if it wanted to say: ‘Do not be so sad, Johannes! see how lovely the blue sky is; your father is now up there in heaven, praying to the Good Lord that all may go well for you!’

‘I will always be good!’ Johannes said, ‘for then I too will go to heaven to my father, and what a joy it will be when we see each other again! how much there will be that I can tell him, and he will once more show me so many things, teach me so much about all that is wonderful in heaven, just as he taught me here on earth. Oh, what a joy it will be!’

Johannes saw all this so clearly that he smiled at the thought, while the tears were still coursing down his cheeks. The small birds sat up in the chestnut trees and chirped ‘cheepcheep, cheepcheep!’, they were so delighted despite the fact that they too were at the funeral, but they knew that the dead man was now up in heaven, had wings far lovelier and larger than theirs, was now happy because he had been good while on earth, and all this delighted them. Johannes saw them fly off from the green trees far out into the world, and he felt such a strong urge to fly off with them. But first he carved a large wooden cross to place on his father’s grave, and when he took it there that evening the grave was decorated with sand and flowers; strangers had done this because all of them were so fond of the dear father who was now dead.

Early the following morning, Johannes packed his small bundle and in his belt hid his inheritance, which was 50 rix dollars and a few silver coins, with them he would set off into the world. First, however, he went to his father’s grave, recited the Lord’s Prayer, and said: ‘Goodbye, dear father! I will always be a good person, and so you may ask the Good Lord for things to go well for me!’

Out in the field where Johannes walked all the flowers stood there so fresh and lovely in the warm sunshine, and they nodded in the wind as if they wanted to say: ‘Welcome to nature! Isn’t it delightful

here?’ But Johannes turned round yet again, so as to see the old church where he had been christened as a small child, where every Sunday he had gone to church with his father and sung hymns; then, high up in one of the holes in the tower, he saw the church pixie standing there with his little red pointed cap, he was shading his eyes with one arm as the sun was blinding him. Johannes nodded goodbye to him, and the little pixie waved his red cap, placed his hand on his heart and kissed his fingers many times, to show him he wished him well, and wished him a really fine journey. Johannes thought about all the beautiful things he was now going to see in the wide, wonderful world, and he walked on and on, further than he had ever been before; he was completely unfamiliar with the towns he passed through, and the people he met, for now he was far from home among strangers.

The first night he had to spend in a haystack out in a field – he had no other bed. But that was quite perfect, it seemed to him, no king could be more comfortable. The whole field with the small river, the haystack and then the blue vault of the sky above him was such a lovely bedroom. The green grass with the small red and white flowers formed a carpet, the elder bushes and the wild hedgerows of roses were bouquets, and as a washbasin he had the entire river with its clear, refreshing water, where the reeds nodded and said both good evening and good morning. The moon was a huge night light, high up beneath the blue ceiling, and it did not set fire to the curtains; Johannes could sleep without a care, and he did so too, only waking up when the sun rose and all the small birds around him sang: ‘Good morning! good morning! Aren’t you up yet?’

The church bells called out, it was Sunday, people went to hear the vicar and Johannes went along with them, sang hymns and listened to God’s word – it was as if he was in his own church, the one where he had been christened, and had sung hymns with his father.

Out in the churchyard there were so many graves, with tall grass growing on some of them. Then Johannes thought of his father’s grave, which would certainly end up looking like these now that he could no longer weed and decorate it. He sat down and pulled up tufts of grass, raised wooden crosses that had fallen down, and laid wreaths that the wind had blown away from the graves back in their rightful places, thinking perhaps someone will do the same to my father’s grave now I can no longer do it myself!

Outside the lichgate there stood an old beggar, leaning on his crutch. Johannes gave him the silver coins he had and, happy and content, set out further into the wide world.

Towards evening, a terrible storm blew up, Johannes hurried to find shelter, but soon dark night had fallen; finally he reached a small church that lay all on its own on a knoll; fortunately the door was ajar, and he slipped inside, deciding to stay there until the foul weather had blown over.

‘I’ll sit down in a corner here!’ he said, ‘I’m rather tired and could do with some rest,’ and he sat down, folded his hands and said his evening prayers and, before he knew it, he was fast asleep dreaming, while the thunder and lightning went on outside.

When he woke up again, it was late at night, but the foul weather had passed, and the moon was shining down through the windows to him. On the middle of the church floor there stood an open coffin with a dead man in it, for the funeral had not yet taken place. Johannes was not the slightest bit afraid, for he had a clear conscience and knew that the dead do not do anything to anyone; it is live, evil people who cause harm to others. Two such live, wicked people were standing close to the dead man who had been placed here in the church before being buried – they wanted to do him harm, not to let him lie there in his coffin but throw him outside the church door, the poor dead man.

‘Why do you want to do this!’ Johannes asked, ‘it is an evil and wicked deed, let him sleep in Jesu’s name!’

‘Rubbish!’ the two nasty people said, ‘he’s cheated us! he owes us money and was unable to pay, and now he’s dead into the bargain, so we won’t get a penny of it, so we want to have our revenge – he’s to lie like a dog outside the church door!’

‘All I have is 50 rix dollars!’ Johannes said, ‘it is my entire inheritance, but I will gladly give it to you if you swear honestly to let the poor dead man rest in peace. I’ll manage somehow without the money; I have healthy strong limbs, and the Good Lord will always come to my aid!’

‘Oh yes,’ the horrible pair said, ‘if you’re prepared to pay his debt, we’ll leave him alone all right, you can be sure of that!’ and they took the money Johannes gave them, laughed loud and long at his goodness and went away; but Johannes arranged the body in the coffin once more, folded the corpse’s hands, took his leave and went happily on his way once more through the large forest.

Round about him, where the moon could shine in between the trees, he could see fine small elves playing away happily; they took no notice of him, they knew he was a good innocent human being, and it is only bad folk that are not allowed to see elves. Some of them were no bigger than a finger and had their blond hair set up with golden combs, they swung in pairs on the large dewdrops that lay on the leaves and the tall grass; sometimes the drop would run down, making them fall off among the long stems of grass, to the great glee of the other tiny creatures. It was so immensely amusing! They sang and Johannes recognised quite clearly all the lovely songs he had learnt as a small boy. Large, many-coloured spiders with silver crowns on their heads had to spin long suspension bridges and palaces from one hedge to the other, and wherever the fine dew fell on it, it made it look like gleaming glass in the bright moonlight. All this lasted until the sun rose. Then the small elves crept into the flower buds and the wind tugged at their bridges and castles, which flew off into the air like large cobwebs.

Johannes had emerged from the forest when he heard a man’s strong voice call out behind him: ‘Hello, comrade, where are you travelling to?’

‘I’m off into the great wide world!’ Johannes said. ‘I have neither father nor mother, am a poor fellow, but the Good Lord is sure to help me!’

‘I also want to be off into the great wide world!’ the stranger said. ‘Shall we keep each other company?’

‘Certainly!’ Johannes said, and so they set out together. They soon became extremely fond of each other, for they were both fine persons. Even so, Johannes noticed that the stranger was much cleverer than he was, he had been almost around the whole world and was able to tell him about all sorts of things.

The sun was already high in the sky when they sat down under a large tree to eat their lunch – at that very moment an old woman appeared. Oh, she was so old and walked bent double, leaning on a crutch, and on her back she had a pile of faggots that she had gathered for herself in the forest. Her apron had been pinned up, and Johannes could see three large bundles of ferns and willow twigs sticking out of it. As she passed close by them, her foot slipped, she fell down and gave a loud cry, for she had broken her leg, the poor old woman.

Johannes immediately wanted the two of them to carry her to her home, but the stranger undid his knapsack, took out a jar and said that he had an ointment with him that could immediately completely heal her leg so that she could walk home herself, as if she had never broken her leg at all. But in return he also wanted her to give them the three bundles she had in her apron.

‘That’s a generous payment!’ the old woman said with a strange nod of her head; she was not all that keen about parting with them, but then it wasn’t very pleasant either to lie there with a broken leg; so she gave him the bundles, and as soon as he had rubbed in the ointment on her leg, the old woman

got up and could walk much better than before. That was brought about by the ointment. But it couldn't be bought at a pharmacy either.

'What do you intend to do with them?' Johannes now asked his travelling companion.

'They are three nice bunches!' he said, 'I just happen to like them for I'm an odd character!'

They walked on quite a long way.

'Oh, how it's clouding over!' Johannes said, pointing straight ahead; 'those clouds look terribly heavy!'

'No,' his travelling companion said, 'those aren't clouds, those are mountains. The lovely high mountains where you can get up far above the clouds into the fresh air! It's wonderful, believe me! Tomorrow we will be that far out in the world!'

It was not as close as it looked, they spent a whole day walking before they came to the mountains, where the black forests grew straight up into the sky, and where there were rocks as large as an entire town; it would really be a difficult task to get right over them, so Johannes and his travelling companion found an inn where they could rest and gather strength for their march the following day.

Down in the large taproom of the inn there were so many people gathered, for there was a man there giving a puppet theatre performance; he had just set up his small theatre, and people were sitting round him to see the play, but right at the front an old, fat butcher had sat down, and that was the best place to take; his huge fierce dog – oh, it looked so ferocious – sat beside him and was wide-eyed, like all the rest of them.

Now the play started, and it was a fine play with a king and a queen who sat on the loveliest of thrones, had golden crowns on their heads and long trains to their robes, for they were able to afford it. The finest wooden puppets with glass eyes and great handlebar moustaches stood at all the doors, and opened them so that fresh air could be let into the room! It was really a fine play, and it wasn't sad at all, but just as the queen got up and went across the floor – heaven only knows what the huge fierce dog was thinking of, but since the butcher wasn't holding onto him, he leapt right into the theatre and seized the queen by her slender waist so it went 'knick-knack!' It was quite terrible!

The poor man putting on the whole play was so surprised and so sad about his queen, for it was the finest puppet of all those he had, and now the nasty dog had bitten off her head; but when people left later, the stranger – the man who had come with Johannes – said that he was sure he could repair her; and then he took out his jar and smeared the puppet with the ointment he had used to help the old woman when she had broken her leg. As soon as he had done so, the puppet was immediately whole again, indeed, it could even move all its own limbs, there was no longer any need to pull the strings – the doll was like a living human being, except for the fact that it could not speak. The man who had the small puppet theatre was so delighted; now he no longer needed to hold onto the puppet – it could dance all by itself. None of the others could do that.

When it later became night, and everyone at the inn had gone to bed, there was one person left who gave such terribly deep sighs and kept on doing this so long that they all got up to see who it could be. The man who had put on the play went over to his small theatre, for the sighing was coming from somewhere inside it. All the wooden puppets lay there together, the king and all his guardsmen, and they were the ones who were sighing so pitifully and staring with their large glass eyes, for they so much wanted to be smeared with the same ointment as the queen, so that they could move all by themselves. The queen knelt down and raised her golden crown in the air, and implored them: 'just take this, but smear in my husband and my courtiers!' And then the poor man who owned the theatre and all the puppets couldn't help weeping, for he felt really sorry for them; he immediately promised the travelling companion that he would give him all the money he got for the play the following evening if

he would smear in the ointment on four or five of his finest marionettes; but the travelling companion said that all he wanted for doing so was the great sword he had by his side, and when he got this, he smeared the ointment on six puppets, who immediately started to dance and it was so fine that all the girls – the human girls who were watching – also started to dance. The coachman and the kitchen girl danced, the servant and the maid, all the strangers, and the fire shovel and the fire tongs, but these two fell down when making their first leap – oh yes, it was a merry night.

The next morning, Johannes and his travelling companion left them all and set off up the slopes of the high mountains and through the large pine forests. They got so high up that the church towers far below them finally looked like small red berries, down in all that greenness, and they could see so far – many, many miles where they had never been! Johannes had never seen so much of the beautiful world at one go before, and the sun shone so warmly in the fresh blue air. He could also hear the hunters blowing their horns in amongst the mountains, so beautifully that it brought tears of joy to his eyes, and he could not help saying: ‘Oh dear Lord God! I could kiss you, because you are so good to all of us, and have given us all the beauty there is in the world!’

The travelling companion also stood there with folded hands, and gazed out over the forest and the towns, in the warm sunshine. Suddenly, there was such a wonderful sound above their heads, they looked up into the sky: a large white swan was hovering in the air; it was so beautiful, and sang as they had never heard any bird sing before; but its song grew weaker and weaker, it bowed its head and slowly sank down at their feet, where it lay dead, the beautiful bird.

‘Two such beautiful wings,’ the travelling companion said, ‘so white and large as those that bird has, are worth a great deal of money – I will take them with me! Can you see what a good thing it was I got a sword!’ and with one blow he cut off both the dead swan’s wings, since he wanted to keep them.

They now journeyed many, many miles over the mountains, until finally ahead of them they saw a large city, with more than a hundred towers that gleamed like silver in the sunlight; in the middle of the city there was a magnificent marble palace roofed with red gold, and there the king lived.

Johannes and his travelling companion did not want to enter the city at once, so they stayed in the inn outside it to make themselves presentable, for they wanted to look good when they were out on the street. Their host told them that the king was such a good man, one who never harmed anybody in any way, but that his daughter – God preserve us! – was a nasty princess. She was ever so lovely, no one could rival her for beauty, but what good was that – she was a nasty, wicked witch who was the cause of so many handsome princes losing their lives. She had given everyone permission to propose to her; anyone could come, prince or pauper, it was all the same to her; he only had to guess three things she asked him; if he could that, she would marry him and he would be king of the whole country when her father died, but if he couldn’t guess those three things, she had him hanged or beheaded – so nasty and wicked was this lovely princess. Her father, the old king, was very sad about this, but he could not forbid her to be so wicked, for he had once said that he would never have the slightest thing to do with her sweethearts, she could do exactly as she pleased. Every time a prince came to guess so as to win the princess’s hand, he couldn’t find the right answers, and then he was hanged or beheaded; for they had warned him in time – he could refrain from proposing. The old king was so grieved at all the sorrow and misery that he spent a whole day a year on his knees, with all his soldiers, and prayed that the princess might become good, but she refused to do so. The old women who drank spirits coloured them pitch-black before drinking them – so much did they grieve, and it was impossible for them to do more.

‘The abominable princess!’ Johannes said, ‘she really ought to be whipped, it would do her good. If only I was the old king – I’d give her a good thrashing!’ At that moment, they heard people outside shout hurrah!

The princess was passing, and she really was so lovely that everyone forgot how wicked she was, and therefore they shouted hurrah. Twelve beautiful maidens, all in white silk dresses and with a golden tulip in their hand, rode on jet-black horses beside her; the princess herself was on a milk-white steed adorned with diamonds and rubies, her riding costume was of pure gold, and the whip she carried in her hand looked as if it was a sunbeam; the gold crown on her head was like small stars from the night sky, and her cloak had been sewn from thousands of lovely butterfly wings. Despite all this, she was much more beautiful than her clothes were.

When Johannes caught sight of her, he went as red in the face as a drop of blood, and he could hardly say a single word; the princess looked exactly like the lovely girl with the golden crown he had dreamt about the night his father died. He found her so beautiful, and was unable to stop himself from being extremely fond of her. It certainly can't be true, he said, that she was a wicked witch who had people hanged or beheaded when they could not guess what she demanded of them. 'And anyone is allowed to propose to her, even the poorest beggar, I really must go up to the palace! for I simply can't stop myself from doing so!'

Everyone said that he mustn't do that, he was sure to end up like all the rest. His travelling companion also advised him against it, but Johannes felt everything would go well, brushed his shoes and jacket, washed his face and hands, combed his lovely blond hair, and went out alone into the city and up to the palace.

'Come in!' the old king said when Johannes knocked on the door. Johannes opened the door, and the old king, in dressing gown and embroidered slippers, came to meet him. His gold crown was on his head, he had the sceptre in one hand and the golden orb in the other. 'Wait a moment!' he said, and stuffed the orb under one arm so he could hold out his hand to Johannes. But as soon as he heard that Johannes was a suitor he started to cry so hard that both sceptre and orb fell onto the floor, and he had to dry his eyes on his dressing gown. The poor old king!

'Don't do it!' he said, 'it'll be the worse for you, just like all the others. Take a look at this!' and he led Johannes out into the princess's pleasure garden – what a terrible sight it was! Up in every tree there hung three, four princes who had proposed to the princess but been unable to guess the things she had asked him. Every time the wind blew, the bones rattled, and so frightened all the small birds that they would never enter the garden again; all the flowers were tied up with human bones, and in the flower pots there were grinning skulls. It was truly a garden for a princess.

'Here you can see for yourself!' the old king said, 'it will go with you like all the others you can see here, so don't do it; you will make me so unhappy, because it upsets me so much!'

Johannes kissed the good old king's hand, and said that it would all turn out all right, for he was so fond of the lovely princess. At that moment, the princess herself arrived with all her ladies in waiting, riding into the palace courtyard, so they went out and said hello to her. She was so nice, held out her hand to Johannes, and he was even fonder of her than before, she certainly couldn't be the nasty wicked witch everyone said she was. They went up into the great hall, and the small pages brought out jam and small biscuits for them, but the old king was so sad that he was unable to eat anything, and the biscuits were too hard for him.

It was then decided that Johannes was to come again to the palace the following morning. Then the judges and entire council would be assembled to hear how the guessing went. If he succeeded the first time, he was to come twice more, but so far no one had managed to guess the first question and had therefore lost his life.

Johannes was not at all worried about how things would go for him, he was highly satisfied and all his thoughts were of the princess. He was certain that the Good Lord would help him but had no idea

how this might take place – and he didn't want to think about it either. He danced along the road when he returned to the inn, where the travelling companion was waiting for him.

Johannes couldn't stop talking about how pleasant the princess had been towards him, and how lovely she was; he was already longing for the next day to arrive when he was to enter the palace and try his luck at guessing.

But the travelling companion shook his head and was extremely sad. 'I am so fond of you!' he said, 'we could have been together for a long time yet, and now I am already going to lose you! you poor fellow, dear Johannes, I would like to cry, but I do not want to disturb your happiness on what may be the last evening we are together. We will be merry, really merry – tomorrow, when you are gone, I will allow myself to weep!'

Everybody in the city had immediately been told that a new suitor had come for the princess, so there was a great deal of sadness. The theatre was closed down, all the women confectioners tied black crepe round their almond pigs, the king and the clergymen were on their knees in the church, there was such great sadness, for things could not go better for Johannes than they had done for all the other suitors.

Later that evening, the travelling companion made a great bowl of punch, and he said to Johannes that now they were to be very merry and drink to the health of the princess. But when Johannes had drunk two glasses, he felt so sleepy, it was impossible for him to keep his eyes open, he had to fall asleep. The travelling companion lifted him gently out of the chair and laid him in his bed, and when it was really dark, he took the two large wings he had cut off the swan, fixed them firmly on his shoulders, placed in his pocket the largest bundle he had got from the old woman who had fallen down and broken her leg, opened the window and flew out over the city, straight to the palace, where he sat in a nook up under the window that led to the princess's bedroom.

It was very quiet in the whole city; now the clock struck a quarter to twelve, the window was opened, and the princess flew in a large white cloak and with long black wings out over the city, out to a large mountain; but the travelling companion made himself invisible, so that she couldn't see him at all, flew after her, and whipped the princess with his bundle so hard that blood spurted where he had struck her. Oh, at what speed they flew through the air, the wind caught her cloak, which spread out on all sides, just like the sail of a large ship, and the moon shone through it.

'How it's hailing! how it's hailing!' the princess said at every stroke she received from the bundle, and that she well deserved. Finally, she arrived at the mountain and knocked. It rolled just like thunder when the mountain opened up, and the princess entered, as did the travelling companion, for no one could see him, he was invisible. They went along a large, long passage where the walls glistened in a very odd way – there were more than a thousand gleaming spiders running up and down the wall and they gleamed like fire. They now came to a great hall, made of silver and gold, flowers as large as sunflowers, red and blue, shone from the walls; but no one could pick the flowers, for their stalks were horrible, poisonous snakes, and the flowers were fire coming out of their mouths. The entire ceiling was studded with gleaming glow-worms and sky-blue bats that beat their thin wings – it all looked very strange. In the middle of the hall was a throne that was borne by four horse skeletons that had harnesses made by the red fire-spiders, the throne itself was of milk-white glass, and the cushions to sit on were small black mice that bit each other's tail. Above it was a baldachin of pink gossamer, studded with the loveliest small green flies that gleamed like precious stones. In the middle of throne sat an old troll, with a crown on his ugly head and a sceptre in his hand. He kissed the princess on her forehead, let her sit next to him on the precious throne, and now the music began. Large black grasshoppers played on jew's harps, and the owl beat itself on the belly since it didn't have a drum. It was a queer concert.

Small black pixies, with jack-o’lanterns on their caps, danced round the hall. No one could see the travelling companion, he had placed himself behind the throne and he heard and saw everything. The courtiers, who now also entered, were so noble and fine, but anyone capable of really seeing could notice what was the matter with them. For they were nothing but broomsticks with cabbages on top that the troll had brought alive by magic and given them embroidered clothes. But that didn’t matter in the slightest – they were only used for show.

After there had been dancing for a while, the princess told the troll that she had got a new suitor, and she asked him what she should think up to ask him the following morning when he came up to the palace.

‘Listen!’ the troll said, ‘I’ll tell you something! Take something that’s very easy, for then he simply won’t be able to think of it. Just think of one of your shoes. He won’t guess that. Then have him beheaded, but don’t forget when you come out to me again to bring me his eyes, for I want to eat them!’

The princess gave a deep curtsey, and promised not to forget the eyes. The troll then opened up the mountain, and she flew home again, but the travelling companion flew alongside her too, and whipped her so hard with the bundle that she sighed deeply about the hailstorm and hurried home as fast as she could, through the window into her bedroom; but the travelling companion returned to the inn, where Johannes was still asleep, took off his wings and also lay down on the bed, for he was now pretty tired.

Early the next morning, when Johannes woke up, his travelling companion also got up and told him that he had had a very strange dream that night about the princess and her shoe, and therefore he asked him to ask the princess if she hadn’t been thinking about her shoe! For that of course was what he had heard from the troll in the mountain, but he didn’t want to tell Johannes anything about that, just urged him to ask if she had been thinking about her shoe.

‘I can just as well ask that as anything else,’ Johannes said, ‘it may possibly be perfectly true what you have dreamt, for I believe always that the Good Lord is sure to help me! But I will even so say goodbye, for if I guess wrongly, I will never get to see you again!’

Then they kissed each other, and Johannes entered the city and went up to the palace. The whole hall was completely full of people, the judges sat in their armchairs, and had eiderdown pillows behind their heads, for they had so much to think about. The old king stood up and dried his eyes on a white handkerchief. Now the princess entered, she was even lovelier than the day before, and she greeted everyone so sweetly, but to Johannes she held out her hand and said: ‘Good morning, you there!’

Now Johannes was to guess what she had been thinking about. Heavens, how friendly her gaze on him was, but on hearing the one word ‘shoe’ she turned as pale as a ghost and her whole body shook, but that didn’t help her in the least, for he had guessed correctly!

Oh how glad the king was! He turned somersaults with a vengeance, and everyone clapped their hands for him and for Johannes, who now had guessed correctly the first time.

The travelling companion was also delighted when he heard how well everything had gone; but Johannes joined his hands and thanked the Dear Lord, who was sure to help him again the two times that were still to come. He was already to guess the following day once more.

That evening passed like the former one. When Johannes was asleep, the travelling companion flew after the princess out to the mountain, and he whipped her even harder than the last time, for now he had taken two bundles with him; no one could see him, and he heard everything. The princess was to think of her glove, and this he told Johannes as if it had been a dream; so Johannes was able to guess correctly, and there was much joy at the palace. The whole court turned somersaults, just as they had seen the king do the first time; but the princess lay on the sofa and refused to say a single word. Now it



all depended on whether Johannes could guess correctly a third time. If everything went well, he would gain the beautiful princess and inherit the entire kingdom when the old king died; if he guessed wrongly, he would lose his life, and the troll would eat his lovely blue eyes.

The evening before, Johannes went to bed early, said his evening prayers, and slept peacefully; but the travelling companion fixed the wings to his back, buckled on the sword and took all three bundles with him, and then flew to the palace.

It was a pitch-black night, there was such a storm that the tiles flew off the house roofs, and the trees in the garden in which the skeletons hung swayed like reeds at every gust; there was lightning every second, and thunder rolled as if it was one great clap that lasted the whole night. Now the window opened, and the princess flew out; she was as pale as a corpse, but she laughed at the bad weather, thought it wasn't wild enough, her white cloak whirled around in the air like a large ship's sail, but the travelling companion whipped her with his three bundles so that her blood dripped down onto the ground and she was finally hardly able to fly any longer. At last, though, she reached the mountain.

'There's a hailstorm and a thunderstorm both at once,' she said, 'I've never been out in weather like this.'

'One can sometimes have too much of a good thing,' the troll said. She now told him that Johannes had also guessed correctly a second time; if he did the same the next day, he would have won, and she would never come out to the mountain again, never be able to do any more magic – so she was very sad.' He won't be able to guess!' the troll said, 'I'll think of something he's never thought of! or else he must be a greater magician than I am. But now we must be merry!' and he took the princess by both hands and they danced round with all the small pixies and jack-o'-lanterns that were in the room; the red spiders leaped just as merrily up and down the wall – it looked as if the fire-flowers were sparkling. The owl beat the drum, the crickets chirped and the black grasshoppers played on jew's harps. It was a merry ball!

When they had danced long enough, the princess had to leave for home, for otherwise she would be missed at the palace; the troll said that he would accompany her, so they would have some more time together still.

They flew off into the terrible weather, and the travelling companion wore out his three bundles on their backs; the troll had never been out in such a hailstorm before. Outside the palace he said goodbye to the princess, and at the same moment he whispered to her: 'Think of my head.' But the travelling companion just managed to hear it, and at the same moment that the princess slipped through the window into her bedroom, and the troll was about to turn back, he seized him by his long black beard, and cut off his ugly troll's head with his sword right at the troll's shoulders, so that the troll didn't even get to see it; he threw his body into the lake to the fishes, but he only dipped the head in the water and then wrapped it in his silk handkerchief, took it home with him to the inn, and lay down to sleep.

The next morning he gave Johannes the handkerchief, but said that he was not to untie it before the princess asked what it was she had been thinking about.

There were so many people in the great hall at the castle that they stood as close to each other as radishes tied in a bunch. The council sat in their chairs with their soft head-pillows, and the old king had new clothes on, his golden crown and sceptre had been polished so everything looked fine, but the princess was very pale and was wearing a jet-black dress, just as if she was going to a funeral.

'What have I been thinking of?' she said to Johannes, and immediately he untied the handkerchief and was himself scared at seeing the ugly troll's head. Everyone there gave a shudder, for it was a horrible sight, but the princess sat there like a stone statue and was unable to say a single word; finally

she rose and gave Johannes her hand, for he had guessed correctly after all; she did not look at anyone around her, but gave a deep sigh: ‘Now you are my master! This evening we will hold a wedding!’

‘That’s what I like to hear!’ the old king said, ‘that’s the way things should be!’ Everyone shouted hurrah, the changing of the guard played music in the streets, the bells rang, and the women confectioners took the black crepe off their almond pigs, for now everyone was happy. Three whole-roasted oxen, stuffed with ducks and chickens, were placed in the middle of the market square and everyone was welcome to cut a slice; in the fountains the finest wine shot up, and if one bought a penny pretzel from the baker, one got six large buns extra free of charge – and they were buns with raisins in.

In the evening the whole city was lit up, and the soldiers fired off cannons, and the boys let off exploding fireworks, people ate and drank, clinked glasses and leapt around at the palace; all the fine gentlemen and lovely ladies danced with each other – one could hear them singing a long way off:

*See the lovely girls now coming  
who would have a lively dance,  
they call for a march with drumming,  
lovely girls, it’s time to prance.  
Dance and stamp just as you choose,  
till the soles fall off your shoes!*

But the princess was still a witch, and wasn’t the least fond of Johannes; the travelling companion remembered that, so he gave Johannes three feathers from the swan’s wings, along with a small phial with some drops in it, said to him that he was to have a large tub placed beside the wedding bed, full of water, and when the princess wanted to get into bed, he was to give her a slight push so she fell into the water, where he was to duck her three times after first having thrown the feathers and emptied the phial in it; then she would be freed from her magic spell and come to grow so very fond of him.

Johannes did everything the travelling companion advised him to; the princess screamed very loudly when he ducked her under the water, and squirmed beneath his hands like a large, jet-black swan with glittering eyes; when she came up to the surface for the second time, the swan was white, with just a single black ring round its neck. Johannes prayed devoutly to the Good Lord, and then let the water wash over the bird for a third time, and at once it was transformed into the most beautiful princess. She was even more beautiful than before, and thanked him with tears in her lovely eyes, for now he had broken the spell.

The next morning the old king came with the entire royal household, and the congratulations lasted most of the day; last of all came the travelling companion, he had his stick in his hand and his knapsack on his back. Johannes kissed him many times over, said he must not leave but stay with him, for he was the cause of all his good fortune. But the travelling companion shook his head and said in a gentle, friendly way: ‘No, now my time is over. I have paid my debt. Do you recall the dead man the wicked people wished to harm. You gave them everything you owned so that he could rest in peace in his grave. I am that dead man!’

At that very instant, he was gone! –

The wedding lasted a whole month, Johannes and the princess were so fond of each other, and the old king lived on for many happy days and let their tiny children ride a cockhorse on his knee and play with his sceptre; but Johannes was king of the entire kingdom.

