

*THE GOBLIN PONY*

‘DON’T stir from the fireplace to-night,’ said old Peggy, ‘for the wind is blowing so violently that the house shakes ; besides, this is Hallow-e’en, when the witches are abroad, and the goblins, who are their servants, are wandering about in all sorts of disguises, doing harm to the children of men.’

‘Why should I stay here?’ said the eldest of the young people. ‘No, I must go and see what the daughter of old Jacob, the rope-maker, is doing. She wouldn’t close her blue eyes all night if I didn’t visit her father before the moon had gone down.’

‘I must go and catch lobsters and crabs,’ said the second, ‘and not all the witches and goblins in the world shall hinder me.’

So they all determined to go on their business or pleasure, and scorned the wise advice of old Peggy. Only the youngest child hesitated a minute, when she said to him, ‘You stay here, my little Richard, and I will tell you beautiful stories.’

But he wanted to pick a bunch of wild thyme and some blackberries by moonlight, and ran out after the others. When they got outside the house they said: ‘The old woman talks of wind and storm, but never was the weather finer or the sky more clear ; see how majestically the moon stalks through the transparent clouds !’

Then all of a sudden they noticed a little black pony close beside them.

'Oh, ho!' they said, 'that is old Valentine's pony; it must have escaped from its stable, and is going down to drink at the horse-pond.'

'My pretty little pony,' said the eldest, patting the creature with his hand, 'you mustn't run too far; I'll take you to the pond myself.'

With these words he jumped on the pony's back and was quickly followed by his second brother, then by the third, and so on, till at last they were all astride the little



beast, down to the small Richard, who didn't like to be left behind.

On the way to the pond they met several of their companions, and they invited them all to mount the pony, which they did, and the little creature did not seem to mind the extra weight, but trotted merrily along.

The quicker it trotted the more the young people enjoyed the fun; they dug their heels into the pony's sides and called out, 'Gallop, little horse, you have never had such brave riders on your back before!'

In the meantime the wind had risen again, and the waves began to howl; but the pony did not seem to mind the noise, and instead of going to the pond, cantered gaily towards the sea-shore.

Richard began to regret his thyme and blackberries, and the eldest brother seized the pony by the mane and tried to make it turn round, for he remembered the blue eyes of Jacob the rope-maker's daughter. But he tugged and pulled in vain, for the pony galloped straight on into the sea, till the waves met its forefeet. As soon as it felt the water it neighed lustily and capered about with glee, advancing quickly into the foaming billows. When the waves had covered the children's legs they repented their careless behaviour, and cried out: 'The cursed little black pony is bewitched. If we had only listened to old Peggy's advice we shouldn't have been lost.'

The further the pony advanced, the higher rose the sea; at last the waves covered the children's heads and they were all drowned.

Towards morning old Peggy went out, for she was anxious about the fate of her grandchildren. She sought them high and low, but could not find them anywhere. She asked all the neighbours if they had seen the children, but no one knew anything about them, except that the eldest had not been with the blue-eyed daughter of Jacob the rope-maker.

As she was going home, bowed with grief, she saw a little black pony coming towards her, springing and curveting in every direction. When it got quite near her it neighed loudly, and galloped past her so quickly that in a moment it was out of her sight.

[From the French, *Kletke*.]