

*THE LITTLE GRAY MAN*

A NUN, a countryman, and a blacksmith were once wandering through the world together. One day they lost their way in a thick, dark forest, and were thankful when they saw, in the distance, the walls of a house, where they hoped they might obtain refuge for the night. When they got close to the house they found that it was an old deserted castle, fast falling into ruins, but with some of the rooms in it still habitable. As they were homeless they determined to take up their abode in the castle, and they arranged that one of them should always stay at home and keep house, while the other two went out into the world to seek their fortunes.

The lot of remaining at home fell first to the nun, and when the countryman and the blacksmith had gone out into the wood, she set to work, tidied up the house, and prepared all the food for the day. As her companions did not come home for their mid-day meal, she ate up her own portion and put the rest in the oven to keep warm. Just as she was sitting down to sew, the door opened and a little gray man came in, and, standing before her, said: 'Oh! how cold I am!'

The nun was very sorry for him, and said at once: 'Sit down by the fire and warm yourself.'

The little man did as he was told, and soon called out: 'Oh! how hungry I am!'

The nun answered: 'There is food in the oven, help yourself.'

The little man did not need to be told twice, for he set to work and ate up everything with the greatest possible despatch. When the nun saw this she was very angry, and scolded the dwarf because he had left nothing for her companions.

The little man resented her words, and flew into such a passion that he seized the nun, beat her, and threw her first against one wall and then against the other. When he had nearly killed her he left her lying on the floor, and hastily walked out of the house.

In the evening the countryman and the blacksmith returned home, and when they found, on demanding their dinner, that there was nothing left for them, they reproached the nun bitterly, and refused to believe her when she tried to tell them what had happened.

The next day the countryman asked to be left in charge of the house, and promised that, if he remained at home, no one should go hungry to bed. So the other two went out into the forest, and the countryman having prepared the food for the day, ate up his own portion, and put the rest in the oven. Just as he had finished clearing away, the door opened and the little gray man walked in, and this time he had two heads. He shook and trembled as before, and exclaimed: 'Oh! how cold I am.'

The countryman, who was frightened out of his wits, begged him to draw near the fire and warm himself.

Soon after the dwarf looked greedily round, and said: 'Oh! how hungry I am!'

'There is food in the oven, so you can eat,' replied the countryman.

Then the little man fell to with both his heads, and soon finished the last morsel.

When the countryman scolded him for this proceeding he treated him exactly as he had done the nun, and left the poor fellow more dead than alive.'

Now when the blacksmith came home with the nun



"HE DEMANDED MORE!"

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in the evening, and found nothing for supper, he flew into a passion; and swore that he would stay at home the following day, and that no one should go supperless to bed.

When day dawned the countryman and the nun set out into the wood, and the blacksmith prepared all the food for the day as the others had done. Again the gray dwarf entered the house without knocking, and this time he had three heads. When he complained of cold, the blacksmith told him to sit near the fire; and when he said he was hungry, the blacksmith put some food on a plate and gave it to him. The dwarf made short work of what was provided for him, and then, looking greedily round with his six eyes, he demanded more. When the blacksmith refused to give him another morsel, he flew into a terrible rage, and proceeded to treat him in the same way as he had treated his companions.

But the blacksmith was a match for him, for he seized a huge hammer and struck off two of the dwarf's heads with it. The little man yelled with pain and rage, and hastily fled from the house. The blacksmith ran after him, and pursued him for a long way; but at last they came to an iron door, and through it the little creature vanished. The door shut behind him, and the blacksmith had to give up the pursuit and return home. He found that the nun and the countryman had come back in the meantime, and they were much delighted when he placed some food before them, and showed them the two heads he had struck off with his hammer. The three companions determined there and then to free themselves from the power of the gray dwarf, and the very next day they set to work to find him.

They had to walk a long way, and to search for many hours, before they found the iron door through which the dwarf had disappeared; and when they had found it they had the greatest difficulty in opening it. When at last they succeeded in forcing the lock, they entered a large hall,

in which sat a young and lovely girl, working at a table. The moment she saw the nun, the blacksmith, and the countryman, she fell at their feet, thanking them with tears in her eyes for having set her free. She told them that she was a king's daughter, who had been shut up in the castle by a mighty magician. The day before, just about noon, she had suddenly felt the magic power over her disappear, and ever since that moment she had eagerly awaited the arrival of her deliverers. She went on to say that there was yet another princess shut up in the castle, who had also fallen under the might of the magician.

They wandered through many halls and rooms till at last they found the second princess, who was quite as grateful as the first, and thanked the three companions most warmly for having set her free.

Then the princesses told their rescuers that a great treasure lay hidden in the cellars of the castle, but that it was carefully guarded by a fierce and terrible dog.

Nothing daunted, they all went down below at once, and found the fierce animal mounting guard over the treasure as the princesses had said. But one blow from the blacksmith's hammer soon made an end of the monster, and they found themselves in a vaulted chamber full of gold and silver and precious stones. Beside the treasure stood a young and handsome man, who advanced to meet them, and thanked the nun, the blacksmith, and the countryman, for having freed him from the magic spell he was under. He told them that he was a king's son, who had been banished to this castle by a wicked magician, and that he had been changed into the three-headed dwarf. When he had lost two of his heads the magic power over the two princesses had been removed, and when the blacksmith had killed the horrible dog, then he too had been set free.

To show his gratitude he begged the three companions to divide the treasure between them, which they did ;

but there was so much of it that it took a very long time.

The princesses, too, were so grateful to their rescuers, that one married the blacksmith, and the other the countryman.

Then the prince claimed the nun as his bride, and they all lived happily together till they died.

[From the German. *Kletke.*]