The Riddle

Once upon a time there was a king's son who felt like traveling around the world and took no one with him but a faithful servant. One day he came into a great forest, and when evening came, he could find no inn and did not know where he should spend the night. Then he saw a girl who was going toward a little house, and when he came nearer, he saw that the girl was young and beautiful. He spoke to her and said, "Dear child, can I and my servant find shelter in the little house for the night?" "Oh yes," said the girl in a sad voice, "you can indeed, but I advise you not to; do not go in." "Why should I not?" asked the king's son. The girl sighed and said, "My stepmother practices evil arts; she does not mean well by strangers." Then he realized that he had come to the house of a witch, but because it grew dark, and he could go no further, and was not afraid, he entered. The old woman sat in an armchair by the fire and looked at the strangers with her red eyes. "Good evening," she croaked, and acted quite friendly, "sit down and rest yourselves." She blew on the coals, by which she was cooking something in a little pot. The daughter warned the two to be careful, to eat nothing and drink nothing, for the old woman brewed evil drinks. They slept quietly until early morning. When they were getting ready to depart and the king's son was already on horseback, the old woman said, "Wait a moment, I want to offer you a farewell drink first." While she fetched it, the king's son rode away, and the servant, who had to tighten his saddle, was still alone when the evil witch came with the drink. "Bring this to your master," she said, but at that moment the glass shattered and the poison splashed onto the horse, and was so strong that the animal immediately fell down dead. The servant ran after his master and told him what had happened, but did not want to leave the saddle behind and ran back to get it. But when he came to the dead horse, a raven was already sitting on it and eating from it. "Who knows if we will find anything better today," said the servant, killed the raven and took it with him. Now they traveled on through the forest all day, but could not get out. At nightfall they found an inn and went in. The servant gave the innkeeper the raven, which he was to prepare for supper. But they had stumbled into a murderers' den, and in the darkness twelve murderers came and wanted to kill and rob the strangers. But before they set to work, they sat down at the table and the innkeeper and the witch sat down with them, and they ate together a bowl of soup into which the raven's flesh had been chopped. But scarcely had they swallowed a few mouthfuls when they all fell down dead, for the poison from the horseflesh had communicated itself to the raven. Now no one was left in the house but the innkeeper's daughter, who meant well and had taken no part in the wicked deeds. She opened all the doors to

the stranger and showed him the accumulated treasures. But the king's son said she should keep everything, he wanted none of it, and rode on with his servant.

After they had traveled around for a long time, they came to a city where there was a beautiful but arrogant king's daughter, who had announced that whoever posed her a riddle that she could not guess should become her husband: but if she guessed it, he would have to have his head cut off. She had three days to think about it, but she was so clever that she always guessed the riddles posed before the appointed time. Already nine had perished in this way when the king's son arrived and, dazzled by her great beauty, was willing to risk his life on it. Then he stepped before her and gave her his riddle, "What is it," he said, "one struck none and yet struck twelve." She did not know what that was, she pondered and pondered, but could not figure it out: she opened her riddle books, but it was not in them: in short, her wisdom was at an end. Since she did not know how to help herself, she ordered her maid to creep into the gentleman's bedchamber, there she should listen to his dreams, and thought perhaps he spoke in his sleep and betrayed the riddle. But the clever servant had lain down in bed instead of his master, and when the maid came near, he tore the cloak from her with which she had wrapped herself, and chased her out with rods. On the second night the king's daughter sent her chambermaid, who was to see if she had better luck with listening, but the servant also took her cloak away and chased her out with rods. Now the master thought himself safe for the third night and lay down in his bed, then the king's daughter herself came, had put on a mist-gray cloak and sat down beside him. And when she thought he was asleep and dreaming, she spoke to him and hoped he would answer in his dream, as many do: but he was awake and understood and heard everything very well. Then she asked, "One struck none, what is that?" He answered, "A raven that ate from a dead and poisoned horse and died of it." She asked further, "And yet struck twelve, what is that?" "Those are twelve murderers who ate the raven and died of it."
[130] When she knew the riddle, she wanted to slip away, but he held her cloak fast so that she had to leave it behind. The next morning the king's daughter announced that she had guessed the riddle, and had the twelve judges brought and solved it before them. But the young man asked for a hearing, and said, "She crept to me in the night and questioned me, for otherwise she would not have guessed it." The judges said, "Bring us a token." Then the three cloaks were brought by the servant, and when the judges beheld the mist-gray one that the king's daughter was accustomed to wear, they said, "Have the cloak embroidered with gold and silver, then it shall be your wedding cloak."