

The Snow Queen

A Tale in Seven Stories

THE MIRROR AND ITS FRAGMENTS

First Story

Let us begin! When we reach the end of our story, we shall know more than we do now. Once upon a time there lived a troll, an exceedingly wicked one; he was the very devil himself. One day he was in a particularly good mood: he crafted a mirror in which everything good and beautiful shrank to nothing, while everything worthless and ugly, on the contrary, stood out even brighter and appeared even worse. The most lovely landscapes looked like boiled spinach in it, and the best of people seemed like monsters or appeared standing on their heads without bellies! Faces were distorted so terribly that they could not be recognized at all; if anyone had a freckle or a mole on their face, it would spread across the entire visage. All this amused the devil immensely. A good, pious human thought reflected in the mirror as an unimaginable grimace, so that the troll could not help but laugh, rejoicing in his invention. All the troll's pupils—he had his own school—spoke of the mirror as some kind of miracle.

"Now, at last," they said, "one can see the whole world and people in their true light!"

And they ran about with the mirror everywhere; soon there was not a single country nor a single person who had not been reflected in it in a distorted form. Finally, they wished to reach heaven itself, to mock the angels and the Creator Himself. The higher they rose, the more the mirror twisted and writhed with grimaces; they barely managed to hold it in their hands. But then they ascended even higher, and suddenly the mirror became so warped that it slipped from their grasp, fell to the ground, and shattered into countless pieces. Millions, billions of its fragments caused, however, even greater misfortune than the mirror itself. Some of them were no larger than grains of sand; they scattered across the wide world, sometimes falling into people's eyes and remaining there forever. A person with such a fragment in their eye began to see everything upside down or to notice only the bad aspects in every thing, for each fragment retained the very property that distinguished the original mirror. For some people, fragments penetrated straight into their hearts, and this was the worst of all: the heart turned into a lump of ice. Among these fragments there were also large ones, such as could be

fitted into window frames, but it was certainly not advisable to look through those windows at one's good friends. Finally, there were fragments that were made into spectacles, but woe betide those people who put them on with the aim of seeing things and judging them more accurately! And the evil troll laughed until he held his sides: so pleasantly did the success of his invention tickle him. Yet many fragments of the mirror still flew about the world. Let us listen then!

THE BOY AND THE GIRL

Second Story

In a large city, where there are so many houses and people that not everyone succeeds in fencing off even a tiny spot for a garden, and where therefore most inhabitants must content themselves with potted flowers indoors, there lived two poor children, yet they possessed a garden larger than a flowerpot. They were not related by blood, but they loved each other like brother and sister. Their parents lived in attics of adjacent houses. The roofs of the houses almost met, and beneath the eaves ran a rain gutter positioned exactly under the window of each attic. Thus, it sufficed to step from any window onto the gutter to find oneself at the neighbors' window.

Each parent owned a large wooden box; in them grew roots and small rose bushes (one in each), covered with wonderful blooms. The parents hit upon the idea of placing these boxes across the gutters—thus, from one window to another stretched what seemed like two rows of flowers. Peas descended from the boxes in green garlands, rose bushes peered into the windows and intertwined their branches; something resembling triumphal arches of greenery and flowers was formed. Since the boxes were very high and the children knew well that they were not allowed to climb upon them, the parents often permitted the boy and the girl to visit each other across the roof and sit on a little bench beneath the roses. And what merry games they played there!

In winter this pleasure ceased: the windows were often covered with frost patterns. But the children heated copper coins on the stove and pressed them against the frozen panes—immediately a wonderful little round hole thawed out, and through it peeked a cheerful, kindly eye—this was the boy and the girl, Kay and Gerda, looking from their respective windows. In summer they could leap in a single bound to visit one another, but in winter one first had to descend many, many steps downward, and then ascend just as many upward. Outside, snowflakes fluttered about.

"These are white bees swarming!" said Grandma.

"Do they have a queen too?" asked the boy; he knew that real bees have one.

"They do!" answered Grandma. "Snowflakes surround her in a dense swarm, but she is larger than them all and never remains on the ground—she forever flies about on a black cloud. Often at night she flies through the city streets and peers into windows; that is precisely why they become covered with frost patterns, as if with flowers!"

"We saw, we saw!" said the children, and believed that all this was absolute truth.

"But can the Snow Queen not enter here?" asked the girl.

"Just let her try!" said the boy. "I will set her on the warm stove, and she will melt!"

But Grandma stroked his head and turned the conversation to something else.

In the evening, when Kay was already home and almost completely undressed, preparing to go to bed, he climbed onto the chair by the window and looked through the small round hole thawed in the windowpane. Outside, snowflakes fluttered; one of them, somewhat larger, fell upon the edge of the flower box and began to grow, to grow, until finally it transformed into a woman, wrapped in the finest white tulle, woven seemingly from millions of snowy starlets. She was so lovely, so tender—entirely of dazzling-white ice, and yet alive! Her eyes sparkled like stars, but in them there was neither warmth nor gentleness. She nodded to the boy and beckoned him with her hand. The little fellow grew frightened and jumped down from the chair; past the window flashed something resembling a large bird.

The next day brought fine frost, but then came a thaw, and thereafter spring arrived in all its beauty. The sun shone, the flower boxes were once again all in green, swallows built nests under the roof, the windows were opened, and the children could again sit in their little garden on the roof.

The roses bloomed all summer long, delightfully. The girl learned a psalm which also spoke of roses; the girl sang it to the boy, thinking meanwhile of her roses, and he joined her in singing:

Already roses bloom in the valleys,
The infant Christ is here with us!

The children sang, holding hands, kissed the roses, gazed at the bright sun, and spoke to it: it seemed to them that the infant Christ Himself looked down upon them from it. What a wonderful summer it was, and how pleasant it was beneath the bushes of fragrant roses, which seemed destined to bloom eternally!

Kay and Gerda sat examining a picture book filled with animals and birds; the great tower clock struck five.

"Oh!" the boy suddenly cried out. "Something pricked me right in the heart, and something got into my eye!"

The girl wrapped her little arm around his neck; he blinked his eyes, but nothing could be seen in either.

"It must have fallen out!" he said.

But the fact of the matter was, it had not. Two fragments of the devil's mirror had entered his heart and his eye, in which, as we of course remember, everything great and good appeared insignificant and vile, while evil and bad things reflected even more brightly, and the bad sides of every object stood out even more sharply. Poor Kay! Now his heart was destined to turn into a lump of ice! The pain in his eye and heart had already passed, but the fragments themselves remained within them.

"Why are you crying then?" he asked Gerda. "Ugh! How ugly you look now! It doesn't hurt me at all! Pah!" he shouted afterward. "This rose is being eaten by a worm! And that one is completely crooked! What hideous roses! No better than the boxes in which they stick!"

And he kicked the box with his foot and tore out two roses.

"Kay, what are you doing?" cried the girl, but he, seeing her fright, plucked yet another one and fled from pretty little Gerda into his own window.

After that, whenever the girl brought him the picture book, he said that such pictures were suitable only for infants; whenever Grandma told them something, he found fault with her words. If only that were all! But he went so far as to mimic her walk, put on her spectacles, and imitate her voice! It came out very

It also amused people. Soon the boy learned to mimic all the neighbors as well—he excellently knew how to expose all their oddities and flaws, and people said:

"What a head that little lad has!"

And the cause of it all were the splinters of the mirror that had gotten into his eye and into his heart. That was why he even mocked little pretty Gerda, who loved him with all her heart.

And his amusements became now quite different, so cunning. Once in winter, when snow was fluttering about, he appeared with a large magnifying glass and held the skirt of his blue jacket under the snow beneath the glass.

"Look through the glass, Gerda!" he said.

Every snowflake seemed under the glass far larger than it really was, and resembled a luxurious flower or a ten-pointed star. A real wonder!

"See how skillfully it is made!" said Kay. "This is far more interesting than real flowers! And what precision! Not a single irregular line! Ah, if only they would not melt!"

A little while later Kay appeared in large mittens, with his sled on his back, shouted right into Gerda's ear: "They have allowed me to go sledding on the big square with the other boys!"—and ran off.

On the square many children were sledding. Those who were bolder tied their sleds to peasants' sleighs and thus rode quite far. Fun was boiling over. At the very height of it, large sleighs painted white appeared on the square. In them sat a person entirely wrapped in a white fur coat and such a cap. The sleighs drove around the square twice; Kay quickly tied his sled to them and set off. The large sleighs sped faster and then turned from the square into an alley. The person sitting in them turned and friendly nodded to Kay, as to an acquaintance. Kay several times tried to untie his sled, but the person in the fur coat kept nodding to him, and he continued riding. Then they drove out beyond the city gates. Snow suddenly began falling in flakes, it grew so dark that nothing could be seen around. The boy hurried to let go of the rope by which he had hooked onto the large sleighs, but his sled seemed to have grown fast to the large sleighs and continued rushing like a whirlwind. Kay cried out loudly—no one heard him! Snow fell, the sled raced, diving into snowdrifts, jumping over fences and ditches. Kay trembled all over, wanted to recite the Lord's Prayer, but in his mind only the multiplication table kept spinning.

The snowflakes kept growing and finally turned into large white hens. Suddenly they flew apart in all directions, the large sleighs stopped, and the person sitting in them stood up. It was a tall, slender, dazzlingly white woman—the Snow Queen; both her fur coat and her cap were made of snow.

"We had a fine ride!" she said. "But you are quite frozen. Climb into my fur coat!"

And, having seated the boy in her sleigh, she wrapped him in her fur coat; Kay seemed to sink into a snowdrift.

"Still cold?" she asked and kissed him on the forehead.

Ugh! Her kiss was colder than ice, pierced him through with cold and reached his very heart, which was already half icy without that. For one moment it seemed to Kay that he was about to die, but on the contrary, it became easier, he even ceased feeling cold altogether.

"My sled! Do not forget my sled!" he remembered first of all about the sled.

And the sled was tied onto the back of one of the white hens, which flew with it behind the large sleighs. The Snow Queen kissed Kay once more, and he forgot both Gerda, and his grandmother, and everyone at home.

"I shall not kiss you anymore!" she said. "Otherwise I will kiss you to death!"

Kay looked at her—she was so beautiful! He could not imagine a wiser, more lovely face. Now she did not seem icy to him, as that time when she sat behind the window and nodded her head to him; now she seemed to him perfection. He was not at all afraid of her and told her that he knew all four arithmetic operations, even with fractions, knew how many square miles and inhabitants there were in each country, and she only smiled in response. And then it seemed to him that he indeed knew little, and he fixed his gaze into the infinite airy space. At that same moment the Snow Queen rose with him onto a dark leaden cloud, and they sped away. The storm howled and moaned, as if singing ancient songs; they flew over forests and lakes, over seas and solid land; beneath them blew cold winds, wolves howled, snow sparkled, black ravens flew crying, and above them shone a great clear moon. Kay looked at it all through the long, long winter night—by day he slept at the Snow Queen's feet.

THE FLOWER GARDEN OF THE WOMAN WHO KNEW HOW TO CAST SPELLS

Third Tale

But what happened to Gerda when Kay did not return? And where had he gone? No one knew this, no one could report anything about him. The boys only told that they had seen how he tied his sled to large magnificent sleighs, which then turned into an alley and drove out beyond the city gates. No one knew where he had gone. Many tears were shed for him; Gerda wept bitterly and long. Finally they decided that he had died, drowned in the river flowing behind the town. Long dragged the gloomy winter days.

But then spring arrived, the sun peeked out.

"Kay is dead and will not return!" said Gerda.

"I do not believe it!" answered the sunlight.

"He is dead and will not return!" she repeated to the swallows.

"We do not believe it!" they answered.

In the end Gerda herself ceased to believe it.

"I shall put on my new red shoes: Kay has never yet seen them," she said one morning, "and I will go to the river to ask about him."

It was still very early; she kissed her sleeping grandmother, put on the red shoes and ran all alone beyond the town, straight to the river.

"Is it true that you have taken my foster brother? I will give you my red shoes if you give him back to me!"

And it seemed to the girl that the waves somehow strangely nodded to her; then she took off her red shoes, her first treasure, and threw them into the river. But they fell right by the shore, and the waves immediately carried them back onto land—the river as if did not want to take from the girl her best treasure, since it could not return Kay to her. The girl thought that she had thrown the shoes not very far, climbed into a boat rocking in the reeds, stood on the very edge of the stern and again threw the shoes into the water. The boat was not tied and pushed off from the shore. The girl wanted to jump ashore as quickly as possible, but while she was making her way from the stern to the bow, the boat had already moved from the shore a whole yard and swiftly sped away with the current.

Gerda became terribly frightened and began to cry and shout, but no one except the sparrows heard her cries; the sparrows, however, could not carry her to land and only flew along the shore after her, chirping as if wishing to comfort her: "We are here! We are here!"

The boat was carried farther and farther; Gerda sat quietly, in stockings only; her red shoes floated behind the boat but could not catch up with it.

The riverbanks were very beautiful—everywhere wonderful flowers could be seen, tall spreading trees, meadows where sheep and cows grazed, but nowhere could a human soul be seen.

"Perhaps the river is carrying me to Kay!" thought Gerda, cheered up, stood on her feet and for a long, long time admired the beautiful green banks. But then she floated to a large cherry orchard, in which nestled a little house with colored glass in the windows and a thatched roof. By the door stood two wooden soldiers and saluted with their rifles everyone who floated past.

Gerda shouted to them: she took them for living beings, but they, of course, did not answer her. Then she floated closer to them, the boat approached almost to the very shore, and the girl shouted even louder. From the little house came out, leaning on a cane, a very, very old woman in a large straw hat painted with wonderful flowers.

"Oh, you poor little thing!" said the old woman. "How did you get onto such a large, swift river and wander so far?"

With these words the old woman stepped into the water, hooked the boat with her cane, pulled it to the shore and helped Gerda out.

Gerda was overjoyed that she finally found herself on land, though she was somewhat afraid of the strange old woman.

"Well, come along, and tell me who you are and how you got here?" said the old woman.

Gerda began telling her everything, and the old woman shook her head and repeated: "Hmm! hmm!" But then the girl finished and asked the old woman whether she had seen Kay. She answered that he had not yet passed this way, but surely would pass, so that the girl

There is nothing to grieve about yet—let her rather try some cherries and admire the flowers growing in the garden: they are more beautiful than any painted in a picture book, and they all know how to tell fairy tales! Here the old woman took Gerda by the hand, led her into her little house, and locked the door.

The windows were high above the floor and made entirely of multicolored glass—red, blue, and yellow; accordingly, the room itself was illuminated by some wonderfully bright, rainbow-like light. On the table stood a basket filled with marvelous cherries, and Gerda could eat as many as her heart desired; while she ate, the old woman combed her hair with a golden comb. The hair curled into ringlets and surrounded the girl's fresh, round face, like a rose, with a golden radiance.

"I have long wished to have such a pretty little girl!" said the old woman. "You will see how well we shall live together!"

And she continued combing the girl's curls, and the longer she combed, the more Gerda forgot her foster brother Kay: the old woman knew how to practice magic. She was not an evil sorceress and practiced magic only occasionally, for her own pleasure; now, however, she very much wanted to keep Gerda with her. So she went out into the garden, touched all the rose bushes with her cane, and though

they had been in full bloom, they all sank deep, deep into the earth until not a trace of them remained. The old woman feared that if Gerda saw the roses, she would remember her own, and then Kay, and would run away from her.

Having accomplished her deed, the old woman led Gerda into the flower garden. The girl's eyes wandered in every direction: here were flowers of every kind and from every season. What beauty, what fragrance! In all the world, one could not find a picture book more colorful or more beautiful than this flower garden. Gerda jumped for joy and played among the flowers until the sun set behind the tall cherry trees. Then she was laid down in a wonderful little bed with red silk quilts stuffed with blue violets; the girl fell asleep, and she dreamed such dreams as only a queen might dream on her wedding day.

The next day, Gerda was again allowed to play in the sunshine. Thus passed many days. Gerda knew every single flower in the garden, yet, numerous as they were, it still seemed to her that something was missing, only what? Once she sat examining the old woman's straw hat, which was painted with flowers; the most beautiful of them happened to be a rose—the old woman had forgotten to erase it. Such is what comes of absent-mindedness!

"What! Are there no roses here?" said Gerda, and immediately she ran to search for them throughout the entire garden—not a single one could be found!

Then the little girl sank to the ground and began to weep. Her warm tears fell precisely upon the spot where one of the rose bushes had formerly stood, and as soon as they moistened the earth, the bush instantly grew up from it, just as fresh and blooming as before. Gerda wrapped her little arms around it, began kissing the roses, and remembered those wonderful roses that had bloomed at home, and along with them, Kay.

"How I have lingered!" said the girl. "I must go looking for Kay!... Do you know where he is?" she asked the roses. "Do you believe that he is dead and will never return?"

"He is not dead!" said the roses. "We ourselves were beneath the earth, where all the dead reside, but Kay was not among them."

"Thank you!" said Gerda, and she went to the other flowers, peering into their cups and asking, "Do you know where Kay is?"

But each flower basked in the sunshine and thought only of its own fairy tale or story; Gerda heard many of them, yet not one of the flowers said a single word about Kay.

What, then, did the fiery lily tell her?

"Do you hear how the drum beats? Boom! boom! The sounds are very monotonous: boom! boom! Listen now to the mournful singing of the women! Listen to the cries of the priests!... Clad in a long red garment, an Indian widow stands upon the funeral pyre. The flames engulf her and the body of her deceased husband, yet she thinks of him alive—of him whose gaze burned her heart more fiercely than the fire that is about to consume her body. Can the flame of the heart be extinguished in the flame of the pyre?"

"I understand nothing of this!" said Gerda.

"This is my fairy tale!" answered the fiery lily. What did the bindweed relate?

"A narrow mountain path leads to an ancient knight's castle proudly towering upon a cliff. The old brick walls are thickly overgrown with ivy. Its leaves cling to the balcony, and upon the balcony stands a lovely maiden; she leans over the railing and gazes down at the road. The maiden is fresher than a rose, more ethereal than an apple blossom swayed by the wind. How her silk dress rustles! Will he not come?"

"Are you speaking of Kay?" asked Gerda.

"I am telling my own fairy tale, my own dream!" answered the bindweed. What did the little snowdrop tell?

"Between the trees swings a long board—these are the swings. Two pretty little girls sit upon the board; their dresses are white as snow, and long green silk ribbons flutter from their hats. Their little brother, older than his sisters, stands behind them, holding the ropes with the bends of his elbows; in his hands he holds: in one, a small cup of soapy water, in the other, a clay pipe. He blows bubbles, the board swings, the bubbles fly off into the air, shimmering in the sunlight with all the colors of the rainbow. Now one hangs at the end of the pipe and sways from the breath of the wind. A little black puppy, light as a soap bubble, rises on its hind legs and places its front paws on the board, but the board flies upward, the puppy falls, yelps, and grows angry. The children tease it, the bubbles burst... The swinging board, the foam scattering through the air—this is my song!"

"It may be a good one, perhaps, but you tell it all in such a sorrowful tone! And again, not a word about Kay!"

What will the hyacinths say?

"Once there lived three slender, ethereal beautiful sisters. One wore a red dress, another a blue one, and the third one altogether white. Hand in hand they danced in the clear moonlight beside a quiet lake. They were not elves, but real maidens. A sweet fragrance spread through the air, and the maidens vanished into the forest. Then the fragrance became even stronger, even sweeter—three coffins floated out from the thicket; within them lay the beautiful sisters, and around them fluttered, like living sparks, glowing beetles. Are the maidens asleep or dead? The scent of the flowers says they are dead. The evening bell tolls for the departed!"

"You have filled me with sadness!" said Gerda. "Your little bells smell so strongly too!... Now I cannot get these dead maidens out of my mind! Ah, could Kay possibly be dead? But the roses were beneath the earth, and they say he is not there!"

"Ding-dong!" chimed the bells of the hyacinths. "We do not toll for Kay! We do not even know him! We are ringing our own little song; we know no other!"

And Gerda went to the golden dandelion, shining in the brilliant green grass.

"You, little clear sun!" said Gerda to it. "Tell me, do you not know where I should seek my foster brother?"

The dandelion shone even brighter and looked at the little girl. What song, then, did it sing to her? Alas! In this song too, there was not a word about Kay!

"Early spring, the clear sun of God shines kindly upon a small courtyard. Swallows circle near the white wall adjoining the neighbors' yard. From the green grass peek the first little yellow flowers, sparkling in the sunshine like gold. An old grandmother has come out to sit in the yard; here comes her granddaughter, a poor servant girl, returning from a visit, and she kisses the old woman warmly. The girl's kiss is dearer than gold—it comes straight from the heart. Gold is on her lips, gold in her little heart, gold also in the sky in the morning hour! That is all!" said the dandelion.

"My poor grandmother!" sighed Gerda. "How she misses me, how she grieves! No less than she grieved for Kay! But I shall soon return and bring him back with me. There is no point in questioning the flowers further: nothing can be gained from them, they know only their own songs!"

And she tucked up her skirt higher to make running easier, but when she tried to jump over the yellow lily, it struck her across the legs. Gerda stopped, looked at the tall flower, and asked:

"Perhaps you know something?" And she bent down toward it, awaiting an answer. What, then, did the yellow lily say?

"I see myself! I see myself! Oh, how fragrant I am!... High, high up in a tiny attic room, right under the roof, stands a half-dressed dancer. Now she balances on one leg, now she stands firmly on both and tramples the whole world beneath them, for she is an illusion of the eye. Now she pours water from a teapot onto some white piece of fabric which she holds in her hands. This is her bodice. Purity is the best

What beauty! A white petticoat hangs on a nail driven into the wall; the skirt too has been washed with water from a kettle and dried on the roof! Now the girl dresses and ties a bright yellow kerchief around her neck, making the whiteness of her little dress stand out even more sharply. Again one leg shoots up into the air! Look how straight she stands on the other, just like a flower on its stem! I see myself, I see myself!

"But I care little about that!" said Gerda. "There is no need to tell me about it!"

And she ran out of the garden.

The door was locked only with a latch; Gerda pulled the rusty bolt, it gave way, the door opened, and the little girl, barefoot as she was, set off running down the road! Three times she looked back, but no one was chasing her. At last she grew tired, sat down on a stone, and looked around: summer had already passed, late autumn stood in the yard, yet in the old woman's wonderful garden, where the sun always shone and flowers of all seasons bloomed, this was not noticeable!

"Good heavens! How long I have lingered! It is already autumn outside! There is no time for resting!" said Gerda, and set off on her way again.

Ah, how her poor, weary little feet ached! How cold and damp the air was! The leaves on the willows had turned quite yellow, fog settled on them in large drops and trickled down to the ground; the leaves kept showering down. One thornbush stood entirely covered with astringent, tart berries. How gray and dreary the whole wide world looked!

THE PRINCE AND THE PRINCESS

Story Four

Gerda had to sit down again to rest. Right in front of her, a large crow was hopping on the snow; for a long, long time he watched the little girl, nodding his head at her, and finally spoke:

"Caw-caw! Greetings!"

He could not pronounce human speech any clearer than this, but evidently he wished the girl well and asked her where she was wandering all alone through the

wide world. Gerda understood the words "all alone" perfectly and immediately felt their full meaning. Having told the crow her whole life story, the little girl asked whether he had seen Kay.

The crow shook his head thoughtfully and said:

"Perhaps, perhaps!"

"What? Truly?" exclaimed the little girl, and nearly smothered the crow with kisses.

"Gently, gently!" said the crow. "I think that it was your Kay! But now he has probably forgotten you because of his princess!"

"Does he live with the princess?" asked Gerda.

"Well, listen!" said the crow. "Only it is terribly difficult for me to speak in your language! If only you understood crow-speech, I could tell you everything much better."

"No, I was not taught that!" said Gerda. "Grandmother understands it! How I wish I could too!"

"Well, never mind!" said the crow. "I shall tell you as best I can, even if poorly." And he told her everything he himself knew.

"In the kingdom where you and I now are, there is a princess so clever that words cannot describe it! She has read all the newspapers in the world and has already forgotten everything she read—that is how clever she is! Once she was sitting on her throne—and there is not much fun in that, as people say—and she sang a little song: 'Why should I not get married?' 'Indeed, why not!' she thought, and she wanted to get married. But for a husband she wanted to choose someone who would know how to answer when spoken to, not someone who only knew how to put on airs: that is so boring! So they summoned all the ladies of the court by beat of drum and announced the princess's will. They were all very pleased and said: 'That suits us! We ourselves were thinking about this recently!' All this is the absolute truth!" added the crow. "I have a fiancée at court; she is tame—it is from her that I know all this."

His fiancée was a crow.

"The next day all the newspapers came out bordered with hearts and with the princess's monogram. In the newspapers it was announced that every young man of pleasant appearance might present himself at the palace and converse with the princess; and the one who conducted himself quite freely, as if at home, and

proved to be the most eloquent of all, the princess would choose for her husband! Yes, yes!" repeated the crow. "All this is as true as the fact that I am sitting here before you! The people flocked to the palace in a torrent; there was pushing and shoving, but nothing came of it either on the first or the second day. Out in the street all the suitors spoke excellently, but as soon as they stepped over the palace threshold, saw the guards all in silver and the footmen in gold, and entered the enormous halls flooded with light, they were seized with fright. They would approach the throne where the princess sat and merely repeat her own last words, which was not at all what she wanted! Indeed, they all seemed as if drugged with henbane! And once they stepped outside the gates, they regained the gift of speech. From the very gates to the palace doors stretched a long, long tail of suitors. I myself was there and saw it! The suitors wanted food and drink, but from the palace they were not given even a glass of water. True, those who were somewhat wiser had provided themselves with sandwiches, but the provident ones did not share with their neighbors, thinking to themselves: 'Let them go hungry, let them grow thin—the princess will not take them then!'"

"Well, but Kay—Kay?" asked Gerda. "When did he appear? Did he come to woo her too?"

"Wait! Wait! Now we have reached him! On the third day there appeared a small fellow, neither in a carriage nor on horseback, but simply on foot, and he went straight into the palace. His eyes sparkled like yours; his hair was long, but he was poorly dressed."

"That is Kay!" cried Gerda joyfully. "So I have found him!" And she clapped her hands.

"He had a knapsack on his back!" continued the crow.

"No, those must have been his little sledges!" said Gerda. "He left home with his sledges!"

"Very possible!" said the crow. "I did not look closely enough. Well then, my fiancée told me that, upon entering the palace gates and seeing the guards in silver and the footmen in gold on the stairs, he was not in the least embarrassed, nodded his head, and said: 'It must be rather dull standing here on the stairs; I had better go into the rooms!' All the halls were flooded with light; noblemen walked about without boots, carrying golden dishes: one could not imagine anything more solemn! And his boots creaked loudly, but he was not embarrassed by that either."

"That surely is Kay!" exclaimed Gerda. "I know he had new boots! I myself heard how they creaked when he came to grandmother's!"

"Yes, they certainly creaked quite a bit!" continued the crow. "But he boldly approached the princess; she was sitting on a pearl as large as a spinning wheel, and around her stood the ladies and gentlemen of the court with their maids, the maids' undermaids, valets, the valets' servants, and the servant of the valets' servants. The farther anyone stood from the princess and the closer to the doors, the more important and haughty was their bearing. One could not even look at the servant of the valets' servants, who stood right in the doorway, without fear—so important was he!"

"How frightening!" said Gerda. "But did Kay marry the princess after all?"

"Were I not a crow, I would have married her myself, even though I am engaged. He entered into conversation with the princess and spoke just as well as I do when I speak crow-speech—at least, that is what my fiancée told me. He behaved altogether very freely and pleasantly and declared that he had come not to woo, but only to listen to the princess's wise words. Well then, she liked him, and he liked her too!"

"Yes, yes, that is Kay!" said Gerda. "He is so clever! He knew all four arithmetic operations, and fractions besides! Oh, do take me to the palace!"

"Easy to say," answered the crow, "but how to do it? Wait, I shall speak with my fiancée—she will think of something and advise us. Do you suppose they will let you into the palace just like that? Not likely; they do not admit such little girls very readily!"

"They will let me in!" said Gerda. "If only Kay hears that I am here, he will immediately run out to me!"

"Wait for me here by the gate!" said the crow, shook his head, and flew away.

He returned only toward evening and croaked:

"Caw, caw! My fiancée sends you a thousand bows and this little loaf of bread. She stole it from the kitchen—there are many there, and you are surely hungry!... Well, you cannot get into the palace: you are barefoot—the guards in silver and the footmen in gold will certainly not let you pass. But do not cry; you will get in all the same. My fiancée knows how to reach the princess's bedroom by the back entrance, and she knows where to get the key."

And so they entered the garden, walked along long avenues strewn with yellowed autumn leaves, and when all the lights in the palace windows had gone out one after another, the crow led the little girl to a small, half-open door.

Oh, how her little heart beat!

Gerda trembled with fear and joyful impatience! She surely seemed about to do something wicked, yet she only wished to find out whether her Kai was here! Yes, yes, he must be here! So vividly she pictured his clever eyes, his long hair, his smile... How he used to smile at her when they sat side by side beneath the rose bushes! And how glad he would be now when he saw her, when he heard what a long journey she had undertaken for his sake, when he learned how all at home had grieved for him! Ah, she was simply beside herself with fear and joy.

But now they were on the landing of the staircase; a little lamp burned atop the cupboard, and on the floor sat the tame crow, looking around in every direction. Gerda curtsied and bowed, as her grandmother had taught her.

"My betrothed has told me so many good things about you, young lady!" said the tame crow. "'The story of your life,' as people say, is also very moving! Would you care to take the lamp? I shall go ahead. We shall take the straight path—we shall meet no one there!"

"But it seems to me someone is following us!" said Gerda, and at that very moment shadows rushed past her with a soft noise: horses with flowing manes and slender legs, hunters, ladies and gentlemen on horseback.

"These are dreams!" said the tame crow. "They come to carry the thoughts of high personages off to the hunt. So much the better for us: it will be easier to examine the sleepers! I hope, however, that upon entering into favor, you will show that you have a grateful heart!"

"What is there even to discuss about that? It goes without saying!" said the forest crow.

Then they entered the first hall, entirely draped in pink satin embroidered with flowers. Once more dreams swept past the little girl, but so swiftly that she could not even make out the riders. One hall was more magnificent than another—it was simply overwhelming. At last they reached the bedchamber: the ceiling resembled the crown of an enormous palm tree with precious crystal leaves; from its center hung down a thick golden stem, upon which two beds shaped like lilies were suspended. One was white, and in it slept the princess; the other was red, and in it Gerda hoped to find Kai. The little girl gently turned back one of the red petals and saw a dark-blond nape. This was Kai! She loudly called his name and held the lamp close to his face. The dreams flew away with a noise; the prince woke and turned his head... Ah, this was not Kai!

The prince resembled him only from behind, yet he was just as young and handsome. From the white lily the princess looked out and asked what had happened. Gerda wept and told her whole story, mentioning also what the crows had done for her...

"Oh, you poor child!" said the prince and princess, praised the crows, declared that they were not at all angry with them—only they must not do this again—and even wished to reward them.

"Do you wish to become free birds?" asked the princess. "Or would you prefer to hold the position of court crows, fully maintained from kitchen scraps?"

The crow and the crowess bowed and requested positions at court—they thought of old age—and said:

"It is good to have a sure piece of bread in one's old age!"

The prince rose and gave up his bed to Gerda; for the time being he could do nothing more for her. And she folded her little hands and thought, "How kind all people and animals are!"—closed her eyes and fell sweetly asleep. Dreams flew into the bedchamber once more, but now they resembled God's angels and carried upon little sledges Kai, who nodded his head to Gerda. Alas! All this was only in a dream and vanished as soon as the little girl awoke.

The next day she was dressed from head to foot in silk and velvet and allowed to remain in the palace as long as she wished. The little girl might have lived there merrily and happily, but she stayed only a few days and began to beg that they give her a carriage with a horse and a pair of shoes—she wished to set out once more to search throughout the wide world for her foster brother.

They gave her shoes, a muff, and a wonderful dress, and when she had taken leave of everyone, a golden carriage drew up to the gates, bearing coats of arms of the prince and princess that shone like stars; upon the heads of the coachman, the footmen, and the outriders—they had even given her outriders—sparkled little golden crowns. The prince and princess themselves seated Gerda in the carriage and wished her a happy journey. The forest crow, who had already managed to marry, accompanied the little girl for the first three miles and sat inside the carriage beside her—he could not ride facing backward toward the horses. The tame crow sat upon the gate and clapped her wings. She did not ride along to accompany Gerda, because she had suffered from headaches ever since obtaining her position at court and had eaten too much. The carriage was packed full of sugar twists, and the box beneath the seat was filled with fruits and gingerbread.

"Farewell! Farewell!" cried the prince and princess.

Gerda wept, and the crow too. Thus they traveled the first three miles. Here the crow also took leave of the little girl. It was a heavy parting! The crow flew up into a tree and waved his black wings until the carriage, shining like the sun, disappeared from sight.

THE LITTLE ROBBER GIRL

Tale Five

Now Gerda drove into a dark forest, but the carriage gleamed like the sun and immediately caught the robbers' eye. They could not resist and swooped down upon her with cries of "Gold! Gold!"—seized the horses by their bridles, killed the little jockeys, the coachman and the servants, and dragged Gerda out of the carriage.

"Just look what a fine, plump little thing! Fed on nuts!" said the old robber woman with a long, coarse beard and shaggy overhanging eyebrows. "Plump as your own lambkin! Let us see how she tastes!"

And she drew out a sharp, glittering knife. What terror!

"Ai!" she suddenly screamed: her own daughter, who sat behind her back and was so wild and willful that it was a wonder, had bitten her by the ear.

"Oh, you nasty girl!" cried the mother, but she did not manage to kill Gerda.

"She shall play with me!" said the little robber girl. "She will give me her muff, her pretty little dress, and shall sleep with me in my little bed."

And the girl bit her mother again so hard that the woman jumped and spun around on the spot. The robbers burst out laughing:

"Just look how she hops about with her girl!"

"I want to sit in the carriage!" cried the little robber girl and insisted upon it: she was terribly spoiled and stubborn.

They climbed into the carriage with Gerda and sped over stumps and bumps deep into the forest thicket. The little robber girl was the same height as Gerda, but stronger, broader in the shoulders, and much darker. Her eyes were quite black, yet somehow sorrowful. She embraced Gerda and said:

"They will not kill you until I grow angry with you! Are you perhaps a princess?"

"No!" answered the little girl and told what she had endured and how she loved Kai.

The little robber girl looked seriously at her, nodded her head slightly, and said:

"They will not kill you even if I grow angry with you—I would rather kill you myself!"

And she wiped Gerda's tears, then hid both her hands inside Gerda's pretty, soft, warm little muff.

Now the carriage stopped; they drove into the courtyard of the robber castle. It was covered entirely with huge cracks; from them flew crows and ravens; from somewhere enormous bulldogs leaped out and looked so ferociously as though they wished to devour everyone, yet they did not bark—that was forbidden.

In the midst of a vast hall with half-collapsed, soot-blackened walls and a stone floor, a fire blazed; smoke rose to the ceiling and had to find its own way out; above the fire soup boiled in a huge cauldron, while hares and rabbits roasted on spits.

"You shall sleep together with me right here, beside my little menagerie!" said the little robber girl to Gerda.

The girls were fed and given drink, then went off to their corner where straw had been spread and covered with carpets. Higher up, perched upon rods, sat more than a hundred pigeons; all of them seemed asleep, but when the girls approached, they stirred slightly.

"All mine!" said the little robber girl, seized one pigeon by the legs and shook it so hard that it flapped its wings. "Here, kiss it!" she cried, thrusting the pigeon right into Gerda's face. "And here sit the forest rascals!" she continued, pointing to two pigeons sitting in a small niche in the wall, behind a wooden lattice. "These two are forest rascals! They must be kept locked up, or they'll quickly fly away! And here is my dear old fellow Reindeer!"—And the girl pulled by the antlers a reindeer tethered to the wall, wearing a shining copper collar. "He too must be kept on

Tie him up, or he'll run away! Every evening I tickle him under the neck with my sharp knife—he is deathly afraid of that!"

With these words the little robber girl pulled a long knife from a crack in the wall and drew it across the reindeer's neck. The poor animal kicked out, while the girl burst into laughter and dragged Gerda to bed.

"Do you really sleep with a knife?" asked Gerda, glancing sideways at the sharp blade.

"Always!" answered the little robber girl. "Who knows what might happen! But tell me once more about Kay and how you set out to wander across the wide world!"

Gerda told her story. The forest doves in the cage cooed softly; other doves were already asleep; the little robber girl wrapped one arm around Gerda's neck—in the other hand she held the knife—and began to snore, but Gerda could not close her eyes, not knowing whether they would kill her or spare her life. The robbers sat around the fire, singing songs and drinking, while the old robber woman tumbled about. It was terrible for the poor little girl to watch.

Suddenly the forest doves cooed:

"Coo! Coo! We saw Kay! A white hen carried his sledge on her back, and he sat in the Snee Queen's sledge. They flew over the forest while we, little ones, still lay in our nest; she breathed upon us, and all died except the two of us! Coo! Coo!"

"What are you saying!" exclaimed Gerda. "Where did the Snow Queen fly? Do you know?"

"She surely flew to Lapland, for there is eternal snow and ice there! Ask the reindeer standing tied up here!"

"Yes, there is eternal snow and ice: wonderfully fine!" said the reindeer. "There you can leap freely across vast shining icy plains! There the Snow Queen has pitched her summer tent, while her permanent palace lies at the North Pole, on the island of Spitsbergen!"

"Oh Kay, my dear Kay!" sighed Gerda.

"Lie still then!" said the little robber girl. "Otherwise I'll stab you with my knife!"

In the morning Gerda told her what she had heard from the forest doves. The little robber girl looked seriously at Gerda, nodded her head, and said:

"Well, so be it!... And do you know where Lapland is?" she then asked the reindeer.

"Who should know if not I!" answered the reindeer, and his eyes sparkled. "There I was born and raised, there I leaped across snowy plains!"

"Then listen!" said the little robber girl to Gerda. "You see, all our people have gone; only mother remains at home; after a while she will take a drink from the big bottle and fall asleep—then I will do something for you!"

At this the girl jumped out of bed, embraced her mother, tugged her by the beard, and said:

"Hello, my little goat!"

And her mother gave her several flicks on the nose until it turned red and blue, but all this was done lovingly.

Then, when the old woman had drunk from her bottle and begun to snore, the little robber girl approached the reindeer and said:

"We could have teased you for a long, long time! You are simply hilarious when tickled with a sharp knife! Well, so be it! I will untie you and set you free. You may run away to your Lapland, but in return you must carry this little girl to the Snow Queen's palace—there lies her foster brother. You certainly heard what she recounted? She spoke quite loudly, and your ears are always pricked up."

The reindeer leaped for joy. The little robber girl lifted Gerda onto his back, fastened her securely for safety, and slipped a soft cushion beneath her so she might sit more comfortably.

"So be it," she then said, "take back your fur boots—it will be cold! But I shall keep the muff for myself, it is far too lovely! Yet I won't let you freeze: here are mother's enormous mittens, they reach right up to your elbows! Put your hands in them! There now, with your hands you resemble my ugly mother!"

Gerda wept for joy.

"I cannot stand whining!" said the little robber girl. "Now you must look cheerful! Here are two loaves of bread and a ham as well! What? Surely you won't go hungry!"

Both were tied to the reindeer. Then the little robber girl opened the door, lured the dogs inside, cut with her sharp knife the rope by which the reindeer was tethered, and said to him:

"Now, quickly! And mind you protect the little girl."

Gerda stretched out both hands clad in the huge mittens toward the little robber girl and bade her farewell. The reindeer set off at full speed over stumps and hummocks, through forest, swamp, and steppe. Wolves howled, crows cawed, and suddenly the sky fizzed and shot forth pillars of fire.

"There is my native northern lights!" said the reindeer. "Look how they burn!"

And he ran onward without stopping day or night. The bread was eaten, the ham likewise, and thus Gerda found herself in Lapland.

THE LAPLANDER WOMAN AND THE FINNISH WOMAN

Story Six

The reindeer stopped before a wretched little hut; the roof sloped down to the very ground, and the door was so low that people had to crawl into it on all fours. Inside lived an old Laplander woman frying fish by the light of a grease lamp. The reindeer told the Laplander woman Gerda's entire story, but first he recounted his own—it seemed much more important to him. Gerda, however, was so frozen with cold that she could not speak.

"Oh, you poor things!" said the Laplander woman. "A long journey still lies ahead of you! You must travel over a hundred miles before reaching Finland, where the Snow Queen lives at her summer residence and every evening lights blue Bengal fires. I shall write a few words on dried cod—I have no paper—and you shall take it to the Finnish woman who lives in those regions and can instruct you better than I what must be done."

When Gerda had warmed herself, eaten, and drunk, the Laplander woman wrote a few words on the dried cod, instructed Gerda to guard it carefully, then tied the little girl to the reindeer's back, and he galloped off once more. Again the sky fizzed and shot forth pillars of wonderful blue flame. Thus the reindeer carried Gerda to Finland and knocked at the Finnish woman's chimney—for she had no door at all.

What heat prevailed in her dwelling! The Finnish woman herself, a short, dirty woman, walked about half-naked. Swiftly she stripped Gerda of all her clothes, mittens, and boots, otherwise the little girl would have become excessively hot, placed a piece of ice upon the reindeer's head, and then began reading what was written on the dried cod. She read everything word for word three times until she had memorized it, and then thrust the cod into the soup pot, for the fish was still fit to eat, and nothing went to waste with the Finnish woman.

Then the reindeer first told his own story, and afterward Gerda's. The Finnish woman blinked her wise little eyes but spoke not a word.

"You are such a wise woman!" said the reindeer. "I know you can bind all four winds with a single thread; when a shipmaster unties one, a favorable wind blows; unties another—the weather turns stormy; and if he unties the third and fourth—such a tempest arises that it shatters trees to splinters. Could you not prepare for the little girl a potion that would give her the strength of twelve heroes? Then she could overcome the Snow Queen!"

"The strength of twelve heroes!" said the Finnish woman. "What good would that do?"

With these words she took a large leather scroll from the shelf and unrolled it: strange writings stood upon it; the Finnish woman began reading them and read until sweat broke out upon her.

The reindeer again pleaded for Gerda, and Gerda herself gazed at the Finnish woman with such beseeching, tear-filled eyes that the woman blinked again, led the reindeer aside, and while changing the ice upon his head whispered:

"Kay is indeed with the Snow Queen, but he is perfectly content and thinks there is no better place for him anywhere. The cause of all this lies in the mirror shards lodged in his heart and eye. These must be removed, otherwise he will never become human again and the Snow Queen will retain her power over him.

"But can you not help Gerda somehow to destroy this power?"

"I cannot make her stronger than she already is. Do you not see how great her strength is? Do you not see that both people and animals serve her? She has walked barefoot halfway around the world! We cannot lend her strength! Strength lies in her dear innocent child's heart. If she herself cannot penetrate the Snow Queen's palace and extract the shards from Kay's heart, then certainly we cannot help her! Two miles from here begins the Snow Queen's garden. Carry the little girl there, set her down beside the large bush covered with red berries, and return immediately without delay!"

With these words the Finnish woman lifted Gerda onto the reindeer's back, and he he broke into a run with all his might.

"Oh, I have no warm boots! Oh, I have no mittens!" cried Gerda, finding herself out in the frost.

But the reindeer dared not stop until he reached the bush with red berries; there he set the little girl down, kissed her right on the lips, and large shining tears rolled from his eyes. Then he shot back like an arrow. The poor girl remained all alone, utterly alone, in the biting frost, without shoes, without mittens.

She ran forward with all her strength; toward her rushed a whole regiment of snowflakes, but they were not falling from the sky—the sky was perfectly clear, and upon it blazed the northern lights—no, they were running along the ground straight at Gerda, and as they drew nearer, they grew larger and larger. Gerda remembered the large beautiful flakes seen through a burning glass, but these were far bigger, more terrible, of the most astonishing shapes and forms, and all alive. These were the advance guards of the Snow Queen's army. Some resembled

large ugly hedgehogs, others hundred-headed snakes, others still fat bear cubs with ruffled fur. Yet all alike sparkled with whiteness, all were living snowflakes.

Gerda began to recite the "Our Father"; it was so cold that the girl's breath immediately turned into thick fog. This fog grew denser and denser, but then from it began to emerge small bright angelic figures who, stepping onto the earth, grew into large formidable angels with helmets on their heads and spears and shields in their hands. Their number kept increasing, and by the time Gerda finished her prayer, a whole legion had formed around her. The angels took the snow monsters on their spears, and those shattered into a thousand pieces. Gerda could now boldly proceed: the angels stroked her hands and feet, and she no longer felt so cold. At last the little girl reached the palace of the Snow Queen.

Let us see, meanwhile, what was happening with Kay. He was not thinking about Gerda at all, and least of all that she was ready to enter to him.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PALACE OF THE SNOW QUEEN AND WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD

Story Seven

The walls of the Snow Queen's palace were created by the blizzard, the windows and doors were cut out by the wild winds. Hundreds of enormous halls, illuminated by the northern lights, stretched one after another; the largest extended for many, many miles. How cold, how desolate it was in these white, brightly sparkling halls! Merriment never even peeked in here! If only occasionally a bear party were held, with dances to the music of the storm, in which the polar bears could distinguish themselves by their grace and skill in walking on their hind legs, or if a card game were organized, complete with quarrels and fights, or finally, if the little white fox gossips gathered for conversation over a cup of coffee—no, never anything! Cold, desolate, dead! The northern lights flashed and burned so regularly that one could calculate precisely at what minute the light would intensify and at what minute it would weaken. In the middle of the largest desolate snowy hall lay a frozen lake. The ice upon it had cracked into thousands of pieces, marvelously even and regular: one just like another. In the middle of the lake stood the throne of the Snow Queen; upon it she sat when she was at home, saying that she sat on the mirror of reason; in her opinion, this was the single best mirror in the world.

Kay had turned quite blue, almost black from the cold, but he did not notice it: the kisses of the Snow Queen had made him insensitive to cold, and his very heart was a piece of ice. Kay was busy with flat pointed shards of ice, arranging them in every possible way. There is such a game—making figures out of wooden tablets—which is called the Chinese puzzle. Kay too was assembling various

intricate figures, but out of ice shards, and this was called the ice game of reason. In his eyes these figures were a miracle of art, and their assembly—a occupation of primary importance. This happened because a shard of the magic mirror was lodged in his eye! He assembled whole words out of the ice shards, but he could not manage to assemble the one he particularly wanted: the word "eternity." The Snow Queen had told him: "If you assemble this word, you will be your own master, and I will give you the whole world and a pair of new skates." But he could not assemble it in any way.

"Now I shall fly to the warm regions!" said the Snow Queen. "I shall look into the black cauldrons!"

By cauldrons she meant the craters of volcanoes—Vesuvius and Etna.

"I shall whitewash them a little! That is good after lemons and grapes!" And she flew away, while Kay remained alone in the boundless desolate hall, looking at the ice shards and thinking, thinking, so that his head ached. He sat in one place, so pale, so motionless, as if lifeless. One might have thought he had frozen.

It was precisely at this time that Gerda entered through the huge gates cut out by the wild winds. She had recited her evening prayer, and the winds subsided, as if fallen asleep. She freely entered the vast desolate icy hall and saw Kay. The little girl recognized him immediately, threw her arms around his neck, embraced him tightly, and exclaimed:

"Kay, my dear Kay! At last I have found you!"

But he sat just as motionless and cold as before. Then Gerda wept; her hot tears fell upon his chest, penetrated his heart, melted its icy crust, and dissolved the shard. Kay looked at Gerda, and she sang:

Roses bloom already in the valleys,
The infant Christ is here with us!

Kay suddenly burst into tears and wept so long and so strongly that the shard flowed out of his eye together with the tears. Then he recognized Gerda and rejoiced.

"Gerda! My dear Gerda!.. Where have you been all this time? Where have I been myself?" And he looked around. "How cold and desolate it is here!"

And he pressed himself tightly against Gerda. She laughed and wept for joy. Yes, the joy was such that even the ice shards began to dance, and when they grew tired, they lay down and formed that very word which the Snow Queen had tasked

Kay to assemble; having assembled it, he could become his own master, and moreover receive from her as a gift the whole world and a pair of new skates.

Gerda kissed Kay on both cheeks, and they bloomed again like roses; she kissed his eyes, and they sparkled like hers; she kissed his hands and feet, and he became lively and healthy once more. The Snow Queen could return whenever she wished: his discharge papers lay there, written in shining letters of ice.

Hand in hand, Kay and Gerda walked out of the desolate icy palace; they walked and spoke about grandmother, about their roses, and along their path the wild winds subsided and the sun peeked through. When they reached the bush with red berries, the northern reindeer was already waiting for them. He had brought with him a young female reindeer; her udder was full of milk; she gave Kay and Gerda a drink and kissed them right on the lips. Then Kay and Gerda went first to the Finn woman, warmed themselves by her fire and learned the way home, and afterward—to the Lapland woman; she sewed new clothes for them, repaired her sledge, and drove along to accompany them.

The pair of reindeer also accompanied the young travelers all the way to the very border of Lapland, where the first greenery was already sprouting. There Kay and Gerda took leave of the reindeer and of the Lapland woman.

Now before them lay the forest. The first birds began to sing, the trees covered themselves with green buds. From the forest, riding upon a magnificent horse, a young girl came out to meet the travelers, wearing a bright red cap and with pistols at her belt. Gerda immediately recognized both the horse—it had once been harnessed to the golden carriage—and the girl. It was the little robber maiden: she had grown weary of living at home and had wanted to visit the north, and if she did not like it there—to other parts of the world. She too recognized Gerda. What joy there was!

"Well, well, you wanderer!" she said to Kay. "I should like to know whether you are worth running to the edge of the world for!"

But Gerda patted her on the cheek and asked about the prince and princess.

"They have gone abroad!" answered the young robber maiden.

"And the raven with the crow?" asked Gerda.

"The forest raven has died, the tame crow remains a widow, walks with a black tuft on her leg and complains about her fate. But all this is trifles; you had better tell me what happened to you and how you found him."

Gerda and Kay told her everything.

"Well, now the tale is ended!" said the young robber maiden, shook their hands, and promised to visit them if ever she came to their town. Then she went her own way, and Kay and Gerda theirs. They walked, and along the road spring flowers bloomed, the grass turned green. Then bell ringing sounded, and they recognized the steeples of their native town. They

They climbed the familiar staircase and entered the room where everything was just as before: the clock ticked just the same, the hour hand moved just the same. But, passing through the low doorway, they noticed that in the meantime they had grown into adults. Blooming pink rose bushes peered from the roof into the open window; right there stood their childhood little chairs. Kai and Gerda each sat on their own and took each other by the hands. The cold, desolate splendor of the Snow Queen's palaces was forgotten by them like a heavy dream. Grandmother sat in the sunshine and read aloud from the Gospel: "Unless you become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven!"

Kai and Gerda looked at each other and only then understood the meaning of the old psalm:

Now roses bloom in the valleys,
The infant Christ is here with us.

Thus they sat side by side, both already grown up, yet children in heart and soul, while outside stood a warm, bountiful summer!