

I'm not a bot



























Once upon a time two poor Woodcutters were making their way home through a great pine-forest. It was winter, and a night of bitter cold. The snow lay thick upon the ground, and upon the branches of the trees: the frost kept snapping the little twigs on either side of them, as they passed; and when they came to the Mountain-Torrent she was hanging motionless in air, for the Ice-King had kissed her.So cold was it that even the animals and the birds did not know what to make of it.Ugh! snarled the Wolf as he limped through the brushwood with his tail between his legs, this is perfectly monstrous weather. Why doesnt the Government look to it?Weet! weet! twittered the green Linnets, the old Earth is dead, and they have laid her out in her white shroud.The Earth is going to be married, and this is her bridal dress, whispered the Turtle-doves to each other. Their little pink feet were quite frost-bitten, but they felt that it was their duty to take a romantic view of the situation.Nonsense! growled the Wolf. I tell you that it is all the fault of the Government, and if you dont believe me I shall eat you.The Wolf had a thoroughly practical mind, and was never at a loss for a good argument.Well, for my own part, said the Woodpecker, who was a born philosopher, I dont care an atomic theory for explanations. If a thing is so, it is so, and at present it is terribly cold.Terribly cold it certainly was. The little Squirrels, who lived inside the tall fir-tree, kept rubbing each others noses to keep themselves warm, and the Rabbits curled themselves up in their holes, and did not venture even to look out of doors. The only people who seemed to enjoy it were the great horned Owls. Their feathers were quite stiff with rime, but they did not mind, and they rolled their large yellow eyes, and called out to each other across the forest, Tu-whit! Tu-who! Tu-whit! Tu-who! What delightful weather we are having!On and on went the two Woodcutters, blowing lustily upon their fingers, and stamping with their huge iron-shod boots upon the caked snow. Once they sank into a deep drift, and came out as white as millers ears, when the stones are grinding; and once they slipped on the hard smooth ice when the marsh-water was frozen, and their faggots fell out of their bundles, and they had to pick them up again, and once they thought that they had lost their way, and a great terror seized on them, for they knew that the Snow is cruel to those who sleep in her arms. But they put their trust in the good Saint Martin, who watches over all travellers, and retraced their steps, and went warily, and at last they reached the outskirts of the forest, and saw, far down in the valley beneath them, the lights of the village in which they dwelt.So overjoyed were they at their deliverance that they laughed aloud, and the Earth seemed to them like a flower of silver, and the Moon like a flower of gold.Yet, after that they had laughed they became sad, for they remembered their poverty, and one of them said to the other, Why did we make merry, seeing that life is for the rich, and not for such as we are? Better that we had died of cold in the forest, or that some wild beast had fallen upon us and slain us.Truly, answered his companion, much is given to some, and little is given to others. Injustice has parcelled out the world, nor is there equal division of aught save of sorrow.But as they were bewailing their misery to each other this strange thing happened. There fell from heaven a very bright and beautiful star. It slipped down the side of the sky, passing by the other stars in its course, and, as they watched it wondering, it seemed to them to sink behind a clump of willow-trees that stood hard by a little sheep-fold no more than a stones throw away.Why! there is a crock of gold for whoever finds it, they cried, and they set to and ran, so eager were they for the gold.And one of them ran faster than his mate, and outstripped him, and forced his way through the willows, and came out on the other side, and lo! there was indeed a thing of gold lying on the white snow. So he hastened towards it, and stooping down placed his hands upon it, and it was a cloak of golden tissue wrought with stars, and wrapped in many folds. And he cried out to his companion, But, alas! no gold was in it, nor silver, nor, indeed, treasure of any kind, but a little child who was asleep.And one of them said to the other, This is a bitter ending to our hope, nor have we any good fortune, for what doth a child profit to a man? Let us leave it here, and our way, seeing that we are poor men, and have children of our own whose bread we may not give to another.But his companion answered him: Nay, but it were an evil thing to leave the child to perish here in the snow, and though I am poor as thou art, and have many mouths to feed, and but little in the pot, yet will I bring it home with me, and my wife shall have care of it.So very tenderly he took up the child, and wrapped the cloak around it to shield it from the harsh cold, and made his way down the hill to the village, his comrade marvelling much at his foolishness and softness of heart.And when they came to the village, his comrade said to him, Thou hast the child, therefore give me the cloak, for it is meet that we should share.But he answered him: Nay, for the cloak is neither mine nor thine, but the childs only, and he bade him Godspeed, and went to his own house and knocked.And when his wife opened the door and saw that her husband had returned safe in her, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him, and took from his back the bundle of faggots, and brushed the snow off his boots, and bade him come in.But he said to her, I have found something in the forest, and I have brought it to thee to have care of it, and he stirred not from the threshold.What is it? she cried. Show it to me, for the house is bare, and we have need of many things. And he drew the cloak back, and showed her the sleeping child.Alack, Goodman! she murmured, have we not children enough of our own, that thou must needs bring a changeling to sit by the hearth? And who knows if it will not bring us bad fortune? And how shall we tend it? And she was wroth against him.Nay, but it is a Star-Child, he answered; and he told her the strange manner of the finding of it.But she would not be appeased, but mocked at him, and spoke angrily, and cried: Our children lack bread, and shall we feed the child of another? Who is there who careth for us? And who giveth us food?Nay, but God careth for the sparrows even, and feedeth them, he answered.Do not the sparrows die of hunger in the winter? she asked. And is it not winter now?And the man answered nothing, but stirred not from the threshold.And a bitter wind from the forest came in through the open door, and made her tremble, and she shivered, and said to him: Willt thou not close the door? There cometh a bitter wind into the house, and an cold into a house where a heart is hard cometh there not always a bitter wind? he asked. And the woman answered him nothing, but crept closer to the fire.And after a time she turned round and looked at him, and her eyes were full of tears. And he came in swiftly, and placed the child in her arms, and she kissed it, and laid it in a little bed where the youngest of their own children was lying. And on the morrow the Woodcutter took the curious cloak of gold and placed it in a great chest, and a chain of amber in which was round the child, and set it in the chest also. So the Star-Child was brought up with the children of the Woodcutter, and sat at the same board with them, and was their playmate. And every year he became more beautiful to look at, so that all those who dwell in the village were filled with wonder, for, while they were swarthy and black-haired, he was white and delicate as sawn ivory, and his curls were like the rings of the daffodil. His lips, also, were like the petals of a red flower, and his eyes were like violets by a river of pure water, and his body like the narcissus of a field where the mower comes not.Yet did his beauty work him evil. For he grew proud, and cruel, and selfish. The children of the Woodcutter, and the other children of the village, he despised, saying that they were of mean parentage, while he was noble, being sprung from a Star, and he made himself master over them, and called them his servants. No pity had he for the poor, or for those who were blind or maimed or in any way afflicted, but would cast stones at them and drive them forth on to the highway, and bid them beg their bread elsewhere, so that none save the outlaws came twice to that village to ask for alms.Indeed, he was as one enamoured of beauty, and would mock at the weakly and ill-favoured, and make jest of them; and himself he loved, and in summer, when the winds were soft, and they rolled their large yellow eyes, and called out to each other across the forest, Tu-whit! Tu-who! What delightful weather we are having!On and on went the two Woodcutters, blowing lustily upon their fingers, and stamping with their huge iron-shod boots upon the caked snow. 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No pity had he for the poor, or for those who were blind or maimed or in any way afflicted, but would cast stones at them and drive them forth on to the highway, and bid them beg their bread elsewhere, so that none save the outlaws came twice to that village to ask for alms.Indeed, he was as one enamoured of beauty, and would mock at the weakly and ill-favoured, and make jest of them; and himself he loved, and in summer, when the winds were still, he would lie by the well in the priests orchard and look down at the marvel of his own face, and laugh for the pleasure he had in his fairness.Often did the Woodcutter and his wife hide him, and say: We did not deal with thee as thou dealest with those who are left desolate, and have none to succour them. Wherefore art thou so cruel to all who need pity?Often did the old priest send for him, and seek to teach him the love of living things, saying to him: The fly is thy brother. Do it no harm. The wild birds that roam through the forest have their freedom. Snare them not for thy pleasure. God made the blind-worm and the mole, and each has its place. Who art thou to bring pain into Gods world? Even the cattle of the field praise Him.But the Star-Child heeded not their words, but would frown and flout, and go back to his companions, and lead them. And his companions followed him, for he was fair, and fleet of foot, and could dance, and pipe, and make music. And wherever the Star-Child led them they followed, and whatever the Star-Child bade them do, that did they. And when he pierced with a sharp reed the dim eyes of the mole, they laughed, and when he cast stones at the leper they laughed also. And in all things he ruled them, and they became hard of heart even as he was.Now there passed one day through the village a poor beggar-woman. Her garments were torn and ragged, and her feet were bleeding from the rough road on which she had travelled, and she was in very evil plight. And being weary she sat her down under a chestnut-tree to rest.But when the Star-Child saw her, he said to his companions, See! There sitteth a foul beggar-woman under that fair and green-leaved tree. Come, let us drive her hence, for she is ugly and ill-favoured.So he came near and threw stones at her, and mocked her, and she looked at him with terror in her eyes, nor did she move her gaze from him. And when the Woodcutter, who was cleaving logs in a haggard hard by, saw what the Star-Child was doing, he ran up and rebuked him, and said to him: Surely thou art hard of heart and knowest not mercy, for what evil has this poor woman done to thee that thou shouldst treat her in this wise?And the Star-Child grew red with anger, and stamped his foot upon the ground, and said, Who art thou to question me what I do? I am no son of thine to do thy bidding.Thou speakest truly, answered the Woodcutter, yet did I show thee pity when I found thee in the forest.And when the woman heard these words she gave a loud cry, and fell into the snow, and when she rose up she was all in tears. And she said to the Star-Child, Didst thou not say that the child was found in the forest?And was it not ten years from this day?And the Woodcutter answered, Yea, it was in the forest that I found him, and it is ten years from this day.And what signs didst thou find with him? she cried. Bare he not upon his neck a chain of amber? Was not round him a cloak of gold tissue brodered with stars?Truly, answered the Woodcutter, it was even as thou sayest. And he took the cloak and the amber chain from the chest where they lay, and showed them to her.And when she saw them she wept for joy, and said, He is my little son whom I lost in the forest. I pray thee send for him quickly, for in search of him have I wandered over the whole world.So the Woodcutter and his wife went out and called to the Star-Child, and said to him, Go into the house, and there shalt thou find thy mother, who is waiting for thee.So he ran in, filled with wonder and great gladness. But when he saw her who was waiting there, he laughed scornfully and said, Why, where is my mother? For I see none here but this vile beggar-woman.And the woman answered him, I am thy mother.Thou art mad to say so, cried the Star-Child angrily. I am no son of thine, for thou art a beggar, and ugly, and in rags. Therefore get thee hence, and let me see thy foul face no more.Nay, but thou art indeed my little son, whom I bare in the forest, she cried, and she fell on her knees, and held out her arms to him. The robbers stole thee from me, and left thee to die, she murmured, but I recognised thee when I saw thee, and the signs also have I recognised, the cloak of golden tissue and the amber-chain. Therefore I pray thee come with me, for over the whole world have I wandered in search of thee. Come with me, my son, for I have need of thy love.But the Star-Child stirred not from his place, but shut the doors of his heart against her, nor was there any sound heard save the sound of the woman weeping for pain.And at last he spoke to her, and his voice was hard and bitter. If in very truth thou art my mother, tell me how thou art come here, and how thou art come here to bring me to shame, seeing that I thought I was the child of some Star, and not a beggars child, as thou tellest me I am. Therefore get thee hence, and let me see thee no more.Alas! my son, she cried, wilt thou not kiss me before I go? For I have suffered much to find thee.Nay, said the Star-Child, but thou art too foul to look at, and rather would I kiss the adder or the toad than thee, and rather would I kiss the adder or the toad than thee, and rather would I kiss the adder or the toad than thee. So the woman rose up, and went away into the forest weeping bitterly, and when the Star-Child saw that she had gone, he was glad, and ran back to his playmates that he might play with them. But when they beheld him coming, they mocked him and said, Why, thou art as foul as the toad, and as loathsome as the adder. Get thee hence, for we will not suffer thee to play with us, and they drove him out of the garden.And the Star-Child frowned and said to himself, What is this that they say to me? I will go to the well of water and look into it, and it shall tell me of my beauty.So he went to the well of water and looked into it, and lo! his face was as the face of a toad, and his body was scaled like an adder. And he flung himself down on the grass and wept, and said to himself, Surely this has come upon me by reason of my sin. For I have denied my mother, and driven her away, and been proud, and cruel to her. Wherefore I will go and seek her through the whole world, nor will I rest till I have found her.And there came to him the little daughter of the Woodcutter, and she put her hand upon his shoulder and said, What doth it matter if thou hast lost thy comeliness? Stay with us, and I will not mock at thee.And he said to her, Nay, but I have been cruel to my mother, and as a punishment has this evil been sent to me. Wherefore I must go hence, and wander through the world till I find her, and she give me her forgiveness.So he ran away into the forest and called out to his mother to come to him, but there was no answer. All day long he called to her, and when the sun set he lay down to sleep on a bed of leaves, and the birds and the animals fled from him, for they remembered his cruelty, and he was alone save for the toad that watched him, and the slow adder that crawled past.And in the morning he rose up, and plucked some bitter berries from the trees and ate them, and took his way through the great wood, weeping sorely. And of everything that he met he made inquiry if perchance they had seen his mother. He went to the Mole, Thy cantst fly over the tops of the tall trees, and canst thou see the whole world? Tell me, canst thou see my mother?And the Mole answered, Thou hast blinded mine eyes. How should I know?Thou canst fly over the tops of the tall trees, and canst see the whole world? Tell me, canst thou see my mother?And the Linnet answered, Thou hast clipit my wings for thy pleasure. How should I fly?And to the little Squirrel who lived in the fir-tree, and was lonely, he said, Where is my mother?And the Squirrel answered, Thou hast slain mine. Dost thou seek to slay thine also?And the Star-Child wept and bowed his head, and prayed forgiveness of Gods things, and went on through the forest, seeking for the beggar-woman. And on the third day he came to the other side of the forest and went down into the plain.And when he passed through the villages the children mocked him, and threw stones at him, and the carlots would not suffer him even to sleep in the byres lest he might bring mildew on the stored corn, so foul was he to look at, and their hired men drove him away, and there was none who had pity on him. Nor could he hear anywhere of the beggar-woman who was his mother, though for the space of three years he wandered over the world, and often seemed to see her on the road in front of him, and would call to her, and run after her till the sharp flints made his feet to bleed. But overtake her he could not, and those who dwelt by the way did ever deny that they had seen her, or any like to her, and they made sport of his sorrow.For the space of three years he wandered over the world, and in the world there was neither love nor loving-kindness nor charity for him, but it was even such a world as he had made for himself in the days of his great pride.And one evening he came to the gate of a strong-walled city that stood by a river, and, weary and footsore though he was, he made to enter in. But the soldiers who stood on guard dropped their halberets across the entrance, and said roughly to him, What is thy business in the city?I am seeking for my mother, he answered, and I pray ye to suffer me to pass, for it may be that she is in this city.But they mocked at him, and one of them wagged a black beard, and set down his shield and cried,Of a truth, thy mother will not be merry when she sees thee, for thou art more ill-favoured than the toad of the marsh, or the adder that crawls in the fen. Get thee gone. Get thee gone. Thy mother dwells not in this city.And another, who held a yellow banner in his hand, said to him, Who is thy mother, and wherefore art thou seeking for her?And he answered, My mother is a beggar even as I am, and I have treated her evilly, and I pray ye to suffer me to pass that she may give me her forgiveness, if it be that she tarrieth in this city. But they would not, and pricked him with their spears.And, as he turned away weeping, one whose armour was inlaid with gilt flowers, and on whose helmet couched a lion that had wings, came up and made enquiry of the soldiers who it was who had sought entrance. And they said to him, It is a beggar and the child of a beggar, and we have driven him away.Nay, he cried, laughing, but we will sell the foul thing for a slave, and his price shall be the price of a bowl of sweet wine.And an old and evil-visaged man who was passing by called out, and said, I will buy him for that price, and, when he had paid the price, he took the Star-Child by the hand and led him into the city.And after that they had gone through many streets they came to a little door that was set in a wall that was covered with a pomegranate tree. And the old man touched the door with a ring of graved jasper and it opened, and they went down five steps of brass into a garden filled with black poppies and green jars of burnt clay. And the old man took them from his turban a scarf of figured silk, and bound with it the eyes of the Star-Child, and drove him in front of him. And when the scarf was taken off his eyes, the Star-Child found himself in a dungeon, that was lit by a lantern of horn.And the old man set before him some mouldy bread on a trencher and said, Eat, and some brackish water in a cup and said, Drink, and when he had eaten and drunk, the old man went out, locking the door behind him and fastening it with an iron chain.And on the morrow the old man, who was indeed the subtlest of the magicians of Libya and had learned his art from one who dwelt in the tombs of the Nile, came in to him and frowned at him, and said, In a wood that is nigh to the gate of this city of Giauour there are three pieces of gold. One is of white gold, and another is of yellow gold, and the gold of the third one is red. To-day thou shalt bring me the piece of white gold, and if thou bringest it not back, I will beat thee with a hundred stripes. Get thee away quickly, and at sunset I will be waiting for thee at the door of the garden. See that thou bringest the white gold, or it shall go ill with thee, for I have bought thee for the price of a bowl of sweet wine. And he brought the eyes of the Star-Child with the scarf of figured silk, and led him through the house, and through the garden to the poppies, and up the five steps of brass. And having opened the little door with his ring he set him in the street.And the Star-Child went out of the gate of the city, and came to the wood of which the Magician had spoken to him.Now this wood was very fair to look at from without, and seemed full of singing birds and of sweet-scented flowers, and the Star-Child entered it gladly. Yet did he miss the well of water and looked into it, and lo! his face was as the face of a toad, and his body was scaled like an adder. And he flung himself down on the grass and wept, and said to himself, Surely this has come upon me by reason of my sin. For I have denied my mother, and driven her away, and been proud, and cruel to her. Wherefore I will go and seek her through the whole world, nor will I rest till I have found her.And there came to him the little daughter of the Woodcutter, and she put her hand upon his shoulder and said, What doth it matter if thou hast lost thy comeliness? Stay with us, and I will not mock at thee.And he said to her, Nay, but I have been cruel to my mother, and as a punishment has this evil been sent to me. Wherefore I must go hence, and wander through the world till I find her, and she give me her forgiveness.So he ran away into the forest and called out to his mother to come to him, but there was no answer. 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But overtake her he could not, and those who dwelt by the way did ever deny that they had seen her, or any like to her, and they made sport of his sorrow.For the space of three years he wandered over the world, and in the world there was neither love nor loving-kindness nor charity for him, but it was even such a world as he had made for himself in the days of his great pride.And one evening he came to the gate of a strong-walled city that stood by a river, and, weary and footsore though he was, he made to enter in. But the soldiers who stood on guard dropped their halberets across the entrance, and said roughly to him, What is thy business in the city?I am seeking for my mother, he answered, and I pray ye to suffer me to pass, for it may be that she is in this city.But they mocked at him, and one of them wagged a black beard, and set down his shield and cried,Of a truth, thy mother will not be merry when she sees thee, for thou art more ill-favoured than the toad of the marsh, or the adder that crawls in the fen. Get thee gone. Get thee gone. Thy mother dwells not in this city.And another, who held a yellow banner in his hand, said to him, Who is thy mother, and wherefore art thou seeking for her?And he answered, My mother is a beggar even as I am, and I have treated her evilly, and I pray ye to suffer me to pass that she may give me her forgiveness, if it be that she tarrieth in this city. But they would not, and pricked him with their spears.And, as he turned away weeping, one whose armour was inlaid with gilt flowers, and on whose helmet couched a lion that had wings, came up and made enquiry of the soldiers who it was who had sought entrance. And they said to him, It is a beggar and the child of a beggar, and we have driven him away.Nay, he cried, laughing, but we will sell the foul thing for a slave, and his price shall be the price of a bowl of sweet wine.And an old and evil-visaged man who was passing by called out, and said, I will buy him for that price, and, when he had paid the price, he took the Star-Child by the hand and led him into the city.And after that they had gone through many streets they came to a little door that was set in a wall that was covered with a pomegranate tree. And the old man touched the door with a ring of graved jasper and it opened, and they went down five steps of brass into a garden filled with black poppies and green jars of burnt clay. And the old man took them from his turban a scarf of figured silk, and bound with it the eyes of the Star-Child, and drove him in front of him. And when the scarf was taken off his eyes, the Star-Child found himself in a dungeon, that was lit by a lantern of horn.And the old man set before him some mouldy bread on a trencher and said, Eat, and some brackish water in a cup and said, Drink, and when he had eaten and drunk, the old man went out, locking the door behind him and fastening it with an iron chain.And on the morrow the old man, who was indeed the subtlest of the magicians of Libya and had learned his art from one who dwelt in the tombs of the Nile, came in to him and frowned at him, and said, In a wood that is nigh to the gate of this city of Giauour there are three pieces of gold. One is of white gold, and another is of yellow gold, and the gold of the third one is red. To-day thou shalt bring me the piece of white gold, and if thou bringest it not back, I will beat thee with a hundred stripes. Get thee away quickly, and at sunset I will be waiting for thee at the door of the garden. See that thou bringest the white gold, or it shall go ill with thee, for I have bought thee for the price of a bowl of sweet wine. And he brought the eyes of the Star-Child with the scarf of figured silk, and led him through the house, and through the garden of poppies, and up the five steps of brass. And having opened the little door with his ring he set him in the street.And the Star-Child went out of the gate of the city, and came to the wood of which the Magician had spoken to him.Now this wood was very fair to look at from without, and seemed full of singing birds and of sweet-scented flowers, and the Star-Child entered it gladly. Yet did its beauty profit him little, for whenever he went harsh briars and thorns shot up from the ground and



