

Extract from “The Travelling Companion”

They walked on and towards evening they came to an inn. They were hungry and thirsty, so they went in. As they sat and ate, there was a commotion outside with much running to and fro.

“What’s that?” said Johannes.

“It’s the king’s daughter driving up and down the street,” replied someone in the inn. “She’s as evil as any witch.”

“She’s bewitched herself,” said another.

Johannes and Companion wanted to hear more about the princess and the people at the inn were only too happy to oblige.

“She’s the most beautiful princess in the world and has an endless string of suitors.”

“Princes from all over the world come to woo her though they must first guess the three things she is thinking of.”

“There’s not a single flower in her garden, it’s full of dead people and bones.”

“Ravens and crows fight over them.”

As they were talking, the princess rode past on a white horse that had a gold saddle and bridle. She looked stunning with beautiful eyes and long golden hair that draped over the horse. Johannes was smitten by her and said to Companion that he wished to attempt to guess what she was thinking of. Companion tried to persuade him to leave well alone, but Johannes wouldn’t listen and went to the castle where he presented himself as a suitor.

Johannes was taken before the king and princess. She asked him if he could guess what she was thinking about and told him he had until the following day to mull it over. As soon as she’d said it, Johannes felt a little afraid. The princess looked so forbidding.

“I’ll just have to find out the answer one way or another,” he said to himself.

He went back to the inn and told Companion what had happened.

“If the answer doesn’t come in a dream this night, then I don’t

know what will become of me.”

“Go to bed,” said Companion. “See if the answer comes to you in your sleep.”

They both went to bed, but as soon as Johannes fell into a deep sleep, Companion got up and fetched his bag. He opened it, took out the eagle’s wings and the falcon’s legs and tied them to himself. He reached further into the bag and brought out two sticks, then flew away to the princess’ castle.

When Companion arrived there, he sat on the princess’ window ledge. After a little time, the window opened and the princess flew out. Companion followed and beat her with the sticks as hard as he could. She gasped and groaned and settled on the ground now and then to get her breath back.

“Such terrible hail, what dreadful hail,” she said to herself.

Eventually they came to a mountain and stopped before a door set flush to the mountain side. The princess landed, walked to the door and knocked on it hard. It opened and she went inside. Companion crept in behind her. She was greeted by a troll. His head was as large as the rest of his body, his ears grew out of the middle of his forehead and his eyes were as big as dinner plates.

The princess complained to him that the hailstorm she’d flown through was so bad, she almost didn’t get there.

“Don’t think of that anymore,” said the troll. “Come and sit a while with me.”

He led her into the mountain. Companion made himself invisible and followed after them. They came to a large hall where there were many different types of animals – lions, toads, lizards and vile creeping things – milling around.

The troll and princess walked through the hall and each sat on a throne. The animals began to dance and the troll took the princess by the hand and danced with her among the horrible creatures. Companion shadowed them closely, listening to every word that passed between them.

At the end of the dance, the princess told the troll that she had another suitor.

“What should I think about this time?” she asked.

“Think of your gloves,” he replied.

They danced some more, but the night wore on and she had to return home. The troll led her to the door, opened it and Companion

was able to slip out unnoticed. On the flight back, he beat her unmercifully until the sticks were in splinters. She gasped and groaned throughout the journey and only just managed to make it back to her window.

Companion flew back to the inn and went to bed.