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## ŠUMA STRIBOROVA

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### 1.1 LIJEPE LI GUJE

Zašao neki momak u šumu Striborovu, a nije znao da je ono šuma začarana i da se u njoj svakojaka čuda zbivaju. Zbivala se u njoj čuda dobra, ali i naopaka — svakome po zasluži.

Morala je pak ta šuma ostati začarana, doklegod u nju ne stupi onaj kojemu je milija njegova nevolja, nego sva sreća ovoga svijeta.

Nasjekao dakle onaj momak drva i sjeo na panj, da počine, jer bijaše lijep zimski dan. Ali iz panja iziđe pred njega zmija i stade se umiljavati oko njega. Ono pak ne bijaše prava zmija, nego bijaše ljudska duša, radi grijeha i zlobe ukleta, a mogao je osloboditi samo onaj, koji bi se s njom vjenčao. Bljeskala se zmija kao srebro na suncu i gledala momku pravo u oči.

»Lijepe li gujice, Bože moj! Gotovo da bih je i kući ponio«, progovori momak od šale.

»Evo budalaste glave koja će me osloboditi na svoju nesreću«, pomisli grješna duša u guji, požuri se i pretvori se odmah od guje u ljepotu djevojku, te stade pred

momka. Rukavci joj bijeli i vezeni kao krila leptirova, a sitne nožice kao u banice. Ali kako bijaše zlobno pomislila, onako joj ostade u ustima gujin jezik.

»Evo me! Vodi me kući i vjenčaj se sa mnom!«, reče guja–djevojka momku.

Sad da je ono bio siguran i dosjetljiv momak, pak da brže mahnuo ušicom od sjekire na nju i da je viknuo: »Nisam baš ja mislio, da se sa šumskim čudom vjenčam«, postala bi djevojka opet gujom, utekla bi u panj i nikomu ništa.

Ali ono je bio neki dobričina, plašljiv i stidljiv mladić, pak ga bilo stid da joj ne ispuni želje, kad se već radi njega pretvorila. A baš mu se i svidjela, jer je bila ljepolika, a on, neuputan, nije mogao znati, što joj je ostalo u ustima.

Uze on djevojku za ruku i povede je kući. A živio je taj momak sa svojom starom majkom i pazio majku kao ikonu.

»Evo, majko, snahe«, reče momak, kad stigoše on i djevojka kući.

»Hvala Bogu, sinko«, odvrati majka i pogleda ljepotu djevojku. Ali je majka bila stara i mudra i odmah spozna, što imade snaha u ustima.

Ode snaha da se preobuče, a mati reče sinu: »Lijepu si mladu izabrao, samo pazi, sine, nije li ono guja!«

Sin se malo ne skamenio od čuda: otkud njegova mati znade, da je ono bila guja? Razljuti se u srcu i pomisli: »Moja majka mora da je vještica«. I odmah zamrzi na majku.

Počelo njih troje živjeti zajedno, ali ono zlo i naopako. Snaha jezičljiva, nazlobna, proždrljiva i goropadna.

Bila je tamo litica visoka do oblaka, te snaha zapovjedi jednog dana starici, neka joj donese snijega sa vrha litice, da se umije.

»Nema puta na onu visinu«, reče starica.

»Uzmi kozu, neka te vodi. Kuda ona gore, tuda ti naglavce dolje«, reče snaha. Tamo bio i sin, pa se nasmijsao na te riječi, samo da ugodi svojoj ženi.

To se tako ražalilo majci, da odmah pođe na liticu po snijeg, jer joj nije bilo žao života. Idući putem, htjela se pomoliti Bogu za pomoć, ali se predomisli govoreći: »Opazio bi Bog, da mi sin ne valja.«

No Bog joj ipak osta na pomoći, i ona sretno donese snasi snijega s litice ispod oblaka.

Drugog dana zapovjedi snaha baki: »Idi tamo na jezero zamrznuto. Usred jezera ima rupa. Uhvati mi na rupi šarana za ručak.«

»Provalit će se led poda mnom, propast ću u jezero«, odvrati baka.

»Radovat će se šaran, propadneš li s njime«, reče snaha.

I opet se sin nasmijsao, a baka se tako ražalostila, da odmah ode na jezero. Pucketa led pod bakom, plače ona, da joj se suze po licu mrznu. Ali još ne će da se Bogu moli, taji pred Bogom, da joj je sin grješan.

»I bolje da poginem«, pomisli baka i ide po ledu.

Ali još nije došlo vrijeme da baka umre. Zato preletje nad njom galeb, noseći ribu. Omakne se riba galebu i

padne upravo pred baku. Baka uze ribu i donese sretno snasi.

Trećeg dana sjela baka uz ognjište i uze sinovu košulju, da je okrpa. Kad to vidje snaha, poletje do nje, istrže joj košulju iz ruku i viknu: »Ostavi to, sljepice stara, nisu to tvoji poslovi.«

I ne dade majci, da okrpa sinovu košulju. Sad se starici posve rastuži srce, te ona ode pred kuću, sjedne na onoj čiči zimi na klupu i pomoli se Bogu: »Bože moj, pomози mi!«

Uto vidje ona, kako k njoj ide neko ubogo djevojče, na njemu samo izderana rubina, a rame pomodrilo od studeni, jer joj se rukav iskinuo. Ali se svejedno djevojče nasmijava jer je umilne ćudi. Pod pazuhom joj svežanj triješća.

»Hoćete li, bako, kupiti lući?« pita djevojče.

»Nemam novaca, kćerce, nego ako hoćeš da ti okrpam taj rukavčić«, reče tužna baka, koja je još držala u rukama iglu i konac za sinovu košulju.

Baka okrpa djevojčici rukav, a djevojka joj dade svežanj lući, zahvali joj milo i ode dalje, radosna, što joj rame ne zebe.

## 1.2 DOMAĆI! DOMAĆI!

U večer reče snaha baki: »Mi ćemo poći u goste kumi, a ti da si ugrijala vode, dok se vratim.«

Bila snaha proždrljiva i uvijek gledala, gdje da se ugosti.

Kad oni odoše, osta baka sama, pa uze onog triješća, što joj ga prodalo djevojče, i potpali oganj na ognjištu, a onda ode u komoru po drva.

Dok je ona u komori tražila drva, začuje, kako u kuhinji nešto pucka, nešto kucka: kuc! kuc!

»Tko je božji?«, upita baka iz komore.

»Domaći! Domaći!«, ozovu se iz kuhinje neki sitni glasovi, kao da žvrgolje vrepći pod strehom.

Dalo se baki na čudo, što je ovo ovako u noći, i ona ude u kuhinju. Kad ona tamo, ali ono se na ognjištu istom rasplamsale luči, a oko plamena zaigrali kolo »Domaći«, sve sami mužići od jedva po lakta. Na njima kožusi, kapice i opančići crveni kao plamenovi, kosa i brada sive kao pepeo, a oči žarke kao živi ugljen.

Izlazi njih sve više i više iz plamena, svaka luč po jednog daje. Kako izlaze, tako se smiju i vrište, prebacuju se po ognjištu, cikću od veselja i hvataju se u kolo.

Pa zaigra kolo: po ognjištu, po pepelu, pod policu, na stolicu, po ćupu, na klupu! Igraj! Igraj! Brzo! Brže! Cikću, vrište, guraju se i krevelje. Sol prosuše, kvas proliše, brašno rastepoše — sve od velike radosti. Vatra na ognjištu plamsa i sjaji, pucka i grije; a baka gleda i gleda. Nije joj žao ni soli ni kvasca, nego se raduje veselju, što joj ga Bog šalje na utjehu.

Čini se baki, da se pomladila — nasmije se kao grlica, poskoči kao curica, hvata se u kolo sa Domaćima pa zaigra. Ali joj ipak ostalo još čemera u srcu, a to bijaše tako teško, te kolo odmah stade.

»Božja braćo«, reče onda baka Domaćima, »biste li vi meni znali pomoći, da ugledam jezik svoje snahe, pa kad kažem momu sinu, što sam na svoje oči vidjela, možda se opameti?!«

Baka stane pripovijedati Domaćima sve, kako je bilo. Domaći posjedali uokolo po rubu ognjišta, nožice ovjesili niz ognjište, nanizali se kao čičak do čička i slušaju baku; pa sve klimaju glavama od čuda. Kako klimaju glavama, onako im se žare crvene kapice: mislio bi tko, ono sama vatra na ognjištu plaminja.

Kad je baka svršila pripovijedanje, viknu jedan od Domaćih, po imenu Malik Tintilinić: »Ja ću ti pomoći! Idem u sunčanu zemlju i donijet ću ti svračjih jaja. Podmetnut ćemo ih pod kokoš, pa kad se izlegu svračići, prevarit će se snaha: polakomit će se kao svaka šumska guja za svračićima i isplazit će jezik.«

Svi Domaći ciknuše od radosti, što se Malik Tintilinić tako dobro dosjetio. Još oni najbolje vrište, ali ide snaha iz gostiju i nosi sebi kolač. Nasrne snaha ljutito na vrata, da vidi, tko to u kuhinji vrišti. Ali kad ona raskrili vrata, a ono: top! — prasne plamen, skočiše Domaći, topnuše svi u jedan mah nožicama o ognjište, ponesoše se nad plamen, poletješe pod krov — kvrcnuše daščice na krovu i nestade Domaćih.

Samo Malik Tintilinić ne uteče, nego se sakrije u pepelu.

Kako je plamen iznenada prsnuo u vis, a vrata udarila o vratnicu, onako se uplašila snaha i od straha sjela na zemlju kao vreća. Rastepe joj se kolač u rukama,

raspadnu joj se kose i češljevi, bulji oči i više od jeda: »Što je ovo bilo, nesrećo stara!«

»Vjetar podigao plamen, kad si otvorila vrata«, reče baka i mudro se drži.

»A što je ono u pepelu?« opet će snaha, jer je iz pepela virila crvena peta opančića Malika Tintilinića.

»Ono je žeravica«, odvraća baka.

Ali snaha ne vjeruje, nego ustane onako raspletena i ide da vidi iz bližega što je na ognjištu. Prikućila se licem do pepela, ali se Malik Tintilinić hitro baci nožicom i kvrcne petom snahu po nosu. Viče snaha kao da se u moru topi, sva je garava po licu, a pepeo joj posuo raščupane kose.

»Što je ovo, nesrećo stara?« pišti snaha. »Poprskao te kesten iz žeravice«, odvraća baka, a Malik Tintilinić u pepelu puca od smijeha.

Kad je snaha otišla da se umije, pokaže baka Maliku Tintiliniću, gdje je u komori snaha nasadila kokoš, da bude malih pilića za Božić. Još iste noći donese Malik svraćjih jaja i podmetne ih pod kokoš umjesto kokošnjih.

### 1.3 ŠTO ĆE BITI OD MOGA SINA?

Zapovjedila snaha baki, da dobro pazi na kokoš, pa kad se izlegu pilići, neka joj javi. Pozvat će snaha čitavo selo, da vidi, kako ona ima pilića na Božić, kad ih nitko nema.

Došlo vrijeme, izlegli se svraćići. Javi baka snasi, da su pilići izašli, a snaha pozove selo. Došle kume i

susjede, malo i veliko, a bio tamo i sin bakin. Snaha zapovjedi baki, da donese gnijezdo u trijem.

Donese baka gnijezdo, podigoše kokoš, a ono u gnijezdu nešto zakriješti: iskočiše goli svračići, pa skok! skok! po trijemu.

Kad je snaha–guja opazila ovako iznenada svračiće, prevari se, polakomi se u njoj zmijina ćud, poletje snaha po trijemu za svračićima i isplazi za njima svoj tanki i šiljasti jezik kao u šumi.

Vrisnuše i prekrstiše se kume i susjede, te povedoše svoju djecu kući, jer upознаše, da je ono zaista šumska guja.

Majka pak radosno pođe do sina govoreći: »Otpremi je, sine, otkud si je doveo, sad si na svoje oči vidio, koga u kući hraniš.« I mati htjede da ogrli sinka.

Ali sin je bio baš posve budalast čovjek, pa se još više usprkosio i suprot sela i suprot majke i suprot istih svojih očiju. Neće da sudi ženi–guji nego još vikne na majku: »Otkud tebi svračići u to doba, vještice stara? Nosi mi se iz kuće!«

E, sad je mati vidjela, da pomoći nema. Zacvili kao ljuta godina i samo umoli, da je bar ne tjera iz kuće, dok je dan, da ne vidi selo, kakvog je sina othranila.

Sin privoli, da mati ostane do večera još u kući. Kad je došla večer, uze baka u torbu nešto kruha i nešto onih luči, što joj ih je dalo ubogo djevojče. A onda ode kukajući iz kuće sinove.

Čim je mati prešla preko praga, utrne se vatra na ognjištu i pade raspelo sa stijene. Ostadoše sin i snaha u mračnoj izbi — i sada sin osjeti, kako je počinio veliku

grehotu na majci, i pokaje se jako. Ali ne smije da ženi o tom govori, jer je plašljiv, nego joj kaže: »Hajdemo za materom, da vidimo, kako će poginuti od studeni«.

Skoči veselo zlorada snaha, nađe im kožuhe, obukoše se i odoše iz daleka za staricom. A baka žalosna ide po snijegu, u po noći, preko polja. Kad je došla na jedno veliko strnište, uhvati je takova studen, da nije mogla dalje. Zato izvadi iz torbe one luči, razgrne snijeg i potpali vatru, da se malo ugrije.

Jedva se luči rasplamsale, ali ono čudo! Eto iz njih izlaze Domaći, upravo kao da je na kućnom ognjištu! Iskakuju iz vatre sve uokolo u snijeg, a za njima iskre frcaju na sve strane u tamnu noć.

Milo je baki, gotovo bi proplakala od milinja, što je ne ostaviše samu na putu. A oni se kupe oko nje, smiju se i zvižde.

»Božja braćo«, reče baka, »nije meni do radosti, nego mi hajde pomozite u nesreći.« Pripovjedi baka Domaćima, kako se budalasti sin još više pozlobio na nju, otkad se i on i selo uvjerali, da je u snahe zaista gujin jezik.

»Izagnao me, a vi pomozite, ako znate.« Malo šute Domaći, malo tepu snijeg s opančića i ne znaju baki savjeta. Ali onda Malik Tintilinić reče: »Hajdemo do Stribora, starješine našega. On svačemu savjeta znade.«

I odmah se Malik popne na glogov grm, zviznu u prste, a ono iz mraka preko strništa dokasa k njima jelen i dvanaest vjeverica. Posadiše baku na jelena, a Domaći posjedaše na vjeverice i pođoše put šume Striborove.

Jašu oni kroz noć — na jelenu rogovi i paroščići, a na svakom paroščiću zvjezdica. Sjaji se jelen i kazuje put, a za njim juri dvanaest vjeverica, a u svake vjeverice dva oka kao dva draga kamena. Jure oni i žure, a za njima izdaleka trči snaha i sin, sve im nestaje sape. Tako stigoše do šume Striborove, i ponese jelen baku kroz šumu.

Spozna snaha sve u mraku, da je ono šuma Striborova, gdje je ona već jednom radi grijeha ukleta bila, ali od velike zlobe ne može se ni sjetiti svojih novih grijeha, ni pobožati se za njih, nego se još više raduje govoreći: »Propast će neuka baka u ovoj šumi sred tolikih čarolija« — i poletje još brže za jelenom.

Donese dakle jelen baku pred Stribora. Stribor pak bijaše šumski starješina. Sjedio je sred šume, u dubu tako velikom, da je u njem bilo sedam zlatnih dvorova i osmo selo, srebrnom ogradicom ograđeno. Pred najljepšim dvorom sjedi Stribor na stolici, u crvenoj kabanici.

»Pomozi baki, propala je od snahe-guje«, rekoše Domaći Striboru, kad mu se bijahu poklonili i oni i baka. Pripovjede oni sve, kako je bilo. A snaha i sin došuljali se do duba, pa kroz crvotoč gledaju i slušaju što će biti.

Kad su Domaći svršili svoju pripovijest, reče Stribor baki: »Ne boj se starice! Ostavi snahu, neka živi u zlobi, dok je zloba ne dovede opet onamo, otkuda se prerano oslobodila. A tebi ću lako pomoći. Gledaj tamo ono selo, srebrom ograđeno!«

Pogleda baka, a ono njezino rodno selo, u kojemu je mladovala, a u selu proštenje i veselje. Zvona zvone, gusle gude, zastave se vijuju, a pjesme podcikuju.

»Uniđi kroz ogradicu, pljesni rukama i pomladit ćeš se odmah. Ostat ćeš u selu svome, da mladuješ i da se raduješ, kao pred pedesetak godina!«, reče Stribor.

Razveseli se baka kao nikada, poletje odmah do ogradice, uhvatila se već rukom za srebrna vratašca, ali se uto još nečega sjetila, pa upita Stribora: »A što će biti od moga sina?«

»Ne budali, bako!« odgovori Stribor, »Otkud bi ti za svoga sina znala? On će ostati u ovom vremenu, a ti ćeš se vratiti u mladost svoju! Ni znati ne ćeš za kakvog sina!«

Kad je baka ovo čula, zamisli se teško. A onda se polako vrati od gredice, dođe natrag pred Stribora, nakloni se duboko i reče: »Hvala ti, dobri gospodaru, na svemu dobru, što mi ga daješ. Ali ja volim ostati u svojoj nesreći, a znati, da imam sina, negoli da mi dadeš sve blago i sve dobro ovoga svijeta, a da moram zaboraviti sina!«

Kad je baka ovo izrekla, strahovito jeknu cijela dubrava, prestadoše čari u šumi Striborovoj, jer je baki bila draža njezina nevolja, nego sva sreća ovog svijeta.

Zanjiše se čitava šuma, provali se zemlja, propade u zemlju ogromni dub sa dvorovima i sa selom srebrom ograđenim, nestade Stribora i Domaćih, ciknu snaha iza duba — pretvori se u guju — uteče u rupu — a majka i sin nađoše se nasred šume sami, jedno uz drugo.

Pade sin pred majku na koljena, ljubi joj skute i rukave, a onda je podiže na svoje ruke i nosi kući, kuda sretno do zore stigoše. Moli sin Boga i majku, da mu oprostite. Bog mu oprost, a majka mu nije ni zamjerila bila.

Momak se poslije vjenčao s onim ubogim i milim djevojčedom, što im bijaše dovela Domaće u kuću. Još i sad sretno žive svi zajedno, pak im Malik Tintilinić u zimnje večeri rado na ognjište dohodi.

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# 2

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## STRIBOR'S FOREST

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### 2.1 WHAT A PRETTY SNAKE

One day a young man went into Stribor's Forest and did not know that the Forest was enchanted and that all manner of magic abode there. Some of its magic was good and some was bad — to each one according to his deserts.

Now this Forest was to remain enchanted until it should be entered by someone who preferred his sorrows to all the joys of this world.

The young man set to and cut wood, and presently sat down on a stump to rest, for it was a fine winter's day. And out of the stump slipped a snake, and began to fawn upon him. Now this wasn't a real snake, but a human being transformed into a snake for its sins, and it could only be set free by one who was willing to wed it. The snake sparkled like silver in the sun as it looked up into the young man's eyes.

"Dear me, what a pretty snake! I should rather like to take it home," said the young man in fun.

"Here's the silly fool who is going to help me out of my trouble," thought the sinful soul within the snake. So she made haste and turned herself at once out of a snake into a most beautiful woman standing there before the young man. Her sleeves were white and embroidered like butterflies' wings, and her feet were tiny like a countess's. But because her thoughts had been evil, the tongue in her mouth remained a serpent's tongue.

"Here I am! Take me home and marry me!" said the snake-woman to the youth.

Now if this youth had only had presence of mind and remembered quickly to brandish his hatchet at her and call out: "I certainly never thought of wedding a piece of forest magic," why, then the woman would at once have turned again into a snake, wriggled back into the stump, and no harm done to anybody.

But he was one of your good-natured, timid and shy youths; moreover, he was ashamed to say "No" to her, when she had transformed herself all on his account. Besides, he liked her because she was pretty, and he couldn't know in his innocence what had remained inside her mouth.

So he took the Woman by the hand and led her home. Now that youth lived with his old Mother, and he cherished his Mother as though she were the image of a saint.

"This is your daughter-in-law," said the youth, as he entered the house with the Woman.

"The Lord be thanked, my son," replied his Mother, and looked at the pretty girl. But the Mother was old and wise, and knew at once what was inside her daughter-in-law's mouth.

The daughter-in-law went out to change her dress, and the Mother said to her son: "You have chosen a very pretty bride, my boy; only beware, lest she be a snake."

The youth was dumbfounded with astonishment. How could his Mother know that the other had been a snake? And his heart grew angry within him as he thought: "Surely my Mother is a witch." And from that moment he hated his Mother.

So the three began to live together, but badly and discordantly. The daughter-in-law was ill-tempered, spiteful, greedy and proud.

Now there was a mountain peak there as high as the clouds, and one day the daughter-in-law bade the old Mother go up and fetch her snow from the summit for her to wash in.

"There is no path up there," said the Mother.

"Take the goat and let her guide you. Where she can go up, there you can tumble down," said the daughter-in-law.

The son was there at the time, but he only laughed at the words, simply to please his wife.

This so grieved the Mother that she set out at once for the peak to fetch the snow, because she was tired of life. As she went her way she thought to ask God

to help her; but she changed her mind and said: "For then God would know that my son is undutiful."

But God gave her help all the same, so that she safely brought the snow back to her daughter-in-law from the cloud-capped peak.

Next day the daughter-in-law gave her a fresh order: "Go out on to the frozen lake. In the middle of the lake there is a hole. Catch me a carp there for dinner."

"The ice will give way under me, and I shall perish in the lake," replied the old Mother.

"The carp will be pleased if you go down with him," said the daughter-in-law.

And again the son laughed, and the Mother was so grieved that she went out at once to the lake. The ice cracked under the old woman, and she wept so that the tears froze on her face. But yet she would not pray to God for help; she would keep it from God that her son was sinful.

"It is better that I should perish," thought the Mother as she walked over the ice.

But her time had not yet come. And therefore a gull flew over her head, bearing a fish in its beak. The fish wriggled out of the gull's beak and fell right at the feet of the old woman. The Mother picked up the fish and brought it safely to her daughter-in-law.

On the third day the Mother sat by the fire, and took up her son's shirt to mend it. When her daughter-in-law saw that, she flew at her, snatched the shirt out of her hands, and screamed: "Stop that, you blind old fool! That is none of your business."

And she would not let the Mother mend her son's shirt.

Then the old woman's heart was altogether saddened, so that she went outside, sat in that bitter cold on the bench before the house, and cried to God: "Oh God, help me!"

At that moment she saw a poor girl coming towards her. The girl's bodice was all torn and her shoulder blue with the cold, because the sleeve had given way. But still the girl smiled, for she was bright and sweet-tempered. Under her arm she carried a bundle of kindling-wood.

"Will you buy wood for kindling, Mother?" asked the girl.

"I have no money, my dear; but if you like I will mend your sleeve," sadly returned the old Mother, who was still holding the needle and thread with which she had wanted to mend her son's shirt.

So the old Mother mended the girl's sleeve, and the girl gave her a bundle of kindling-wood, thanked her kindly, and went on happy because her shoulder was no longer cold.

## 2.2 WHOEVER IS THAT?

That evening the daughter-in-law said to the Mother: "We are going out to supper with godmother. Mind you have hot water for me when I come back." The daughter-in-law was greedy and always on the lookout to get invited for a meal.

So the others went out, and the old woman was left alone. She took out the kindling-wood which the poor girl had given her, lit the fire on the hearth, and went into the shed for wood.

As she was in the shed fetching the wood, she suddenly heard something in the kitchen a-bustling and a-rustling — "hist, hist!"

"Whoever is that?" called the old Mother from the shed.

"Brownies! Brownies!" came the answer from the kitchen in voices so tiny, for all the world like sparrows chirping under the roof.

The old woman wondered what on earth was going on there in the dark, and went into the kitchen. And when she got there the kindling-chips just flared up on the hearth, and round the flame there were Brownies dancing in a ring — all tiny little men no bigger than half an ell. They wore little fur coats; their caps and shoes were red as flames; their beards were grey as ashes, and their eyes sparkled like live coal.

More and more of them danced out of the flames, one for each chip. And as they appeared they laughed and chirped, turned somersaults on the hearth, twittered with glee, and then took hands and danced in a ring.

And how they danced! Round the hearth, in the ashes, under the cupboard, on the table, in the jug, on the chair! Round and round! Faster and faster! They chirped and they chattered, chased and romped all over the place. They scattered the salt; they spilt the barm; they upset the flour — all for sheer fun. The fire on the

hearth blazed and shone, crackled and glowed; and the old woman gazed and gazed. She never regretted the salt nor the barm, but was glad of the jolly little folk whom God had sent to comfort her.

It seemed to the old woman as though she were growing young again. She laughed like a dove; she tripped like a girl; she took hands with the Brownies and danced. But all the time there was the load on her heart, and that was so heavy that the dance stopped at once.

"Little brothers," said the Mother to the Brownies, "can you not help me to get a sight of my daughter-in-law's tongue, so that when I can show my son what I have seen with my own eyes he will perhaps come to his senses?"

And the old woman told the Brownies all that had happened. The Brownies sat round the edge of the hearth, their little feet thrust under the grate, each wee mannikin beside his neighbour, and listened to the old woman, all wagging their heads in wonder. And as they wagged their heads, their red caps caught the glow of the fire, and you'd have thought there was nothing there but the fire burning on the hearth.

When the old woman had finished her story, one of the Brownies called out, and his name was Wee Tintlinkie: "I will help you! I will go to the sunshiny land and bring you magpies' eggs. We will put them under the sitting hen, and when the magpies are hatched your daughter-in-law will betray herself. She will crave

for little magpies like any ordinary forest snake, and so put out her tongue."

All the Brownies twittered with joy because Wee Tintilinkie had thought of something so clever. They were still at the height of their glee when in came the daughter-in-law from supper with a cake for herself.

She flew to the door in a rage to see who was chattering in the kitchen. But just as she opened the door, the door went bang! the flame leapt, up jumped the Brownies, gave one stamp all round the hearth with their tiny feet, rose up above the flames, flew up to the roof, — the boards in the roof creaked a bit, and the Brownies were gone!

Only Wee Tintilinkie did not run away, but hid among the ashes.

When the flame leapt so unexpectedly and the door banged to, the daughter-in-law got a start, so that for sheer fright she plumped on the floor like a sack. The cake broke in her hand; her hair came down, combs and all; her eyes goggled, and she called out angrily: "What was that, you old wretch?"

"The wind blew up the flame when the door opened," said the Mother, and kept her wits about her.

"And what is that among the ashes?" said the daughter-in-law again. For from the ashes peeped the red heel of Wee Tintilinkie's shoe.

"That is a live ember," said the Mother.

However, the daughter-in-law would not believe her, but, all dishevelled as she was, she got up and went over to see close to what was on the hearth. As she

bent down with her face over the ashes Wee Tintilinkie quickly let out with his foot, so that his heel caught the daughter-in-law on the nose. The Woman screamed as if she were drowning in the sea; her face was all over soot, and her tumbled hair all smothered with ashes.

"What was that, you miserable old woman?" hissed the daughter-in-law.

"A chestnut bursting in the fire," answered the Mother; and Wee Tintilinkie in the ashes almost split with laughter.

While the daughter-in-law went out to wash, the Mother showed Wee Tintilinkie where the daughter-in-law had set the hen, so as to have little chickens for Christmas. That very night Wee Tintilinkie fetched magpies' eggs and put them under the hen instead of hens' eggs.

### 2.3 AND WHAT WILL BECOME OF MY SON?

The daughter-in-law bade the Mother take good care of the hen and to tell her at once whenever the chickens were hatched. Because the daughter-in-law intended to invite the whole village to come and see that she had chickens at Christmas, when nobody else had any.

In due time the magpies were hatched. The Mother told her daughter-in-law that the chickens had come out, and the daughter-in-law invited the village. Gossips and neighbours came along, both great and small, and the old woman's son was there too. The Wife told

her mother-in-law to fetch the nest and bring it into the passage.

The Mother brought in the nest, lifted off the hen, and behold, there was something chirping in the nest. The naked magpies scrambled out, and hop, hop, hopped all over the passage.

When the Snake-Woman so unexpectedly caught sight of *magpies*, she betrayed herself. Her serpent's nature craved its prey; she darted down the passage after the little magpies and shot out her thin quivering tongue at them as she used to do in the Forest.

Gossips and neighbours screamed and crossed themselves, and took their children home, because they realised that the woman was indeed a snake from the Forest.

But the Mother went up to her son full of joy.

"Take her back to where you brought her from, my son. Now you have seen with your own eyes what it is you are cherishing in your house;" and the Mother tried to embrace her son.

But the son was utterly infatuated, so that he only hardened himself the more against the village, and against his Mother, and against the evidence of his own eyes. He would not turn away the Snake-Woman, but cried out upon his Mother: "Where did you get young magpies at this time of year, you old witch? Be off with you out of my house!"

Eh, but the poor Mother saw that there was no help for it. She wept and cried, and only begged her son not

to turn her out of the house in broad daylight for all the village to see what manner of son she had reared.

So the son allowed his Mother to stay in the house until nightfall.

When evening came, the old Mother put some bread into her bag, and a few of those kindling-chips which the poor girl had given her, and then she went weeping and sobbing out of her son's house.

But as the Mother crossed the threshold, the fire went out on the hearth, and the crucifix fell from the wall. Son and daughter-in-law were left alone in the darkened cottage. And now the son felt that he had sinned greatly against his Mother, and he repented bitterly. But he did not dare to speak of it to his wife, because he was afraid. So he just said: "Let's follow Mother and see her die of cold."

Up jumped the wicked daughter-in-law, overjoyed, and fetched their fur coats, and they dressed and followed the old woman from afar.

The poor Mother went sadly over the snow, by night, over the fields. She came to a wide stubble-field, and there she was so overcome by the cold that she could go no farther. So she took the kindling-wood out of her bag, scraped the snow aside, and fit a fire to warm herself by.

But lo! no sooner had the chips caught fire than the Brownies came out of them, just the same as on the household hearth!

They skipped out of the fire and all round in the snow, and the sparks flew about them in all directions into the night.

The poor old woman was so glad she could almost have cried for joy because they had not forsaken her on her way. And the Brownies crowded round her, laughed and whistled.

"Oh, dear Brownies," said the Mother, "I don't want to be amused just now; help me in my sore distress!"

Then she told the Brownies how her silly son had grown still more bitter against her since even he and all the village had come to know that his wife truly had a serpent's tongue: "He has turned me away; help me if you can."

For a while the Brownies were silent, for a while their little shoes tapped the snow, and they did not know what to advise.

At last Wee Tintlinkie said: "Let's go to Stribor, our master. He always knows what to do."

And at once Wee Tintlinkie shinned up a hawthorn-tree; he whistled on his fingers, and out of the dark and over the stubble-field there came trotting towards them a stag and twelve squirrels!

They set the old Mother on the stag, and the Brownies got on the twelve squirrels, and off they went to Stribor's Forest.

Away and into the night they rode. The stag had mighty antlers with many points, and at the end of each point there burned a little star. The stag gave light on the way, and at his heels sped the twelve squirrels,

each squirrel with eyes that shone like two diamonds. They sped and they fled, and far behind them toiled the daughter-in-law and her husband, quite out of breath.

So they came to Stribor's Forest, and the stag carried the old woman through the forest.

Even in the dark the daughter-in-law knew that this was Stribor's Forest, where she had once before been enchanted for her sins. But she was so full of spite that she could not think of her new sins nor feel fear because of them, but triumphed all the more to herself and said: "Surely the simple old woman will perish in this Forest amid all the magic!" and she ran still faster after the stag.

But the stag carried the Mother before Stribor. Now Stribor was lord of that Forest. He dwelt in the heart of the Forest, in an oak so huge that there was room in it for seven golden castles, and a village all fenced about with silver. In front of the finest of the castles sat Stribor himself on a throne, arrayed in a cloak of scarlet.

"Help this old woman, who is being destroyed by her serpent daughter-in-law," said the Brownies to Stribor, after both they and the Mother had bowed low before him. And they told him the whole story. But the son and daughter-in-law crept up to the oak, and looked and listened through a wormhole to see what would happen.

When the Brownies had finished, Stribor said to the old woman: "Fear nothing. Mother! Leave your daughter-in-law. Let her continue in her wickedness

until it shall bring her again to the state from which she freed herself too soon. As for yourself, I can easily help you. Look at yonder village, fenced about with silver."

The Mother looked, and lo! it was her own native village, where she had lived when she was young, and in the village there was holiday and merry-making. Bells were ringing, fiddles playing, flags waving, and songs resounding.

"Cross the fence, clap your hands, and you will at once regain your youth. You will remain in your village to be young and blithe once more as you were fifty years ago," said Stribor.

At that the old woman was glad as never before in her life. She ran to the fence; already her hand was on the silver gate, when she suddenly bethought herself of something, and asked Stribor: "And what will become of my son?"

"Don't talk foolishness, old woman!" replied Stribor. "How would you know about your son? He will remain in this present time, and you will go back to your youth. You will know nothing about any son!"

When the old woman heard that, she considered sadly. And then she turned slowly away from the gate, went back to Stribor, bowed low before him, and said: "I thank you, kind lord, for all the favour you would show me. But I would rather abide in my misery and know that I have a son than that you should give me all the riches and happiness in the world and I forget my son."

As the Mother said this, the whole Forest rang again. There was an end to the magic in Stribor's Forest, because the Mother preferred her sorrows to all the joys of this world.

The entire Forest quaked, the earth fell in, and the huge oak, with its castles and its silver-fenced village, sank underground. Stribor and the Brownies vanished, the daughter-in-law gave a shriek, turned into a snake, wriggled away down a hole, and Mother and Son were left alone side by side in the middle of the Forest.

The son fell on his knees before his mother, kissed the hem of her garment and her sleeve, and then he lifted her up in his arms and carried her back to their home, which they happily reached by daybreak.

The son prayed God and his Mother to forgive him. God forgave him, and his Mother had never been angry with him.

Later on the young man married that poor but sweet girl who had brought the Brownies to their house. They are all three living happily together to this day, and Wee Tintilinkie loves to visit their hearth of a winter's evening.

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