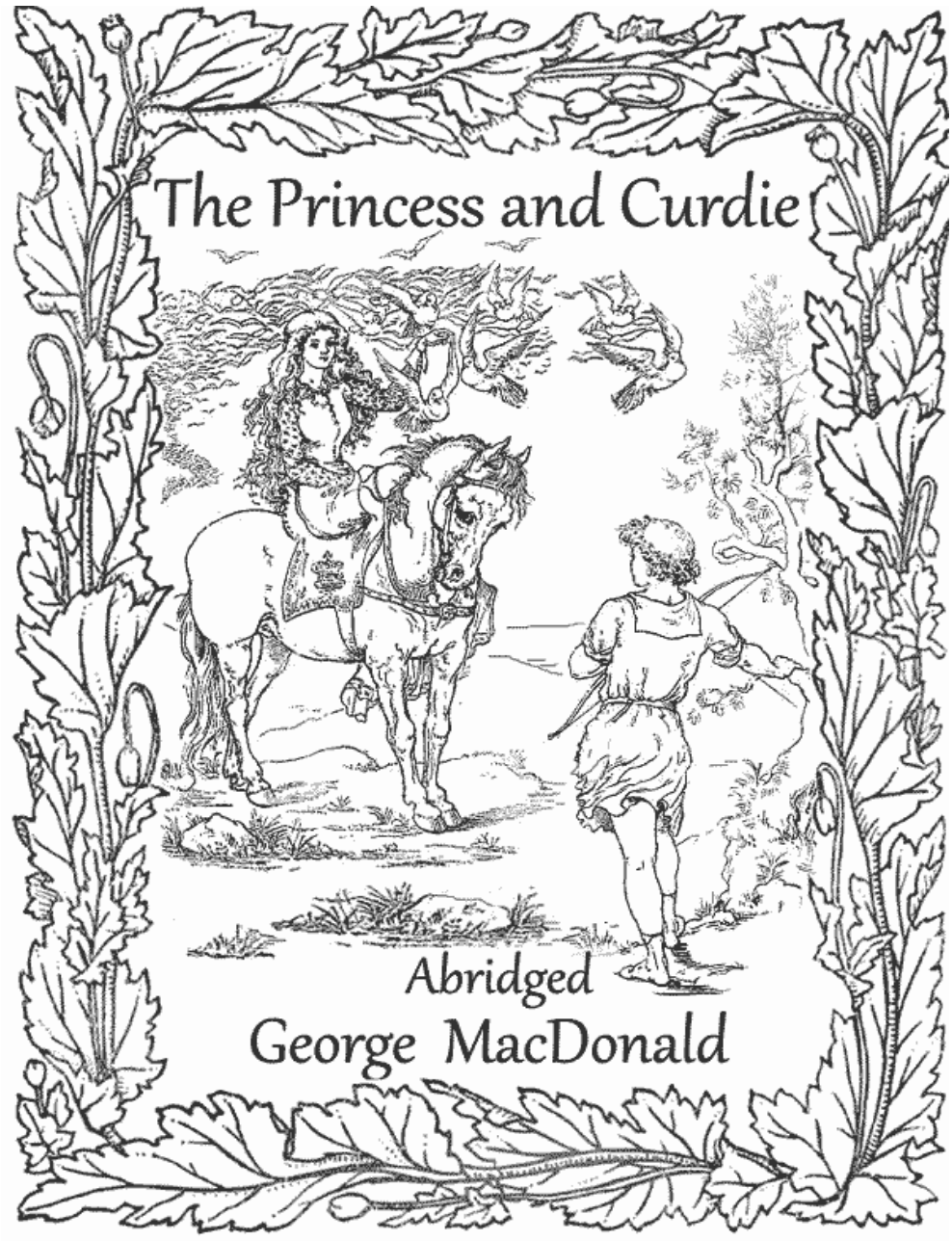

The Princess and Curdie
Abridged

George MacDonald

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THE PRINCESS AND CURDIE

CHAPTER 1
The Mountain

Curdie was the son of Peter the miner. He lived with his father and mother in a cottage built on a mountain, and he worked with his father inside the mountain.

A mountain is a strange and awful thing. It is a piece of the heart of the earth that has escaped from down below, and rushed up and out. For the heart of the earth is a great wallowing mass of glowing hot, melted metals and stones. And just as our hearts keep us alive, so that great lump of heat keeps the earth alive: it is a huge power of buried sunlight – that is what it is.

Now think: out of that cauldron, vast bubbles have escaped up and away, and there they stand in the cold sky – mountains. So it is no wonder that there should be something awful about the very look of a mountain, that shoots upward into the wind, and the cold, and the starshine, with a cloak of snow high up; and everlasting stillness, except for the wind that turns the rocks and caverns into a roaring organ, and the molten music of the streams, rushing ever down.

Think of the creatures scampering over and burrowing in the mountain, and the birds building their nests on it, and the trees growing like hair to clothe it, and the lovely grass in the valleys, and the flowers right up to the very edge of its armour of ice, and the rivers galloping down the valleys in a tumult of white and green! And think of the terrible precipices down which a traveller may fall and be lost, and dark deep lakes, covered with floating ice!

But inside the mountain, who shall tell what lies there? Caves of awful solitude, their walls miles thick, sparkling with ores of gold or silver, copper or iron, studded perhaps with precious stones; perhaps a brook, with eyeless fish in it, running ceaselessly, cold and babbling, through banks crusted with gems – who can tell?

There are caverns full of water, numbingly cold, or fiercely hot. From some of these the water runs in channels, gushing in clefts of all shapes through the mountain, until it springs newborn to the light, and rushes down the mountainside in torrents, and down the valleys in rivers to the sea. There it is tossed in storms, heaved up in billows, twisted in waterspouts, dashed to mist upon rocks, beaten by millions of fish-tails, and at last, melted into vapour by the sun. Then it is lifted up into the air, and borne by the winds back to the mountaintops.

And into the mountains rush humans, to see what they can find there. With pickaxe and spade and crowbar and gunpowder, they force their way in. The mountains are tunnelled and bored in the darkness by people who build their houses on the mountainside.

Curdie and his father were miners: their business was to bring to light hidden things; they sought silver in the rock and found it in darkness and danger, and carried it out. But oh, how sweet was the air on the mountain face when they came out at sunset to go home to wife and mother! They did breathe deeply then!

The mines belonged to the king of the country, and the miners worked for him. He was a real king – that is, one who ruled for the good of his people and not to please himself. He wanted the silver not to buy rich things for himself, but to help him to govern the country, and pay his soldiers and his judges.

About a year before this story began, a series of very remarkable events had just ended. In brief, this is what had happened:

Up on the mountain stood a grand old house, half farmhouse, half castle, belonging to the king; and there his only child, the Princess Irene, had been brought up till she was nearly nine years old. The hollow places of the mountain were inhabited by goblins, who were troublesome to all, but who were dangerous to the little princess. However, their plans had been utterly defeated, mainly by the watchful energy of Curdie; and there were very few goblins left.

The king had been so pleased with Curdie that when he took away his daughter he asked Curdie to accompany them; but he was still better pleased when he found that Curdie preferred staying with his father and mother. So the king said a kind farewell to them and rode away, with his daughter on his horse before him.

A gloom fell upon the mountain and the miners when she was gone, and Curdie did not whistle for a whole week. As for his verses, there was no need to make any now. He had made them to drive away the goblins, and they were all gone – and good riddance – only the princess was gone too!

But whoever is diligent will soon be cheerful, and though the miners missed the household of the castle, they managed to get on without them. Peter and his wife, however, were troubled with the thought that they had stood in the way of their boy's good fortune. It would have been such a fine thing for him if he had ridden with the good king. They believed that he might soon have been a captain!

The good, kind people did not reflect that the road to the next duty is the only straight one; or that we should never wish our children to do what we would not do ourselves.

CHAPTER 2
The White Pigeon

In the winter, after supper, when they sat around the fire, or in the summer when they lay by the stream that ran close by the door of their cottage, Curdie's mother would often talk about one person who was said to have been much involved in the recent events.

That person was the princess Irene's great-great-grandmother, whom neither Curdie nor his mother had ever seen.

Curdie could indeed remember, as if it had happened in a dream, how the princess had once led him up many stairs to what she called a beautiful room in the top of the tower. There she went through all the motions of presenting him to her grandmother, talking now to her and now to him, while all the time he saw nothing but a bare garret, a heap of musty straw, a sunbeam, and a withered apple. At that time he declared that there was nobody there, and the princess was unhappy that he could not see what she saw.

As for his mother, she had once seen, long ago, a mysterious round light like the one Irene called her grandmother's moon; and Curdie himself had seen this same light, shining from above the castle, just as the king and princess were leaving. Since that time they had neither seen nor heard anything that could be connected to the old lady.

Strangely, however, nobody had seen her go away. Still, away she must have gone – if she existed.

But as Curdie grew older, he doubted more and more whether Irene had not been talking of some dream. Yet at the same time there was his mother's story: what was he to do with that? His mother could hardly be imagined to have mistaken a dream for fact.

So he rather shrank from thinking about it, and the less he thought about it, the less he was inclined to believe it when he did think about it; and therefore, of course, was less inclined to talk about it to his father and mother.

And there were no other people to whom he could have talked about it. The miners were a mixture of good and bad; Curdie liked most of them, and was a favourite with them all; but they knew very little about the upper world. They knew silver from copper ore; they understood the underground ways of things, and they could look very wise with their lanterns in their hands; but to them the very word "great-great-grandmother" would have been a week's laughter! They had certainly never seen one.

They were not companions for Curdie as he grew; and he grew faster in body than in mind. In fact, he became rather stupid. One of the chief signs of this was that he believed less and less in things he had never seen.

He was becoming more and more a miner, and less and less a man of the upper world where the wind blew. On his way to and from the mine he took less notice of bees and butterflies, moths and dragonflies, the flowers and the brooks and the clouds. He was gradually changing into a commonplace man: the sort who can grow so afraid of being taken in, that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner.

So Curdie was not in a very good way at that time. His father and mother had, it is true, no fault to find with him, and yet neither of them was happy about him. There must be something wrong when a mother catches herself sighing over the time when her boy was in small, or a father looks sad when he thinks how he used to carry him on his shoulders. The boy should keep the old child at the heart of him, and never let it go. To be a proper man, he should still be his mother's darling, and his father's pride.

Curdie had made himself a bow and some arrows, and was teaching himself to shoot. One evening in the early summer, as he was walking home from the mine with them in his hand, a light flashed across his eyes.

He looked over, and there was a snow-white pigeon settling on a rock in front of him, in the red light of the level sun. It began preening its feathers.

It was indeed a lovely bird, and Curdie thought how happy it must be flitting through the air. For a moment he became so at one with the bird that he seemed to feel its feathers, and his heart swelled with pleasure. Another moment and it would have taken flight again – it was just bending its little legs to spring: but at that moment it fell on the path, broken-winged and bleeding from Curdie's cruel arrow.

With a gush of pride at his skill, and pleasure at his success, he ran to pick up his prey. He picked it up gently – perhaps it was the beginning of his repentance. But when he had the white bird in his hands, its whiteness stained with a different red than that of the sunset, it looked up in his face – with such eyes! – as if asking what had happened. Then its eyes closed, but opened again, with the same questions in them.

Its eyes were fixed on his. The bird did not once flutter or try to get away; it only throbbed and bled and looked at him. Curdie's heart began to feel very large in his chest. What could it mean? It was nothing but a pigeon, and why should he not kill a pigeon?

Once more it opened its eyes – then closed them again, and its throbbing ceased. Curdie gave a sob: its last look reminded him of the princess – he did not know why. He remembered how hard he had laboured to set her beyond

danger, and what dangers she had encountered for his sake: they had been saviours to each other.

And what had he done now? He had stopped saving, and had begun killing! What had he been sent into the world for? Surely not to bring death to its joy and loveliness. He was a destroyer! He was not the Curdie he was meant to be!

Curdie wept. And with the tears came the remembrance that just before the princess went away with her father, a white pigeon came from the grandmother's lamp, and flew round the king and Irene and himself, and then flew away. This might be that very pigeon! Horrible to think! And if it wasn't, it was one the same as this. Whose pigeon could he have killed but the grand old princess's?

Suddenly everything around about him seemed against him. The red sunset stung him; the rocks frowned at him; the sweet wind stopped gently brushing his face. Would he have to stand there forever, not knowing what to do, with the dead pigeon in his hand?

The sun went down. Great clouds gathered over the west, and the wind gave a howl. Then came a rumbling; he thought it was thunder, although it was a rock that fell inside the mountain. A goat ran past him down the hill, followed by a dog: he thought they were goblin creatures, and trembled, although he used to despise them. And still he held the dead pigeon tenderly in his hand.

It grew darker and darker. An evil something began to move in Curdie's heart.

"What a fool I am!" he said to himself. He grew angry, and was about to throw the bird away, when a brightness shone all round him.

He lifted his eyes, and saw a great globe of silver light, that shone from above the roofs of the castle. It must be the great old princess's moon! How could she be there? Of course she was not there! He had asked the whole household, and nobody knew anything about her or her globe. It couldn't be! And yet what did that matter, when there was the white globe shining, and here was the dead white bird in his hand?

At that moment the pigeon gave a little flutter.

"It's not dead!" cried Curdie, almost with a shriek. In the same instant he was running full speed toward the castle, trying not to shake the poor, wounded bird.

CHAPTER 3
The Mistress of the Silver Moon

When Curdie reached the castle, the great front door stood wide open. He had hoped for this, because what could he have said to the housekeeper if he had had to knock? She was often greatly puzzled, because whenever she shut the door, the next time she went to it, she found it open. If Curdie had had to knock, she would not have let him in. But it was open, so in he walked.

Where to go next he did not know. It was not quite dark: a dull twilight filled the place. All he knew was that he must go up, and he saw the great staircase rising before him. When he reached the top of it, he knew there must be more stairs, for he could not be near the top of the tower. Indeed, he must be a good way from the tower itself.

But Curdie, from knowing his way around the king's mines, and being able to calculate his whereabouts in them, was now able to find his way around the king's house. He knew its outside perfectly, and now had to match the inside with the outside.

So he shut his eyes and made a picture of the house's outside in his mind. Then he imagined every turn of the stair over again, always checking to remember where the tower lay. Then when he came to the top where he now stood, he knew exactly where the tower was, and walked in the right direction.

On his way he came to another stair, Up that he went, working out at every turn where the tower must be. At the top of this stair was yet another – they were the stairs up which the princess ran when she first found her great-great-grandmother. At the top of the second stair he could go up no farther.

He still knew in what direction he must go to find the tower, so he left the stair and went down a passage that led nearer it. This passage was rather dark, and very long, with only one window at the end, and although there were doors on both sides of it, they were all shut. At the distant window there glimmered the chill eastern sky, with a few feeble stars in it. Soon he turned into another passage, which also had a window at the end of it; and in at that window shone all that was left of the sunset, just a little touch of warmth.

Still Curdie kept on his way eastward, and came to yet another passage, which brought him to a door. He was afraid to open it without knocking. So he knocked, but heard no answer.

Yet he was answered none the less; for the door gently opened, and there was a narrow stair – so steep that he, like the Princess Irene before him, found he needed his hands to climb it. It was a long climb, but he reached the top at

last. There was a little landing, with a door in front and one on each side. Which should he knock at?

As he hesitated, he heard the noise of a spinning wheel. He knew it at once, because the sound of his mother's spinning wheel had long ago taught him to make verses, and to sing. He stood listening, entranced, and the wheel went on and on, spinning songs and tales and rhymes in his brain, till he was almost asleep as well as dreaming.

But suddenly he remembered the poor bird, which had been lying motionless in his hand all the time. That woke him up, and at once he knocked.

"Come in, Curdie," said a voice.

Curdie shook. It was getting rather awful. The heart that had never feared an army of goblins trembled at the soft word of invitation. But then there was the bird! He dared not hesitate. Gently he opened the door, and what did he see?

Nothing at first – except indeed a great sloping shaft of moonlight that came in through a high window, and rested on the floor. He stood and stared at it, forgetting to shut the door.

"Why don't you come in, Curdie?" said the voice. "Did you never see moonlight before?"

"Never without a moon," answered Curdie, in a trembling voice, but gathering courage.

"Certainly not," returned the voice, which was thin and quavering. "I never saw moonlight without a moon."

"But there's no moon outside," said Curdie.

"Ah! but you're inside now," said the voice. "There are more moons than you know of, Curdie – and of many sorts. Come in and look out of my window, and you will see that there is a moon looking in at it."

The gentleness of the voice made Curdie remember his manners. He shut the door, and drew a step or two nearer to the moonlight.

All the time the sound of the spinning had been going on, and Curdie now caught sight of the wheel. Oh, it was such a thin, delicate thing – reminding him of a spider's web in a hedge. It stood in the middle of the moonlight, and it seemed as if the moonlight had nearly melted it away.

A step nearer, he saw, with a start, two little hands at work with it. And then at last, in the shadow on the other side of the silver moonlight, he saw the person to whom the hands belonged: a small, withered lady, very old, seated on a stool beyond the spinning wheel, which looked very large beside her. She looked like a filmy thing that a puff of wind would blow away.

Curdie stood still again, a good deal in wonder, a little in reverence, a little in doubt, and a little in amusement. Her grey hair mixed with the moonlight, so that he could not tell where one began and the other ended.

Her back was crooked, her shoulders were hunched, and her two little hands were just like the claws of a hen, scratching at the thread, which Curdie could not see in the moonlight. Indeed he laughed within himself, just a little, when he thought of how the princess used to talk about her huge, great, old grandmother.

But at that moment the little lady leaned forward into the moonlight, and Curdie caught a glimpse of her eyes, and all the laugh went out of him.

"What do you come here for, Curdie?" she said, as gently as before.

Then Curdie remembered that he stood there as a culprit, and had a confession to make. There was no time to hesitate over it.

"Oh, ma'am! See here," he said, and advanced a step or two, holding out the pigeon into the moonlight. The moment the rays fell upon it, the pigeon gave a faint flutter.

The old lady put out her old hands and took it, and held it to her bosom, and rocked it, murmuring over it as if it were a sick baby. When Curdie saw how distressed she was he grew sorrier still, and said:

"I didn't mean to do any harm, ma'am. I didn't think of its being yours."

"Ah, Curdie! If it weren't mine, what would become of it now?" she asked. "You say you didn't mean any harm: did you mean any good, Curdie?"

"No."

"Remember, then, that whoever does not mean good is always in danger of doing harm. But I try to give everybody fair play; and I know that when you shot that arrow you did not know what a pigeon really is. Now that you do know, you are sorry. It is very dangerous to do things you don't know about."

"But, please, ma'am – I don't mean to be rude or to contradict you," said Curdie, "but if a person was never to do anything except what he knew to be good, he would live half his time doing nothing."

"There you are much mistaken," said the old quavering voice. "How little you must have thought! Why, you don't seem even to know the good of the things you are constantly doing. Now don't mistake me. I don't mean you are good for doing them. It is a good thing to eat your breakfast, but not because it's good of you to do it. The thing is good, not you."

Curdie laughed.

"There are a great many more good things than bad things to do. Now tell me what bad thing you have done today besides this sore hurt to my little white friend."

When the old lady asked him that question, he was at first inclined to consider himself a very good fellow on the whole. "I really don't think I did anything else that was very bad all day," he said to himself. But at the same time he could not honestly feel that he was worth standing up for. All at once a light seemed to break in upon his mind.

“I know now, ma’am; I understand now,” he said. “I have been doing wrong the whole day, and such a many days besides! Yet it seems as if I had done right some time and had forgotten how. When I killed your bird I did not know I was doing wrong, just because I was always doing wrong, and the wrong had soaked all through me.”

“What wrong were you doing all day, Curdie?” said the old lady, and her voice was gentler even than before.

“I was doing the wrong of never wanting or trying to be better. And now I see that I have been letting things go for a long time. I just did whatever came into my head. I never thought about anything to come. I haven’t been attending to my mother, or my father. And now I think of it, I know I’ve often seen them looking troubled, and I have never asked them what the matter was. I think I didn’t ask because I suspected it had something to do with me and my behaviour, and I didn’t want to hear the truth. And I know I have been grumbling at my work, and doing a hundred other things that are wrong.”

“You have got it, Curdie,” said the old lady, in a voice that sounded almost as if she had been crying. “When people don’t care to be better they must be doing everything wrong. I am so glad you shot my bird!”

“Ma’am!” exclaimed Curdie. “How can you be?”

“Because it has made you see what sort of person you were when you did it, and what sort of person you will grow to be, if you don’t take care. Now that you are sorry, my poor bird will be better. Look up, my dovey.”

The pigeon gave a flutter, and spread out one of its red-spotted wings.

“I will mend the little angel,” she said, “and in a week or two it will be flying again. So you may set your heart at rest about the pigeon.”

“Oh!” cried Curdie. “I don’t know how to thank you.”

“I will tell you. Do better, and grow better, and be better. And never kill anything without a good reason.”

“Ma’am, I will go and fetch my bow and arrows, and you shall burn them yourself.”

“I have no fire that would burn your bow and arrows, Curdie,” the old lady answered.

“Then I promise you to burn them all under my mother’s porridge pot tomorrow morning.”

“No, no, Curdie. Keep them, and practice with them every day, and grow a good shot. There are plenty of bad things that want killing, and a day will come when they will prove useful. But I must see first whether you will do as I tell you.”

“I will!” said Curdie. “What is it, ma’am?”

“Only something not to do,” answered the old lady; “if you should hear anyone speak about me, never to laugh or make fun of me. People around here

sometimes tell very odd and ridiculous stories of an old woman who watches what is going on, and occasionally interferes. They mean me, though what they say is often great nonsense. I want you not to laugh, or side with them, because then they will think that you don't believe there is any such person, any more than they do. Now that would not be the case, would it, Curdie?"

"No, indeed, ma'am. I've seen you."

The old woman smiled very oddly.

"Yes, you've seen me," she said. "But mind, I don't want you to say anything – only to hold your tongue, and not side with them."

"That will be easy," said Curdie, "now that I've seen you with my very own eyes, ma'am."

"Not so easy as you think, perhaps," said the old lady, with another curious smile. "I want to be your friend, but I don't quite know yet whether you will let me."

"Indeed I will, ma'am," said Curdie.

"That is for me to find out," she replied. "In the meantime, come to me again when you find yourself in any trouble, and I will see what I can do for you. I am greatly pleased with you for bringing me my pigeon, doing your best to set right what you had done wrong."

As she spoke she held out her hand to him, and when he took it she rose up from her stool. How it came about, Curdie could not tell, but at the same instant she stood before him a tall, strong woman – old, but grand and rather severe-looking. Every trace of the hunched back and withered look had vanished. Her hair was very white, but it hung thickly about her head, and shone like silver in the moonlight. Straight as a pillar she stood before the astonished boy, and the wounded bird had now spread out both its wings across her bosom, like some great mystical ornament of frosted silver.

"Oh, now I can never forget you!" cried Curdie. "I see now what you really are!"

"It is a bad thing indeed to forget one who has told us the truth," she said. "Now go."

Curdie took a few steps toward the door. He was going to ask, "Please, ma'am, what am I to call you?" – but when he turned round he saw nobody. Whether she was there or not he could not tell, for the moonlight had vanished, and the room was utterly dark.

A great fear, such as he had never before known, came upon him, and almost overwhelmed him. He groped his way to the door, and crawled down the stair in doubt and anxiety as to how he should find his way out of the house in the dark. The stair seemed ever so much longer than when he came up. Down and down he went, until at length his foot struck a door, and when he

opened it, he found himself under the starry, moonless sky at the foot of the tower.

He soon discovered the way out of the garden, and in a few minutes was climbing the mountain with a solemn and more cheerful heart. It was rather dark, but he knew the way well. As he passed the rock from which the poor pigeon fell wounded with his arrow, a great joy filled him at the thought that the little bird was saved, and he ran the next hundred yards at full speed up the hill.

Some dark shadows passed him: he did not even care to think what they were, but let them run. When he reached home, he found his father and mother keeping supper for him.

CHAPTER 4
Curdie's Father and Mother

Fathers and mothers are quick to read their children's looks, and when Curdie entered the cottage, his parents saw at once that something unusual had happened. When he said to his mother, "I beg your pardon for being so late," his politeness and something else in his tone went to her heart.

When he set his father's chair to the table, an attention he had not shown him for a long time, Peter thanked him with more gratitude than the boy had felt in all his life. Yet it was a small thing to do for the man who had been serving him ever since he was born.

A change had come upon Curdie, and his father and mother were pretty sure he must have something to tell them about it. But the story was too solemn for Curdie to come out with it all at once.

After they sat on the grassy bank of the brook that went so sweetly blundering over the great stones of its course, he felt that the right time had come to share the wonderful things that had happened to him. The summer was young and soft, and this was the warmest evening they had yet had – dusky below, while above, the stars were bright and large in the blackest blue sky. The night came close around them, clasping them in one universal arm of love, and seemed to see and hear and know everything they said and did. It is a way the night has sometimes. The only sound was that of the brook.

Accompanied by the sound of water, as it hurried down to the valley and the sea, Curdie told his tale to his father and mother. What a world had slipped in between the entrance of the mine and his cottage! Neither of them said a word until he had finished.

"Now what am I to make of it, Mother? It's so strange!" he said.

"It's easy enough to see what Curdie has got to make of it, isn't it, Peter?" said the good woman, turning to her husband.

"It seems so to me," answered Peter, with a smile which only the night saw, but which his wife felt in the tone of his words. They were the happiest couple in that country, because they always understood each other, and always loved what was fair and true and right.

"Then will you tell Curdie?" said she.

"You can talk best, Joan," said Peter. "You tell him, and I'll listen – and learn how to say what I think."

"I don't know what to think," said Curdie.

"It doesn't matter," said his mother. "You'll work it out. Now I needn't tell you, surely, Curdie, what you've got to do?"

“I suppose you mean, Mother,” answered Curdie, “that I must do as the old lady told me?”

“That is what I mean. Am I right, Peter?”

“Quite right, Joan,” answered Peter, “so far as I can judge. It is a very strange story, but there’s no question about believing it, for Curdie knows what happened.”

“You remember, Curdie,” said his mother, “that when the princess took you up that tower once before, and talked to her great-great-grandmother, you came home quite angry with her. You said there was nothing in the place but an old tub, a heap of straw, a withered apple, and a sunbeam. But now you have had a glimpse of the old princess herself!”

“Yes, Mother, I did see her,” said Curdie very thoughtfully. “The hardest thing to believe, though I saw it with my own eyes, was when the thin, filmy creature, that seemed almost to float like a cobweb, took my hand and rose up. She looked taller and stronger than you, Mother! That one thing would almost make me think I had been dreaming, after all.”

“Of course,” answered his mother, “it is not for me to say whether you were dreaming or not; but it doesn’t make me think I am dreaming when in the summer I hold in my hand the bunch of sweet peas that make my heart glad with their colour and scent, and remember the dry, withered-looking little plant I dibbled into that hole in the spring. I only think how wonderful and lovely it all is. How it is done I can’t tell, only there it is! And there is this too, Curdie – when you come home to your father and mother, and they find you behaving more like a dear, good son than you have behaved for a long time, they are not likely to think you were only dreaming.”

“Still,” said Curdie, looking a little ashamed, “I might have dreamed my duty.”

“Then dream often, my son; for there must then be more truth in your dreams than in your waking thoughts. But one thing is certain: there can be no harm in doing as she told you. And, indeed, until you are sure there is no such person, you are bound to do it, for you promised.”

“It seems to me,” said his father, “that if a lady comes to you in a dream, Curdie, and tells you not to talk about her when you wake, the least you can do is to hold your tongue.”

“True, Father! Yes, Mother, I’ll do it,” said Curdie.

Then they went to bed, and sleep took them in its arms.

CHAPTER 5
The Miners

The next morning, while Curdie and his father were at work in the mine, the group he was working with began talking about all sorts of wonderful tales that were told about the mines and the country around them. These were stories they had heard from their mothers and grandmothers; and in the evenings when they sat by their firesides they would hear their wives telling their children the same tales.

After a while they began to talk about a strange being they called Old Mother Wotherwop. Some said their wives had seen her; although no-one had seen her more than once. Some of their mothers and grandmothers had seen her also, and had told them tales about her when they were children. They said she could take any shape she liked, but that in reality she was a withered old woman, so old and so withered that you could almost see through her; and they said that she was never seen except at night, when something terrible had happened, or was going to happen – such as the roof of a mine falling in, or a flood within it.

She had sometimes been seen – always at night – sitting beside a well, leaning over and stirring it with her forefinger, which was six times as long as her other fingers. And whoever for months after drank from that well was sure to be ill. One of the miners, however, added that he remembered his mother saying that whoever was ill and drank from the well was sure to get better. But the majority agreed that the former was the right version of the story: for was she not an old witch, who loved to do mischief? One said he had heard that at times she took the shape of a young woman, as beautiful as an angel, and then was most dangerous of all, for she struck every man who looked upon her stone-blind.

Peter ventured to ask whether she might not be an angel that took the form of an old woman, rather than an old woman that took the form of an angel. But nobody except Curdie, who was keeping quiet with all his might, saw any sense in the question. They said an old woman might be very glad to make herself look like a young one, but who ever heard of a young and beautiful woman making herself look old and ugly?

Peter asked why they were so much more ready to believe the bad that was said of her than the good. They answered, because she was bad. He asked why they believed her to be bad, and they answered, because she did bad things. When he asked how they knew that, they said, because she was a bad creature. Even if they didn't know it, they said, a woman like that was much more likely

to be bad than good. Why did she go about at night? Why did she appear only now and then?

One went on to tell how one night when his grandfather had been having a jolly time with his friends in the market town, on his way home she had dragged him into a bog, and tumbled him up and down in it till he was nearly dead. And after that the poor man never drank a drop of anything stronger than water.

"I suppose that was her way of teaching him what a good thing water was," said Peter; but the man, who liked strong drink, did not see the joke.

"They do say," said another, "that she has lived in the old house over there ever since the little princess left it. They say that the housekeeper knows all about it, and is hand and glove with the old witch. I expect they have nice airings together on broomsticks. But it's probably all nonsense, and there's no such person at all."

"When our cow died," said another, "the witch was seen going round and round the cow-house the same night. To be sure the cow left a fine calf behind her. I wonder the witch didn't kill that too, for she'll be a far finer cow than ever her mother was."

"My old woman came upon her one night, not long before the water flooded the mine, sitting on a stone on the hillside with a whole load of goblins around her. When they saw my wife they all scampered off as fast as they could run, and where the witch was sitting there was nothing to be seen but a withered bracken bush."

And so they went on with one foolish tale after another, while Peter put in a word now and then, and Curdie diligently held his peace. But at last one of them said:

"Come, young Curdie, what are you thinking of?"

"How do you know I'm thinking of anything?" asked Curdie.

"Because you're not saying anything."

"I know what he's thinking," said another man; "he's thinking what a set of fools you are to talk such rubbish; as if ever there was such an old woman as you say! I'm sure Curdie knows better than that."

"I think," said Curdie, "it would be better that a person who says anything about her should be quite sure it is true, lest she should hear him, and not like to be lied about."

"But would she like it any better if it were true?" said the same man. "If she is what they say, she might go into a rage to be called it."

"If bad things were true of her, and I knew it," said Curdie, "I would not hesitate to say them, for I will never be afraid of anything that's bad. I suspect that the things they tell, however, if we knew all about them, would turn out to

have nothing but good in them. And I won't say a word more for fear I should say something that she might not like."

They all burst into loud laughter.

"Hear the parson!" they cried. "He believes in the witch! Ha! Ha!"

"He's afraid of her!"

"And says all she does is good!"

"He wants to make friends with her, so that she may help him find the silver ore."

"Give me my own eyes and a good divining rod before all the witches in the world! And so I'd advise you too, Master Curdie."

Thus they all mocked and jeered at him, but he did his best to keep his temper and go quietly on with his work. He got as close to his father as he could, because that helped him to bear it. As soon as they were tired of laughing and mocking, Curdie was friendly with them, and long before their midday meal all between them was as it had been.

But when the evening came, Peter and Curdie felt that they would rather walk home together without the others, and therefore lingered behind when the rest of the men left the mine.

CHAPTER 6
The Emerald

Father and son had seated themselves on a projecting piece of rock at a corner where three galleries met: the one that led from their working, one to the right leading out of the mountain, and the other to the left leading far into a part of the mine which had been long disused. Since the flood caused by the goblins, it had been impossible to pass, because of a small but very deep lake which had formed in a hollow.

They had just risen and were turning to the right to leave, when a gleam caught their eyes, and made them look along the gallery. Far up they saw a pale green light, about halfway between the floor and roof of the passage.

They could not tell what caused the light: it was like a large star, with a point of darker colour yet brighter radiance in the heart of it. It shed hardly any light around it, although in itself it was so bright as to sting the eyes that beheld it. Wonderful stories had for years gone around the mines about certain magic gems which gave out light by themselves, and this light looked just as if it came from such a gem.

So they went up the old gallery to find out what it could be. To their surprise they found that after going some distance, they seemed to be no nearer to it than when they started. Still they persevered, for it was far too wonderful a thing to lose sight of. At length they drew near the hollow where the water lay, and still were no nearer the light. But the lake had gone. The passage was no longer blocked by water: it had drained away, and the gallery lay open.

And now, to their surprise, the light, instead of being in front of them, was shining to the right, where they did not know there was any passage at all. Their lanterns showed an entrance in the rock where the water had broken through, which led into a part of the mountain of which Peter knew nothing. But when they walked a little way into it, still following the light, Curdie thought he recognized some of the passages he had gone through when he was watching the goblins.

After they had advanced a long way, with many turnings, now to the right, now to the left, all at once they realised that the light which they had thought was a long way from them was in reality almost within reach of their hands.

At the same instant it began to grow larger and thinner: the point of light grew dim as it spread, the greenness melted away, and in a moment or two, instead of a star, a dark yet luminous face was looking at them with living eyes.

And Curdie felt a great awe swell up in his heart, for he thought he had seen those eyes before.

"I see you know me, Curdie," said a voice.

"If your eyes are you, ma'am, then I know you," said Curdie. "But I never saw your face before."

"Yes, you have seen it, Curdie," said the voice. And the darkness melted away, and Curdie and his father beheld a lady, exceedingly beautiful, dressed in pale green cloth like velvet, over which her hair fell in rich gold waterfalls. It looked as if it were pouring down from her head, and vanishing in a golden vapour before it reached the floor.

Over her hair the lady wore a coronet of gold, set with pearls and emeralds. In the front of the crown was a great emerald, which looked somehow as if had caused the light they had followed. There was no other ornament on her clothes, except on her slippers, which were one mass of gleaming emeralds of various shades of green, all mingling like the waving of grass in the wind and sun.

She looked about twenty-five years old. Yet Curdie knew that the face before him was that of the old princess, Irene's great-great-grandmother.

By this time all around them had grown light, so that they could see where they were. They stood in a great splendid cavern, which Curdie recognized as that in which the goblins held their state assemblies. But, strangely, the light came streaming, sparkling, and shooting from stones of many colours in the sides and roof and floor of the cavern.

It was a glorious sight – the whole rugged place flashing with colours – in one spot a great light of deep red, in another of sapphire blue, in another of topaz yellow. Sometimes the colours ran together, and made a little river or lake of changing tints, which seemed to imitate the flowing of water.

And all the beauty of the cavern seemed gathered in one centre of harmony and loveliness, in the person of the lady who stood before Curdie in the very summer of beauty and strength. Nothing flashed or glowed or shone about her.

He said, "I was here once before, ma'am."

"I know that, Curdie," she replied.

"The place was full of torches, and the walls gleamed, but nothing like they do now, and there is no lamp in the place."

"You want to know where the light comes from?" she said, smiling.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then see: I will go out of the cavern. Do not be afraid, but watch."

She went slowly out. When she turned her back to go, the light began to pale and fade; the moment she was out of their sight the place was black as

night, except for the smoky yellow-red of their lamps, which cast a dusky glimmer round them.

CHAPTER 7
What Is in a Name?

For a time that seemed long, Curdie and Peter stood waiting. Still the Mother of Light did not return. They began to grow anxious: how were they to find their way through the mountain with its goblin paths, if their lamps should go out? For it was all night; no dawn would come there.

And their lamps were going out, for they grew redder and smokier! But they did not lose courage, for they gained faith and strength from each other's presence: they knew that they had seen the lady of emeralds, and neither would yield for a moment to the half doubts and half dreads that awoke in his heart.

Yet still she did not return. They grew weary, and sat down on the rocky floor, for wait they would – indeed, wait they must. Each set his lamp by his knee, and watched it die. Slowly the flame sank, dulled, looked lazy and stupid. But ever as it sank and dulled, the image in Curdie's mind of the Lady of Light grew stronger and clearer. Together the two lamps panted and shuddered. First one, then the other went out.

Then all was blackness up to their very hearts and everywhere around them. Or was it? No. Far away – it looked miles away – shone one tiny faint point of green light. Where, who could tell? They only knew that it shone. It grew larger, and seemed to draw nearer, until at last, as they watched with speechless delight and expectation, it seemed once more within reach of an outstretched hand.

Then it spread and melted away as before, and there were eyes – and a face – and a lovely form – and behold! the whole cavern was blazing with lights innumerable, and gorgeous, yet soft and blended.

The moment they saw the speck in the vast distance they had risen to their feet. When it came nearer they bowed their heads. Yet now they looked with fearless eyes, for the woman that was old yet young was a joy to see, and filled their hearts with reverent delight. She turned first to Peter.

"I have known you long," she said. "I have met you going to and from the mine, and seen you working in it for the last forty years."

"How is it, madam, that a grand lady like you should notice a poor man like me?" said Peter humbly.

"I am poor as well as rich," said she. "I, too, work for my bread. Last night when Curdie told you about my pigeon, and my spinning, and wondered whether he could believe that he had actually seen me, I heard what you said to each other. I am always about, as the miners said the other night when they

talked of me as Old Mother Wotherwop." She laughed, and her laugh was a delight in their souls.

"Yes," she went on, "you have got to thank me that you are so poor, Peter. It has done well for both you and me, my friend. Things come to the poor that can't get in at the door of the rich. Their money somehow blocks it up. It is a great privilege to be poor, Peter – one that no man ever coveted, but that many have yet learned to prize.

"And now I am going to tell you what no one knows but myself: you, Peter, and your wife both have the blood of the royal family in your veins. I know every branch of your family tree, and I expect Curdie to turn out a blossom on it. Therefore I have been training him for a work that must soon be done. I was near losing him, and had to send my pigeon. It would have been better if he had not shot it; but he repented, and that shall be as good in the end." She turned to Curdie and smiled.

"Ma'am," said Curdie, "may I ask questions?"

"You may ask me as many as you please – so long as they are sensible. Only I may take a few thousand years to answer some of them."

"Then would you mind telling me now, ma'am, for I feel very confused – are you the Lady of the Silver Moon?"

"Yes, Curdie; you may call me that if you like."

"And now I see you clothed in green, and the mother of all the light that dwells in the stones of the earth! And up there they call you Old Mother Wotherwop! And the Princess Irene told me you were her great-great-grandmother! And you spin the spider threads, and take care of the pigeons; and you are worn to a pale shadow with old age; and are as young as anybody can be; and as strong, I do believe, as I am."

The lady stooped toward a large green stone embedded in the rock of the floor, that looked like a well of grassy light. She laid hold of it with her fingers, broke it out, and gave it to Peter.

"There!" cried Curdie. "Twenty men could not have done that. And your fingers are as white and smooth as any lady's in the land. I don't know what to make of it."

"I could give you twenty more names to call me, Curdie, all true. What does it matter how many names I have?"

"But it is not just names, ma'am. Look at what you were like last night, and how I see you now!"

"Shapes are only dresses, Curdie. What is inside is the same all the time. But the shape I choose to put on is one thing, and the shape that foolish talk gives me is quite another. Also, a bad man may see me quite differently to you and your father. For instance, if a thief were to come in here just now, he would think he saw the demon of the mine, all in green flames, come to protect her

treasure, and would run like a hunted wild goat. I should be the same, but his evil eyes would not see me the same way."

"I think I understand," said Curdie.

"Peter," said the lady, turning to him, "you will have to give up Curdie for a little while."

"So long as he loves us, ma'am, that will not matter – much."

"Ah! you are right there, my friend," said the beautiful princess. She put out her hand, and took the hard hand of the miner, and held it for a moment lovingly. "We understand each other, Peter, you and I."

The tears came into Peter's eyes. He bowed his head in thankfulness, and his heart was too full to speak. Then the great old, young, beautiful princess turned to Curdie.

"Now, Curdie, are you ready?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Curdie.

"You do not know what for."

"You do, ma'am. That is enough."

"You could not have given me a better answer, Curdie," she replied, with one of her radiant smiles. "Do you think you will know me again?"

"I think so. But how can I tell what you may look like next?"

"Ah, indeed! How can you tell? But those who know me well, know me whatever new dress or shape or name I may be wearing; and by and by you will learn to do so too."

"But if you want me to know you again, ma'am, for certain," said Curdie, "could you not give me some sign, or tell me something about you that never changes – or some other way to know you?"

"No, Curdie; that would prevent you from knowing me. You must know me in quite another way from that. That would be only to know the sign of me – not to know me myself. It would be no better than if I were to take this emerald out of my crown and give it to you to take home with you, and you were to call it me, and talk to it. Much good that would do you, Curdie! But you shall see me again in very different circumstances from these, and maybe in a very different shape.

"Come now, I will lead you out of this cavern; your mother will be getting anxious about you. One word more: you know that the men knew little what they were talking about this morning, when they told all those tales of Old Mother Wotherwop; but did you wonder why they began talking about me at all? It was because I came to them. I was beside them all the time, though they did not know it."

As she spoke she turned and led the way from the cavern, which sank into absolute blackness behind them. And now they saw nothing of the lady except the green star, which again seemed to stay a good distance in front of them,

although they followed it at a quick pace through the mountain. Such was their confidence in her guidance, however, that they felt their way with neither hand nor foot, but walked straight on through the pitch-dark galleries. When at length the night of the upper world looked in at the mouth of the mine, the green light seemed to lose its way among the stars, and they saw it no more.

Out they came into the cool, blessed night. It was very late, with only starlight. To their surprise, three paces away they saw, seated upon a stone, an old country-woman, in a cloak which they took for black. When they came close up to it, they saw that it was red.

"Good evening!" said Peter.

"Good evening!" returned the old woman, in a voice as old as herself.

But Curdie took off his cap and said, "I am your servant, Princess."

The old woman replied, "Come to me in the dove tower tomorrow night, Curdie – alone."

"I will, ma'am," said Curdie.

So they parted, and father and son went home.

CHAPTER 8
Curdie's Mission

The next night Curdie went home from the mine a little earlier than usual, to make himself tidy before going to the dove tower. On his way down the hill, he met his father coming up. The sun had set, and the warmth of the twilight filled the evening.

Peter came rather wearily up the hill: the road, he thought, must have grown steeper since he was Curdie's age. But Curdie thought what a grand-looking man his father was, even when he was tired. It is greed and laziness and selfishness, not hunger or weariness or cold, that take the dignity out of a man.

"Ah, Curdie! There you are!" said Peter, seeing his son bounding along.

"You look tired, Father," said Curdie.

"Yes, my boy. I'm not so young as you. Why do people talk about going downhill when they begin to get old? It seems to me that they begin to go uphill."

"You looked to me, Father, as if you had been climbing the hill all your life, and were soon to get to the top."

"Nobody can tell when that will be," replied Peter. "We're so ready to think we're at the top when it lies miles away. But I must not keep you, my boy, for you are wanted; and we shall be anxious to know what the princess says to you – if she'll allow you to tell us."

"I think she will, for she knows she can trust you," said Curdie, with pride. And away he ran, and jumped, and seemed almost to fly down the long, steep path, until he came to the gate of the king's house.

There he met an unexpected obstruction. In the open door stood the housekeeper, and she seemed to broaden herself out until she almost filled the doorway.

"So!" she said, "it's you, is it, young man? You're the person that comes and goes when he pleases, and keeps running up and down my stairs without ever saying by your leave, or even wiping his shoes, and always leaves the door open! Don't you know this is my house?"

"No, I do not," returned Curdie respectfully. "You forget, ma'am, that it is the king's house."

"That is all the same. The king left it to me to take care of!"

"Is the king dead, ma'am, that he has left it to you?" asked Curdie, half in doubt.

"Insolent fellow!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "Don't you see by my dress that I am in the king's service?"

“And am I not one of his miners?”

“Ah! that counts for nothing. I am one of his household. You are a labourer, a nobody. You carry a pickaxe. I carry the keys at my girdle. See!”

“But you must not call someone a nobody to whom the king has spoken,” said Curdie.

“Go along with you!” cried the housekeeper, and would have shut the door in his face, except that it was very heavy and seemed unwilling to shut.

Curdie came a pace nearer. She called aloud on the menservants, to come and help her. Before any of them could answer, however, she gave a great shriek and turned and fled, leaving the door wide open.

Looking behind him, Curdie saw an animal. He had seen strange animals before – for many used to live inside the mountain with their masters, the goblins – but he had never seen one as gruesome and as odd as this. Its eyes were flaming with anger, but it seemed to be anger at the housekeeper, for it came creeping up and laid its head on the ground at Curdie’s feet.

Curdie paid it little attention. He ran into the house, eager to get up the stairs before any of the menservants should come. Though the passages were nearly dark, he reached the door of the princess’s workroom, and knocked.

“Come in,” said the princess’s voice.

Curdie opened the door – but, to his astonishment, saw no room there. Could he have opened the wrong door? There was the great sky, and the stars, and beneath them he could see nothing, only darkness! But what was that in the sky, straight in front of him? A great wheel of fire, turning and turning, and flashing blue lights!

“Come in, Curdie,” said the voice again.

“I would at once, ma’am,” said Curdie, “if I were sure I was standing at your door.”

“Why should you doubt it, Curdie?”

“Because I see neither walls nor floor, only darkness and the great sky.”

“That is all right, Curdie. Come in.”

Curdie stepped forward. He was tempted, for a moment, to feel before him with his foot; but he saw that would be to distrust the princess, and would be rude. So he stepped straight in, although with a little tremble at the thought of finding no floor beneath his foot. But his foot landed on a sold surface.

Then he saw that the great revolving wheel in the sky was the princess’s spinning wheel, near the other end of the room, turning very fast. He could see no sky or stars any more, but the wheel was flashing out a lovely sky-blue light. Behind it sat the princess, but whether an old woman as thin as a skeleton leaf, or a glorious young lady, he could not tell for the turning and flashing of the wheel.

“Listen to the wheel,” said the voice which had already grown more precious to Curdie than a jewel. And Curdie listened. “What is it saying?” asked the voice.

“It is singing,” answered Curdie.

“What is it singing?”

Curdie tried to make it out, but no sooner had he got hold of something than it vanished again. Yet he listened and listened, entranced with delight.

“Thank you, Curdie,” said the voice.

“Ma’am,” he said, “I did try hard, but I could not make anything of it.”

“Oh yes, you did, and you have been telling it to me! Shall I tell you what I told my wheel, and my wheel told you, and you have just told me without knowing it?”

“Please, ma’am.”

Then the lady began to sing, and her wheel spun an accompaniment to her song, and the music of the wheel was like the music of a harp played by the wind. Oh, the sweet sounds of that spinning wheel! Now they were gold, now silver, now palm trees, now ancient cities, now rubies, now mountain brooks, now peacock’s feathers, now clouds, now snowdrops, and now islands.

As for the voice that sang through it all, it was beautiful and true and lovely. This is something like the words of the song:

The stars are spinning their threads,
And the clouds are the dust that flies,
And the suns are weaving them up
For the time when the sleepers shall rise.

The ocean in music rolls,
And gems are turning to eyes,
And the trees are gathering souls
For the day when the sleepers shall rise.

The weepers are learning to smile,
And laughter to glean the sighs;
Burn and bury the care and guile,
For the day when the sleepers shall rise.

Oh, the dews and the moths and the daisy red,
The larks and the glimmers and flows!
The lilies and sparrows and daily bread,
And the something that nobody knows!

The princess stopped, her wheel stopped, and she laughed. And her laugh was sweet; sweeter than running brook and silver bell; sweeter than joy itself, for the heart of the laugh was love.

"Come now, Curdie, to this side of my wheel, and you will find me," she said.

Curdie obeyed, and passed the wheel, and there she stood – fairer than when he saw her last, a little younger still, and dressed not in green and emeralds, but in pale blue, with a coronet of silver set with pearls, and slippers covered with opals that gleamed every colour of the rainbow. It was some time before Curdie could take his eyes from her loveliness.

Fearing at last that he was rude, he looked away; and saw that he was in a room of marvellous beauty. The lofty ceiling was a golden vine, with great clusters of gems and rubies hanging down, and in its centre hung the most glorious lamp that human eyes ever saw – the Silver Moon itself, with a radiant heart of light.

The room was so large that, looking back, he could scarcely see the end at which he had entered; but the other end was only a few yards from him – and there he saw another wonder: on a huge hearth a great fire was burning, and it was both a fire and a huge heap of roses. The smell of the roses filled the air, and the heat of the flames of them glowed upon his face.

He turned an inquiring look upon the lady, who was now seated in an ancient chair, the legs of which were crusted with gems, but the upper part a nest of daisies and moss and green grass.

"Curdie," she said, "you have stood more than one trial already, and have stood them well: now I am going to put you to a harder test. Do you think you are prepared for it?"

"How can I tell, ma'am," he returned, "seeing I do not know what it is, or what it needs?"

"It needs only trust and obedience," answered the lady.

"I dare not say anything, ma'am. If you think me fit, command me."

"It will hurt you terribly, Curdie, but that will be all; no real hurt, but much good will come to you from it."

Curdie made no answer but stood gazing at the lady's face.

"Go and thrust both your hands into that fire," she said quickly, almost hurriedly.

Curdie dared not stop to think. It was much too terrible to think about. He rushed to the fire, and thrust both of his hands right into the middle of the heap of flaming roses, and his arms halfway up to the elbows. And it did hurt! But he did not draw them back. He held the pain as if it were a thing that would kill him if he let it go – as indeed it would have done. He was in terrible fear lest it should conquer him.

But when it had risen to the pitch that he thought he could bear it no longer, it began to fall again, and went on growing less and less until at last it ceased altogether. Curdie thought his hands must be burned to cinders, for he did not feel them at all. The princess told him to take them out and look at them. He did so, and found that all that was gone of his hands was the rough, hard skin; they were white and smooth.

"Come to me," she said. He obeyed and saw, to his surprise, that her face looked as if she had been weeping.

"Oh, Princess! What is the matter?" he cried. "Did I make a noise and upset you?"

"No, Curdie," she answered; "but it was very bad."

"Did you feel it too then?"

"Of course I did. But now it is over, and all is well. Would you like to know why I made you put your hands in the fire?"

Curdie said, "To take the marks of work off them and make them fit for the king's court, I suppose."

"No, Curdie," answered the princess, shaking her head. "It would be a poor way of making your hands fit for the king's court to remove the signs of service. There is a far greater difference to them than that. Do you feel none?"

"No, ma'am."

"You will, though, by and by, when the time comes. Have you ever heard what some philosophers say, that men were all animals once?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, there is another thing: all men, if they do not take care, go down the hill to the animals' country; that many men are actually, all their lives, going to be beasts. People knew it once, but they have forgotten it."

"I am not surprised to hear it, ma'am, when I think of some of our miners."

"Ah! But you must beware, Curdie, how you say that this man or that is travelling beastward. There are not nearly so many going that way as at first sight you might think. When you met your father on the hill tonight, you stood on the same spot; and although one of you was going up and the other coming down, at a little distance no one could have told who was going in which direction. Just so, two people may be at the same spot in behaviour, and yet one may be getting better and the other worse."

"But ma'am," said Curdie, "what is the good of knowing that there is such a difference, if you can never know where it is?"

"Now, Curdie, I did not say you can never know the difference. When you need to know, because you have to do important business with a man, there is always a way of knowing enough to keep you from any great blunder. And as you will have important business to do by and by, with people of whom you know nothing, you will need some means of learning their true nature.

“So listen. Since it is always what they do that makes men become less than men, and become beasts, the change always comes first in their hands – in the inside hands, to which the outside ones of flesh and blood are merely like the gloves. The men do not know it, of course; for a beast does not know that he is a beast. Neither their best friends nor their worst enemies indeed see any difference in their hands, for they see only the outer hands. But many people feel a vague something repulsive in the hand of a man who is growing a beast.

“Now here is what the rose-fire has done for you: it has made your hands so knowing and wise, it has brought your real hands so near the outside of your flesh gloves, that you will be able to know at once the hand of a man who is growing into a beast; nay, more – you will feel the foot of the beast he is growing into. You will know what sort of beast it is.

“Then you will know what sort of man you have to deal with. Only there is one beautiful and awful thing about this gift: that if any one uses it for his own purposes, it is taken from him, and then, not knowing that it is gone, he is in a far worse condition than before, for he trusts to knowledge that he has not got.”

“How dreadful!' said Curdie. “I must take care.”

“Yes, indeed, Curdie.”

“But may not one sometimes make a mistake without being able to help it?”

“Yes. But so long as he is not after his own ends, he will never make a serious mistake.”

“I suppose you want me, ma’am, to warn everyone whose hand tells me that he is growing into a beast – because, as you say, he does not know it himself.”

The princess smiled. “Much good that would do, Curdie! It might work in some cases, but they are very rare and peculiar cases. To such a person there is in general no insult like the truth. He cannot endure it, not because he is growing to be a beast, but because he is ceasing to be a man. It is the dying man in him that it makes uncomfortable, and he trots, or creeps, or swims, or flutters out of its way. He calls it a foolish feeling, a whim, an old wives’ fable, a bit of priests’ humbug, a superstition, and so on.”

“And is there no hope for him? Can nothing be done? It’s so awful to think of going down, down, like that!”

“Even when it’s with his own will?”

“That’s what seems to make it worst of all,” said Curdie.

“You are right,” answered the princess, nodding; “but they do not know how horrid their coming fate is. Many a lady, so delicate that she can bear only the finest linen to touch her body, if she had a mirror that could show her the

animal she is growing to, beneath the fair skin and the fine linen and the silk and the jewels, would receive a shock that might possibly wake her up."

"Then, ma'am, why shouldn't she have it?"

The princess was silent for a while.

"Come here, Lina," she said after a long pause.

From somewhere behind Curdie there crept forward the same hideous animal which had fawned at his feet at the door, and which, without his knowing it, must have followed him up to the tower. She ran to the princess, and lay down flat at her feet, looking up at her with an expression so pitiful that in Curdie's heart it overcame all the ludicrous jumble of her appearance.

The animal had a very short body, and very long legs jointed like an elephant's, so that in lying down she kneeled with both pairs. Her tail, which dragged on the floor behind her, was twice as long and quite as thick as her body. Her head was something between that of a polar bear and a snake. Her eyes were dark green, with a yellow light in them. Her under teeth came up like a fringe of icicles, only very white, outside her upper lip. Her throat was white and hairless.

"Give Curdie a paw, Lina," said the princess.

The creature rose, and, lifting a long foreleg, held up a great doglike paw to Curdie. He took it gently.

But what a shudder, as of terrified delight, ran through him, when, instead of the paw of a dog, he felt in his fist the soft, neat little hand of a child! He took it in both of his, and held it as if he could not let it go. The green eyes stared at him with their yellow light, and the mouth was turned up toward him with its constant half grin; but it was a child's hand! If he could only pull the child out of the beast!

He looked at the princess, who was watching him with satisfaction.

"Ma'am, here is a child's hand!" said Curdie.

"Your gift does more for you than it promised. It is yet better to perceive a hidden good than a hidden evil."

"But–"

"I am not going to answer any more questions this evening," interrupted the princess. "You have not got to the bottom of the answers I have already given you."

"But please! one word more: may I tell my father and mother all about it?"

"Certainly – though perhaps now it may be their turn to find it a little difficult to believe just what has happened."

"They shall see that I believe it," said Curdie.

"Tell them that tomorrow morning you must set out for the court – not like a great man, but as the poor man you are. Tell them that they should not speak of it. It will be a long time before they hear of you again, but they must not lose

heart. And tell your father to lay that stone I gave him in a safe place – not because of its value, although it is a princely emerald – but because it will be a news-bearer between you and him. When he gets at all anxious about you, he must take it and lay it in the fire, and leave it there when he goes to bed. In the morning he must find it in the ashes. If it is as green as ever, then all goes well with you; if it has lost colour, things go ill with you; but if it is very pale indeed, then you are in great danger, and he must come to me."

"Yes, ma'am," said Curdie. "Please, am I to go now?"

"Yes." The princess held out her hand to him.

Curdie took it, trembling with joy. It was a very beautiful hand, very smooth, but not very soft, and just the same to his fire-taught touch that it was to his eyes. He would have stood there all night holding it if she had not gently withdrawn it.

"I will provide you a servant," she said, "for your journey."

"But where am I to go, ma'am, and what am I to do? I have no idea."

"Curdie!" said the princess, "remember, did I not say that you were to set out for the court? And you know that lies to the north. You must learn to use far less direct directions than that. You will find out, as you go on, what you have to do. But I warn you that perhaps it will not look the least like what you may have been imagining. Be true and honest and fearless, and all shall go well with you and your work, and all with whom your work lies, and with your parents – and me too, Curdie," she added after a little pause.

The young miner bowed his head low, patted the strange head that lay at the princess's feet, and turned away. As soon as he passed the spinning wheel, the splendour of the place vanished, and he saw only the big bare room he seemed to have first entered, with the moon – the princess's moon, no doubt – shining in at one of the windows upon the spinning wheel.

CHAPTER 9
Hands

Curdie went home, pondering, and told everything to his father and mother. As the old princess had said, it was now their turn to find it hard to believe. If they had not trusted Curdie, they would have believed less than half of it, and would most likely have disbelieved in the very existence of the princess, despite the evidence of their own senses.

For he had nothing to show in proof of what he told them. When he held out his hands, his mother said they looked as if he had been washing them with soft soap, only they smelt of something like roses. His father could not see any difference in his hands, but then it was night, he said, and their little lamp was not bright enough for his old eyes. As to the feel of them – his own hands, said Peter, were hard and calloused, and that must be the reason why he felt no change on Curdie's palms.

"Here, Curdie," said his mother, "try my hand, and see what beast's paw lies inside it."

"No, Mother," answered Curdie, "I will not insult my new gift by making pretence to try it. That would be mockery. There is no hand within yours but the hand of a true woman."

"I should like you just to take hold of my hand though," said his mother. "You are my son, and may know all the bad there is in me."

So Curdie took her hand in his. He kept holding it, stroking it gently with his other hand.

"Mother," he said at length, "your hand feels just like that of the princess."

"What! My cracked, rheumatic old hand, with its swollen joints, and its nails all worn down with hard work – like the hand of the beautiful princess! Why, my child, mine is such an ugly hand I should be ashamed to show it to anyone except those that loved me. But love makes all safe, doesn't it, Curdie?"

"Well, Mother, all I can say is that I don't feel any roughness, or cracks, or swollen joints. Your hand feels very like that of the princess."

"Go away, you flatterer," said his mother, with a smile that showed how she prized the love that lay beneath his words, even if she did not believe him. "If that is all your new gift can do, it won't make a warlock of you."

"Mother, it tells me nothing but the truth," insisted Curdie, "however unlike the truth it may seem. By that gift I know your inside hands are like the princess's."

"I am sure the boy speaks true," said Peter. "He only says about your hand what I have always known about you, Joan. And I can tell you, Curdie, I don't

know much about ladies and gentlemen, but I am sure your inside mother must be a lady, as her hand tells you, and this is why: when I look at her as she goes about her work, I fancy for a moment or two that I am a gentleman; and she makes me feel that I must do everything as a true gentleman should. I will try to explain, Curdie. If a real gentleman were to lose all his money and come to work in the mines to get bread for his family – do you think, Curdie, he would be lazy? No. And my wife, she's a true lady, you may take my word for it."

"Now, Father, let me feel your hand," said Curdie.

"No, no, my boy," answered Peter. "I don't want to hear anything about my hand or my head or my heart. I am what I am, and I hope growing better, and that's enough. You go to bed, for you must start with the sun."

Although his parents were sorry to lose him, they were not heartbroken or even troubled at his going. It was not as if Curdie was leaving them to go to prison.

Because the princess had said he was to go like the poor man he was, Curdie came down in the morning from his little loft dressed in his working clothes. His mother, who was busy getting his breakfast, would have had him put on his best clothes – though even those, she said, would look poor enough among the fine ladies and gentlemen he was going to.

But Curdie said he did not know that he was going among ladies and gentlemen, and that as work was better than play, his workday clothes must be better than his playday clothes; and his mother gave in.

When he had eaten his breakfast, she took a pouch made of hairy goatskin, filled it with bread and cheese, and hung it over his shoulder. Then his father gave him a stick he had cut for him in the wood, and Curdie bade them good-bye rather hurriedly, for he was afraid of breaking down.

As he went out he picked up his mattock. It had on one side a pointed curve of strong steel for loosening the earth and the ore, and on the other side a steel hammer for breaking rocks. Just as he crossed the threshold the sun showed its edge above the horizon.

CHAPTER 10
The Heath

Curdie had to go to the bottom of the hill to get to land that he could cross, for the mountains to the north were full of precipices, and he could not go that way. He did not turn northwards until he had reached the king's house. He kept looking up to the dove tower as he passed it, but he saw nothing of the lady of the pigeons.

On and on he walked, and came in a few hours to a country where there were no mountains, only hills, with great stretches of desolate heath. Here and there was a village, but the people were rougher and worse mannered than those in the mountains, and as he passed through, the children followed and mocked him.

"There's a monkey running away from the mines!" they cried. Sometimes their parents came out and encouraged them.

"He doesn't want to find gold for the king any longer – the lazybones!" they would say.

But Curdie did not mind. He gave them a merry answer now and then, and went diligently on his way. When they got rude enough to almost make him angry, he would treat them as he used to treat the goblins, and sing his own songs to keep out their foolish noises.

Once a child threw a stone at him and then fell as he turned to run away. Curdie picked him up, kissed him, and carried him to his mother. The woman had run out in terror when she saw the strange miner, thinking he was about to take vengeance on her boy. When Curdie put the child in her arms, she blessed him, and he went on his way rejoicing.

And so the day went on, and the evening came, and in the middle of a great desolate heath he began to feel tired. He sat down under an ancient hawthorn tree, through which a lonely wind sighed. It was very old and distorted. There was not another tree for miles around. It seemed to have lived so long, and to have been so torn and tossed by the tempests on that moor, that it had at last gathered a wind of its own, which got up now and then, tumbled itself about, and lay down again.

Curdie had been so eager to get on that he had eaten nothing since his breakfast. But he had had plenty of water, for many little streams had crossed his path. He now opened the pouch his mother had given him, and began to eat his supper. The sun was setting; a few clouds had gathered in the west, but there was not a single cloud anywhere else.

Now Curdie did not know that this was a land that was very hard to get through. Nobody lived here, though many had tried to build houses. Some had died; some had rushed away. Those who stayed longest went raving mad, and died a terrible death. Those who walked straight on, and did not spend a night there, got through well and were none the worse.

But those who slept even a single night in that land were sure to meet with something they could never forget. That old hawthorn might have been a warning – it looked so like a human being dried up and distorted with age and suffering. Both it and the endless heath around it were so withered that it was impossible to say whether they were alive or not.

And while Curdie ate there came a change. Clouds gathered over his head, and seemed to drift in every direction, as if being hunted across the plains of the sky. The sun was going down in a storm of lurid crimson, and out of the west came a wind that felt red and hot at one moment, and cold and pale the next. Very strangely it sang in the dreary old hawthorn tree, and it blew around Curdie, making him creep close to the tree for shelter from its cold, and a minute later, fan himself with his cap, because it was so warm and stifling.

As he gazed at the sun, now on the verge of the horizon, very large and very red and very dull, Curdie saw something strange appear against it, moving about like a fly over its burning face. This looked as if it were coming out of the sun's heart, and was a living creature of some kind; but its shape was very uncertain, because the dazzle of the light all around melted the outlines.

It was growing larger. It must be approaching! It grew so rapidly that by the time the sun was half down, its head reached the top of the arch, and presently nothing but its legs were to be seen, crossing and recrossing the face of the vanishing disc.

When the sun was down Curdie could see it no more, but in a moment he heard feet galloping over the dry crackling heather, and seeming to come straight for him. He stood up, lifted his pickaxe and hoisted it over his shoulder. He was going to have to fight for his life!

And now it appeared again, vague, yet very awful, in the dim twilight the sun had left behind. But just before it reached him, from running on its four long legs it dropped flat on the ground. It came crawling towards him, wagging a huge tail as it came.

CHAPTER 11
Lina

It was Lina. At once Curdie recognized her – the frightful creature he had seen at the princess's. Dropping his pickaxe, he held out his hand. She crept nearer and nearer, and laid her chin in his palm, and he patted her ugly head. Then she crept away behind the tree, and lay down, panting hard.

Curdie did not much like the idea of her being behind him. Horrible as she was to look at, she seemed to his mind more horrible when he was not looking at her. But he remembered the child's hand, and never thought of driving her away. Now and then he glanced behind him, and there she lay, with her eyes closed and her terrible teeth gleaming between her two huge forepaws.

After his supper and his long day's journey it was no wonder Curdie was sleepy. He lay down under the tree, closed his eyes, and thought he would sleep. He found he could not sleep, yet he was aware of resting delightfully.

Soon he heard a sweet sound of singing, such as he had never heard before – a singing as of curious birds far off, which drew nearer and nearer. At length he heard their wings, and, opening his eyes, saw a number of very large birds, as it seemed, alighting around him, still singing. It was strange to hear song from the throats of such big birds.

And still singing loudly, they began to weave a strange dance about him, moving their wings in time with their legs. But the dance seemed somehow to be troubled and broken, and to return upon itself in an eddy, instead of sweeping smoothly on. They wanted to dance all round the tree, but Lina growled, and would not allow them to come round to her side.

Now Curdie liked the birds, and did not altogether like Lina. But that was no reason for driving away the princess's creature. Perhaps she had once been the goblins' creature, but the last time he had seen her was in the dove tower, at the old princess's feet. So he left her to do as she would, and the dance of the birds continued in a semicircle.

But their song and their dance, and the waving of their wings, began at length to make him very sleepy. All the time he had kept doubting whether they could really be birds, and the sleepier he got, the more he imagined them to be something else, but he suspected no harm.

Suddenly, just as he was sinking beneath the waves of slumber, he awoke in fierce pain. The birds were upon him – all over him – and had begun to tear him with beaks and claws. He had just realised that he could not move under their weight, when they set up a hideous screaming, and scattered like a cloud.

Lina was among them, snapping and striking with her paws, while her tail knocked them over. But they flew up, gathered, and descended on her in a swarm, perching upon every part of her body, so that Curdie could see only a huge misshapen mass, which seemed to go rolling away into the darkness. He got up and tried to follow, but could see nothing, and after wandering about for some time, found himself again beside the hawthorn. He feared greatly that the birds had been too much for Lina, and had torn her to pieces.

In a little while, however, she came limping back, and lay down again. Curdie also lay down, but from the pain of his wounds he could not sleep. When the light came he found his clothes a good deal torn, and his skin as well.

Then he turned to look for Lina. She rose and crept over to him. She was in a far worse plight than he – plucked and gashed and torn with the beaks and claws of the birds, especially around the bare part of her neck, so that she was pitiful to see. And she could not reach those wounds to lick them.

"Poor Lina!" said Curdie, "you got all those helping me."

She wagged her tail, showing that she understood. Then it flashed upon Curdie's mind that perhaps this was the companion the princess had promised him. For the princess did so many things differently to expectations! Lina was no beauty, but already, on the first night, she had saved his life.

"Come along, Lina," he said, "we need water."

She put her nose to the earth, and after snuffing for a moment, darted off in a straight line. Curdie followed. The ground was so uneven that after losing sight of her many times, at last he seemed to have lost her altogether. In a few minutes, however, he found her waiting for him.

Instantly she darted off again. After he had lost her again many times, he found her lying beside a great stone. As soon as he came up she began scratching at it with her paws. When he had raised it an inch or two, she shoved in first her nose and then her teeth, and lifted with all her might.

There under the stone was a beautiful little well. Curdie filled his cap with the clearest and sweetest water, and drank. Then he gave it to Lina, and she drank plentifully. Next he washed her wounds very carefully. And as he did so, he noted how much the bareness of her neck added to the strange repulsiveness of her appearance.

Then he thought of the hairy goatskin wallet his mother had given him, and taking it from his shoulders, checked whether it would make a collar for the poor animal. He found there was just enough goatskin, and the hair was so similar in colour to Lina's that you would never think it had grown somewhere else.

Lina understood perfectly what he was doing, for she held her neck conveniently, turning it this way and that while he managed to make the collar fit. His mother had provided him with needles and thread, and he laced the

collar on with one of his boot laces. Poor Lina looked much better in it. If ever green eyes with a yellow light in them could look grateful, hers did.

As they had no longer a bag to carry the food in, Curdie and Lina now ate the rest of it. Then they set out again upon their journey, which lasted for seven days. They met with various adventures, and in all of them Lina proved so helpful, and so ready to risk her life for the sake of her companion, that Curdie grew not merely very fond but also very trustful of her. Her ugliness, which at first only moved his pity, now actually increased his affection for her.

One day, looking at her stretched on the grass, he said: “Oh, Lina! If the princess would only burn you in her fire of roses!”

She looked up at him, gave a mournful whine like a dog, and laid her head on his feet. He could not tell how much she understood, but clearly she had gathered something from his words.

CHAPTER 12
More Creatures

One day they had been passing through a forest. As soon as the sun was down Curdie realised that they were not alone.

First he saw only the swift rush of a figure across the trees at some distance. Then he saw another and then another, more frequently, and closer. At last, missing Lina and looking around for her, he saw a creature as extraordinary as herself steal up to her. It began talking with her after some beast fashion which evidently she understood.

Presently what seemed like a quarrel arose between them; they made strange noises mingled with growling. And then there was a fight. It did not last long before the creature of the wood threw itself upon its back, and held up its paws to Lina. She walked on, and the creature got up and followed her.

They had not gone far before another strange animal appeared, approaching Lina – and precisely the same thing happened. They fought, and Lina won, the vanquished animal rising and following her. Again and again, a fresh animal came up, seemed to be reasoned with and then was fought with and overcome by Lina, until at last, before they were out of the wood, she was followed by forty-nine of the most grotesquely ugly, the most extravagantly shaped animals imagination can conceive.

I knew a boy who used to make animals out of heather roots: his beasts were a most comic menagerie. But they were not so grotesque as Lina and her followers. One of them, for instance, was like a boa constrictor walking on four little stumpy legs near its tail. Near its head were two little wings, which it was forever fluttering as if trying to fly with them. Curdie thought it fancied it did fly with them, when it was merely plodding on busily with its four little stumps. How it managed to keep up he could not think, till once he missed it from the group. He caught sight of something plunging like a huge swift snake through the trees, and presently, from behind an ash tree, this same creature again joined the group, quietly waddling along on its four stumps.

After that he watched it; and saw that, when it was not able to keep up any longer, and had fallen behind, it shot into the wood away from the route, and moved in huge billows of its body, ignoring its legs, but undulating and devouring the ground. In this mad fashion it shot ahead, and, a few minutes after, toddled in again among the rest, walking peacefully and somewhat painfully on its little feet.

It would take too long to describe each of the forty-nine. Luckily Curdie had been too long used to the goblins' creatures in the mines to feel uncomfortable

at being followed by such a herd. On the contrary, their extraordinary shapes amused him greatly, and made the journey feel shorter. While they gathered, however, it got so dark that he could not see them all.

On they marched solemnly, almost in silence, they made little noise either with feet or voice. By the time they reached the outside of the wood morning was coming.

Into the open trooped the strange torrent of deformity, all following Lina. Suddenly she stopped, turned towards them, and said something which they understood, although Curdie could hear no words in the sounds she made. Instantly they all turned and vanished in the forest, and Lina alone came trotting lithely and clumsily after her master.

CHAPTER 13
The Baker's Wife

They were now passing through a lovely country of hills and dales and rushing streams. The hills were steep, with little valleys full of trees. But now and then they came to a larger valley, with a fine river, and meadows dotted with red and white cattle, while on the gently sloping fields above grew oats and wheat and barley; and on the sides of the hills were vines and chestnut trees.

They came at last to a broad, beautiful river, up which they must go to reach the city of Gwyntystorm, where the king had his court. As they walked the valley narrowed, and so did the river, although it was still wide enough for boats. But the banks kept narrowing, until there was only just room for a road between the river and the great cliffs that overhung it.

At last river and road took a sudden turn, and Curdie beheld a great rock in the river, which divided around it; and on the top of the rock was the city, with lofty walls and towers and battlements, and above the city was the king's palace, built like a strong castle.

But the fortifications had long been neglected, for the country was at peace, and men said there was no more need for weapons or walls. No man pretended to love his neighbour, but every man said that peace and quiet behaviour was the best thing for himself, and thought that was just as good. The city was prosperous and rich, and if everybody was not comfortable, everybody else said he ought to be.

When Curdie reached the mighty rock, which sparkled all over with crystals, he found a narrow bridge, defended by gates and a portcullis and towers with arrow-holes. But the gates stood wide open, and were dropping from their great hinges; the portcullis was eaten away with rust, and could not be lowered; while the towers had neither floor nor roof, and were full of rubble. Curdie thought it a pity that they should be so neglected – if only for the sake of history.

But everybody in the city regarded these signs of decay as the best proof of the place's prosperity. Commerce and self-interest, they said, had got the better of violence; and the troubles of the past were overwhelmed in the riches that flowed in at their open gates. Indeed, the people thought themselves much wiser than their forefathers.

Curdie crossed the river, and began to ascend the winding road that led up to the city. He and Lina passed a good many idlers, who all stared at them. It was no wonder they should stare, but there was an unfriendliness in their looks which Curdie did not like.

No one accosted them, however: Lina did not invite such liberties. After a long ascent, they reached the main gate of the city and entered.

A steep street led up toward the palace, which rose in great strength above all the houses. As they entered the gate, a baker, whose shop was just inside it, came out in his white apron to run across the road to the shop of his friend, the barber. But as he ran he stumbled and fell heavily.

Curdie hastened to help him up, and found he had bruised his forehead badly. The baker swore at the stone for tripping him up, declaring it was the third time he had fallen over it within the last month; and saying what was the king doing, to allow such a stone to stick up forever on the main street of Gwyntystorm? What was a king for, if he would not take care of his people's heads!

"Was it your head or your feet that ought to bear the blame of your fall?" asked Curdie.

"Why, you booby of a miner! My feet, of course," answered the baker.

"Nay, then," said Curdie, "the king can't be to blame."

"Oh, I see!" said the baker. "You're laying a trap for me. Of course, it was my head that ought to have looked after my feet. But it is the king's task to look after us all, and have his streets smooth."

"Well, I don't see," said Curdie, "why the king should take care of the baker, when the baker's head won't take care of the baker's feet."

"Who are you to make game of the king's baker?" cried the man in a rage.

Instead of answering, Curdie went up to the bump on the street and struck it such a blow with his mattock that it shattered into flying pieces. Blow after blow he struck until he had levelled it with the street.

But out flew the barber from his shop in a rage. "What did you break my window for, you rascal?"

"I am very sorry," said Curdie. "It must have been a bit of stone that flew from my mattock. I couldn't help it."

"Couldn't help it! A fine story! What did you go breaking the rock for – the very rock on which the city stands?"

"Look at your friend's forehead," said Curdie. "See what a lump he got on it from falling over that stone."

"But what about my window?" cried the barber. "His forehead can mend itself; my poor window can't."

"But he's the king's baker," said Curdie, more and more surprised at the man's anger.

"What's that to me? Every man here takes care of himself, and the king takes care of us all. I'll have the price of my window from you."

Something caught Curdie's eye. He stooped, picked up a piece of the stone he had just broken, and put it in his pocket.

“I suppose you’re going to break another of my windows with that stone!” said the barber.

“Oh no,” said Curdie. “I didn’t mean to break your window, and I certainly won’t break another.”

“Give me that stone,” said the barber. Curdie gave it him, and the barber threw it over the city wall.

“I thought you wanted the stone,” said Curdie.

“No, you fool!” answered the barber. “What should I want with a stone?”

Curdie stooped and picked up another.

“Give me that stone,” said the barber.

“No,” answered Curdie. “You have just told me you don’t want a stone, and I do.”

The barber took Curdie by the collar. “Come, now! You pay me for that window.”

“How much?” asked Curdie.

“A crown,” said the barber.

But the baker, annoyed at the barber’s heartlessness in thinking more of his broken window than the bump on his forehead, interfered.

“No, no,” he said to Curdie; “don’t you pay any such sum. A little pane like that only costs a quarter.”

“Well, to be certain,” said Curdie, “I’ll give a half. Perhaps one day, if he finds he has asked too much, he will bring me the difference.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed the barber. “A fool and his money are soon parted.”

But as he took the coin from Curdie’s hand he grasped it in satisfaction. In Curdie’s hand, the barber’s felt like the cold, smooth, leathery palm of a monkey.

“I’m glad that stone is gone, anyhow,” said the baker. “It was the bane of my life. I had no idea how easy it was to remove it. Give me your pickaxe, young miner, and I’ll show you how to make the stones fly.”

He grabbed the tool out of Curdie’s hand, and flew at one of the stones of the gateway. But he jarred his arm, dropped the mattock with a cry of pain, and ran into his shop.

Curdie picked up his mattock, and seeing some bread in the window, followed him in. But the baker, ashamed of himself, and thinking he was coming to laugh at him, popped out of the back door.

So when Curdie entered, the baker’s wife came from the bakehouse to serve him. Curdie asked her the price of a good-sized loaf.

Now the baker’s wife had been watching what had happened, and she liked the look of Curdie. Also she was more honest than her husband. Casting a glance at the back door, she replied:

“That’s not the best bread. I’ll sell you a loaf of what we bake for ourselves.” And then she laid a finger on her lips. “Take care of yourself in this place, my son,” she added quietly. “They do not love strangers. I was once a stranger here, and I know.” Then fancying she heard her husband coming, she said, in a louder voice, “That is a strange animal you have.”

“Yes,” answered Curdie. “She is no beauty, but she is very good, and we love each other. Don’t we, Lina?”

Lina looked up and whined. Curdie threw her half of his loaf, which she ate, while he and the baker’s wife talked a little. Then the baker’s wife gave them some water, and after Curdie had paid for his loaf, he and Lina went up the street together.

CHAPTER 14
The Dogs of Gwyntystorm

The steep street led them up to a large market place with butchers' shops, around which were many dogs. The moment they caught sight of Lina, they all came rushing down upon her. When Curdie saw the dogs coming he heaved up his mattock over his shoulder, ready for an attack.

A great ugly bulldog flew at him. With the first blow Curdie struck him through the brain – and the brute fell dead at his feet. But his pickaxe was stuck in the skull of his foe, so he could not retrieve it. A huge mastiff, seeing him thus hampered, flew at him next.

Now Lina had been quiet and tame since entering the city, and kept always at Curdie's heel. But it was her turn now. The moment she saw her master in danger she seemed to go mad with rage. As the mastiff jumped at Curdie's throat, Lina flew at him, seized him with her tremendous jaws, gave one roaring grind – and he lay beside the bulldog with his neck broken.

Those two were the best dogs in the market, so the butchers said; and they came next, knives in hand.

Curdie drew himself up fearlessly, mattock on shoulder, and awaited the butchers, while at his heel Lina showed a double row of fangs, and her green eyes flashed. The butchers, not liking the look of either of them, drew back, and began to remonstrate like outraged men.

"Stranger," said the first, "that bulldog is mine."

"Take him, then," said Curdie, indignant.

"You've killed him!"

"Yes – or else he would have killed me."

"That's no business of mine."

"No?"

"This sort of thing won't do, you know," said the other butcher. "That's my mastiff! Your brute shall be burned alive for it."

"We have done no wrong," said Curdie. "We were walking quietly up your street when your dogs flew at us. If you don't teach your dogs how to treat strangers, you must take the consequences."

"They treat strangers quite properly," said the butcher. "What right has anyone to bring an abomination like that into our city? It's horrible."

"We are both subjects of the king, and my poor animal can't help her looks. How would you like to be treated like that because you were ugly? How can she change her looks?"

“I’ll change them,” said the fellow. And the two butchers brandished their long knives and advanced, keeping their eyes upon Lina.

“Don’t be afraid, Lina,” cried Curdie. “I’ll kill one – you kill the other.”

Lina gave a howl that might have terrified an army, and crouched ready to spring. The butchers turned and ran.

By this time a great crowd had gathered behind the butchers, and in it were a number of boys returning from school who began to stone the strangers. One of the stones struck Lina; she caught it in her teeth and crunched it so that it fell in gravel from her mouth. Some of those at the front of the crowd saw this, and it terrified them. They drew back; the rest took fright from their retreat; the panic spread; and the crowd scattered in all directions, crying out that the devil had come to Gwyntystorm.

So Curdie and Lina were left standing unmolested in the market place. But the terror of them spread throughout the city, and everybody began to lock his door, so that by the time the sun was setting, there was not a shop left open. But all the upper windows within sight were crowded with heads watching them.

Curdie looked all round, but could not see one open door. He caught sight of the sign of an inn, however, and laying down his mattock, he walked up to it and knocked on the door.

But the people inside threw things at him from the windows. They would not listen to a word he said, but sent him back to Lina with the blood running down his face.

When Lina saw that, she leaped up in a fury and began to rush at the house, meaning to break into it; but Curdie called her back, and made her lie down.

“Lina,” he said, “the people keep their gates open, but their houses and their hearts shut.”

As if she knew it was her presence that had brought this trouble upon him, she rose and walked round and round him, purring like a tigress, and rubbing herself against his legs.

Now there was one little thatched house that stood squeezed in between two tall gables. The sides of the two great houses shot out projecting windows that nearly met across the roof of the little one, so that it looked like a doll’s house. In this house lived a poor old woman, with her grandchild. And because she never gossiped or quarrelled, or haggled in the market, but went without what she could not afford, the people called her a witch; and they would have done her many an ill turn if they had not been afraid of her.

Now while Curdie was looking in another direction, the door opened, and out came a little dark-haired, black-eyed child, who toddled across the market place toward the outcasts. The moment they saw her coming, Lina lay down flat on the road, with her two huge forepaws covering her mouth, while Curdie

went to meet the little girl, holding out his arms. The little one came straight to him, and took him by the hand, and drew him toward the house.

But when Lina rose to follow, the child shrank away, a little frightened. So Curdie picked her up, and holding her on one arm, patted Lina with the other hand. Then the child wanted also to pat doggy, as she called her, and having patted her, she begged Curdie to let her have a ride on doggy.

So he set her on Lina's back, holding her hand, and she rode home in merry triumph, all unconscious of the hundreds of eyes staring at her from the windows all around, or the murmur of deep disapproval from the people watching.

At the door stood the grandmother to receive them. She hugged the child with delight at her courage, welcomed Curdie, and showed no dread of Lina. Many were the significant nods exchanged, and many a one said to another that the devil and the witch were old friends. But the woman was only a wise woman, who, having seen how Curdie and Lina behaved to each other, judged what sort of people they were, and so made them welcome to her house.

The moment her door was shut the other doors began to open, and little groups appeared here and there at the doorways, while a few of the more courageous ventured out into the square. The baker and the barber joined one of these groups, busily wagging their tongues against Curdie and his horrible beast.

"He can't be honest," said the barber; "for he paid me double the worth of the window pane he broke." And he told them how Curdie broke his window by breaking a stone in the street with his hammer. There the baker struck in.

"Now that was the stone," said he, "over which I had fallen three times within the last month: how could he break that to pieces at the first blow? I tried his own hammer against a stone in the gate; it nearly broke both my arms, and loosened half the teeth in my head!"

CHAPTER 15
Derba and Barbara

Meantime the wanderers were welcomed by the old woman, Derba, and her grand-daughter, and they were very comfortable and happy. Little Barbara sat upon Curdie's knee, and he told her stories about the mines and his adventures in them. And he told her about his mother and father, and how good they were; but he never mentioned the king or the princess. Derba sat and listened. At last little Barbara fell asleep in Curdie's arms, and her grandmother carried her to bed.

It was a poor little house, and Derba gave up her own room to Curdie because he was honest and talked wisely. Curdie begged her to allow him to lie on the floor, but she would not hear of it.

In the night he was woken by Lina pulling at him. Curdie, listening, thought he heard someone trying to get in. He rose, took his mattock, and went around the house, listening and watching; but although he heard noises at various places, he could not think what they meant, for no one appeared. It was certainly not likely that anyone would attack Lina at night. By and by the noises ceased, and Curdie went back to his bed, and slept undisturbed.

In the morning, however, Derba came to him in great agitation. The people had fastened up the door, so that she could not get out. Curdie rose immediately: they found that not only the door, but every window in the house was so secured on the outside that it was impossible to open one of them without using great force. Poor Derba looked anxiously in Curdie's face. He broke out laughing.

"They are much mistaken," he said, "if they think they could keep Lina and a miner in any house in Gwyntystorm." With that he shouldered his mattock.

But Derba begged him not to make a hole in her house just yet. She had plenty of food for breakfast, she said, and before it was time for dinner they would know what the people meant by it.

And indeed they did. For within an hour one of the chief magistrates appeared, accompanied by a score of soldiers with drawn swords, and followed by a multitude of people, requiring the miner and his brute to yield themselves – Curdie to be tried for the disturbance he had caused and the injury he had committed, and Lina so that she might be roasted alive for killing valuable and harmless animals belonging to worthy citizens. The summons was read with every formality by the city marshal himself.

The moment he ended, Lina ran into the little passage, and stood opposite the door.

“I surrender,” cried Curdie.

“Then tie up your brute, and give her here,” said the soldiers.

“No, no,” cried Curdie through the door. “I surrender; but if you want my dog, you must take her.”

“Then we shall set the house on fire, and burn witch and all.”

“We shall kill a few dozen of you first,” cried Curdie. “We’re not the least afraid of you.” Then he turned to Derba, and said, “Don’t be frightened. I have a strong feeling that all will be well. Surely no trouble will come to you for being good to strangers.”

“But the poor dog!” said Derba.

Now Curdie and Lina understood each other well by this time. Not only had he seen that she understood the proclamation, but when she looked up at him, it was with such a grin, and such a yellow flash, that he saw also she was determined to take care of herself.

“The dog will be all right,” he answered. “But now, I fear I must hurt your house a little. I shall make up for it one day.”

“Never mind the house, if only you can get away safely,” she answered. “I don’t think they will hurt this precious lamb,” she added, hugging little Barbara. “As for myself, I am ready for anything.”

“I only want to make a little hole for Lina,” said Curdie. “She can creep through a much smaller one than you would think.”

Again he took his mattock, and went to the back wall. “They won’t burn the house,” he said to himself, “because there is a grand house on each side of it.”

Meanwhile the tumult had kept increasing every moment, and the city marshal had been shouting. When the people heard the blows of his mattock, a great cry went up, and they taunted the soldiers for being afraid of a dog and a miner. The soldiers therefore made a rush at the door, and cut its fastenings.

The moment they opened it, out leaped Lina, with a roar so horrible that the soldiers let their swords drop, paralysed with terror; the crowd fled in every direction, shrieking and yelling in dismay. Without even touching a single one of them, Lina vanished – no one knew where, because not one of the crowd was brave enough to look at her.

The moment she was gone, Curdie advanced and gave himself up. The soldiers were so filled with fear and shame that they were ready to kill him on the spot. But he stood quietly facing them, with his mattock on his shoulder; and because the magistrate wished to question him, the soldiers had to content themselves with taking him prisoner. They tied his mattock against his back, and tied his arms to it.

Then they led him up a very steep street, with all the crowd following. The king’s palace towered above them; but before they reached it, they stopped at a low-arched door in a great, dull, heavy-looking building.

The city marshal opened it with a key which hung at his belt, and ordered Curdie to enter. The place within was dark as night. While Curdie was feeling his way with his feet, the marshal gave him a rough push. He fell, and rolled over once or twice, unable to help himself because his hands were tied behind him.

It was the hour of the magistrate's second and more important breakfast, and he did not like to hear cases until that was over; so Curdie now had time to collect his thoughts. But indeed he had very few to collect – for all that he could do, so far as he could see, was to wait for what would happen next. In truth he was a good deal shaken.

In a few minutes he discovered, to his great relief, that his fall had loosened the ropes tied round his mattock. He got one hand free, and then the other; and soon untied himself and his mattock altogether.

CHAPTER 16
The Mattock

While the magistrate enjoyed a greedy breakfast, Curdie found doing nothing in the dark rather tiresome work. It was useless trying to think what he should do next, because he had never been in this situation before. So he began to think about his father and mother in their little cottage home, high in the clear air of the open Mountainside; and that thought, in the gloomy dungeon, made a light in his soul that destroyed the power of darkness.

But he was startled from his waking dream by an increasing noise outside. The sounds of feet and voices began to grow so rapidly that it was plain a multitude was gathering. For the people of Gwyntystorm always gave themselves an hour of pleasure after their second breakfast, and what greater pleasure could they have than to see a stranger abused by the officers of justice?

The noise grew till it was like the roaring of the sea, and went on a long time, for the magistrate, being a great man, liked to know that he was waited for. It added to the enjoyment of his breakfast, and, indeed, enabled him to eat a little more than he had thought possible. But at length, by the running and shouting, Curdie learned that the magistrate was approaching.

Presently came the sound of the great rusty key in the lock, which yielded with groaning reluctance; the door was thrown back, the light rushed in, and the city marshal called upon Curdie to come forth and be tried for his life, because he had raised a tumult in His Majesty's city of Gwyntystorm, troubled the hearts of the king's baker and barber, and slain the faithful dogs of His Majesty's well-beloved butchers.

He was still reading this out, and Curdie was still seated in the brown twilight of the vault, wondering how this king that the city marshal talked of could be the same king he had seen ride away on his grand white horse with the Princess Irene before him – when a scream of terror arose on the farthest edge of the crowd.

In a moment the air was filled with hideous howling, cries of dismay, and the noise of running feet. In at the door of the vault bounded Lina, her green eyes flaming, and seeming to light up the dungeon. With one spring she threw herself at Curdie's feet, and laid her head upon them panting. Two or three soldiers rushed forward to pull the door closed, and lock it; so that once more Curdie and Lina were prisoners together.

For a few moments Lina lay panting hard. Then she jumped up, and began snuffing about all over the place; and Curdie saw something he had not noticed

before – that two faint spots of light were cast from her eyes onto the ground. He got out his tinder box and lit a precious bit of candle just for a moment, for he must not waste it.

The light revealed his cell to be without any window or other opening apart from the door. It was very old and neglected. The mortar had vanished from between the stones, and the room was half filled with a heap of rubbish, that sloped from the door to the foot of the opposite wall: evidently for a long time the vault had been left open, and every sort of refuse had been thrown into it. Down in the angle between the back wall and the base of the heap, Lina was scratching furiously with all the eighteen great strong claws of her mighty feet.

"Ah, ha!" said Curdie to himself, catching sight of her, "if only they will leave us alone for long enough!"

He ran to the door, to see if there was any lock on the inside. There was none: but a few blows from his mattock were as good as any bolt, for they so ruined the lock that no key could ever turn in it again. The men outside fancied he was trying to get out, and laughed spitefully.

But Curdie blew out his candle, and went over to Lina. She had reached the hard rock which formed the floor of the dungeon, and was now clearing away the earth. She looked up in his face and whined, as if to say, "My paws cannot dig any farther."

"Then get out of my way, Lina," said Curdie, "and mind you keep your eyes shining, so I don't hit you." So saying, he heaved his mattock, and with the hammer end he hit at the spot she had cleared.

The rock was very hard, but eventually broke into pieces. Curdie worked till he was weary, then rested, and then began again. He could not tell what time it was, as he had no light but that from Lina's eyes. The darkness hampered him greatly, for he would not let Lina come close enough to give him more light, in case he should hit her. Every now and then, he had to feel with his hands to know how he was getting on, and to decide in what direction to strike.

He was getting very tired and hungry, and beginning to lose heart a little, when out of the ground burst a dull, gleamy, lead-coloured light; and the next moment he heard a hollow splash and echo. A piece of rock had fallen out of the floor, and dropped into water beneath.

Lina, who had been lying a few yards away, was already on her feet and peering through the hole. Curdie got down on his hands and knees, and looked. They were above what seemed to be a natural cave in the rock, through which the river apparently flowed – for at a great distance below, a faint light was gleaming upon water. If they could only reach it, they might get out; but it was a dangerously long way down.

The first thing was to make the hole larger. It was comparatively easy to break away the sides of it, and in another hour Curdie had made it large enough to get through.

And now he must reconnoitre. He took the rope they had tied him up with, and fastened one end of it by a slipknot round the handle of his pickaxe. Then he dropped the other end through the hole, and laid the pickaxe so that, when he was through himself, he could place it across the hole to support him on the rope.

When this was done, he took the rope in his hands, and, beginning to descend, found himself in a narrow cleft widening into a cave. His rope was not very long, and would not reach close to the water; but he was not more than a couple of yards below the dungeon when he spied an opening on the opposite side of the cleft.

He gave the rope a swing by pushing his feet against the side of the cleft, and so, like a pendulum, swung himself into the opening. Then he laid a stone on the end of the rope so that he could not lose it, and called to Lina, whose yellow eyes were gleaming over the mattock above, to watch there till he returned.

Then he went cautiously in to the opening. It proved to be a passage, level for some distance, then sloping gently up. Curdie advanced carefully, feeling his way as he went. At length he was stopped by a small door, studded with iron. But the wood was so decayed that some of the bolts had dropped out, and he felt sure he could open it.

He returned, therefore, to fetch Lina and his mattock. When he arrived at the cleft, his strong miner arms bore him swiftly up along the rope and through the hole into the dungeon. There he undid the rope from his mattock, and making Lina take the end of it in her teeth, and get through the hole, he lowered her – he could only just manage it, she was so heavy. When she came opposite the passage, with a push of her tail she shot herself into it, and let go the rope, which Curdie drew up.

Then he lit his candle and searching in the rubbish found a bit of iron to take the place of his pickaxe across the hole. He searched again in the rubbish, and found half an old shutter. This he propped up with a bit of stick, so that it was leaning over the hole, and he heaped some earth against the back of it. Next he tied his mattock to the end of the rope, dropped it, and let it hang.

Last, he got through the hole himself, and pulled away the propping stick, so that the shutter fell over the hole with a load of earth on top of it. He let himself down hand over hand, and swung himself and his mattock into the passage beside Lina.

There he secured the end of the rope, and they went on together to the door.

CHAPTER 17
The Wine Cellar

Curdie lit his candle and examined the door. Although it was decayed and broken, it was strongly secured in its place by hinges on one side, and by either a lock or a bolt on the other. Using his pocket-knife, he made room for his hand and arm to get through, and found a great iron bolt – but it was so rusty that he could not move it.

Lina whimpered. Curdie took his knife again, made the hole bigger, and stood back. She pushed in her small head and long neck, seized the bolt with her teeth, and dragged it back, with a grating noise. A push then opened the door.

It was at the foot of a short flight of steps. They ascended, and at the top Curdie found himself in a space which, from the echo, seemed to be large. When when he first felt around he found nothing. But presently his hands fell on a great wine cask.

Just then he heard steps coming down a stair. He stood still, not knowing whether the door would open an inch away or twenty yards behind his back. It did neither. He heard a key turn in the lock, and a stream of light shot in, about fifteen yards away on his right.

A man entered, carrying a candle in one hand and a large silver flagon in the other. The light revealed a row of huge wine casks, that stretched away into the darkness at the other end of the long vault. Curdie retreated into the shadow under the stairs, and peeping round the corner, watched the man, wondering how he might prevent him from locking them in.

The man walked towards them, until Curdie feared he would see them. He was just preparing to rush out and overcome him before he could give the alarm, when, to his relief, the man stopped at the third cask from where they stood.

The man set down his candle on the top of it, removed a large stopper at the top, and poured into the cask a quantity of liquid from the flagon. Then he turned to the next cask, drew some wine from it, rinsed the flagon, threw the wine away, drew more and rinsed it and threw it away again; and then drew more and drank it. Last of all, he filled the flagon from the cask he had first visited. He replaced the stopper, took up his candle, and turned toward the door.

“There is something wrong here!” thought Curdie. “Speak to him, Lina,” he whispered.

The sudden howl she gave made Curdie himself start and tremble for a moment. As for the man, he shuddered with every muscle, then reeled gasping to and fro, and dropped his candle. But then he recovered and flew to the door, through which he darted – leaving it open behind him.

The moment he ran, Curdie stepped out, picked up the candle, which was still alight, and sped after him to the door. He took the key, and then returned to the stair and waited.

In a few minutes he heard the sound of many feet and voices. Instantly he turned on the tap of the cask from which the man had been drinking. He put the candle beside it on the floor, went down the steps and out of the little door, followed by Lina, and closed it behind them.

Through the hole in the door he could see a little, and hear everything. He could see how the light of many candles filled the place, and could hear two dozen feet running hither and thither through the echoing cellar; and he heard how, finding nothing but the best wine running to waste, they all turned on the butler and accused him of having fooled them with a drunken dream.

The butler did his best to defend himself, appealing to them that the key was gone from the door; but the others said it merely showed how drunk he had been, for he must have dropped it. In vain he protested that he had never taken it out of the lock; they asked him why he had to go to the cellar at such a time of the day. He said they must help him to find the key; and they declared they wouldn't do any such thing. He swore that he would have them all turned out of the king's service. They said they would swear he was drunk.

And so positive were they about it, that at last the butler himself began to think they might be right. For he knew that sometimes when he had been drunk he fancied things which could not have happened. Some of his fellow servants did wonder whether a cellar goblin had roared at him, to protect the wine. In any case nobody wanted to find the key for him. By degrees the hubbub died away, and they departed.

As soon as they were gone, Curdie returned, knowing now that they were in the wine cellar of the palace. Finding a pool of wine on the floor, Lina lapped it up eagerly: she had had no breakfast, and was now very thirsty as well as hungry.

Her master was in a similar plight. If only they were all in bed, he thought, so that he might find his way to the larder! For he said to himself that, as he was sent there by the young princess's great-great-grandmother to help her, surely he must have a right to food in the Palace. He would go and explore.

So he crept up the stair from the cellar. At the top was a door, opening on a long passage dimly lit by a lamp. He told Lina to lie down upon the stair while he went on. At the end of the passage he found a door ajar, and, peering through, saw right into a great stone hall, where a huge fire was blazing, and

through which men in the king's livery were constantly coming and going. Some men in the same livery were lounging about the fire. He noted that their colours were the same as those he himself wore, as a king's miner; but he did not expect that they would treat him any better because of that.

Most interesting to him at the moment, however, was the plentiful supper spread upon the table. He decided that if at any moment the hall should be empty, he would rush in and attempt to carry off a dish. He selected a large pie upon which to pounce if the chance came. But he waited for some time with no luck, and was just about to turn away and rejoin Lina, when he saw that there was nobody in the place.

Curdie did not hesitate. He darted in, seized the pie, and bore it swiftly and noiselessly to the cellar stair.

CHAPTER 18
The King's Kitchen

Back to the cellar Curdie and Lina sped with their booty, where, seated on the steps, Curdie lit his bit of candle for a moment. It was a very little bit of candle now, but they did not waste much in examining the pie; they sampled it instead. Curdie thought it the nicest food he had ever tasted, and between them they soon ate it up.

Curdie was going to throw the dish into the water, so that there might be no trace of it; but he thought of his mother, and hid it instead – and the very next minute they needed it to draw some wine into. He was careful to take it from the cask which he had seen the butler drink from.

Then they sat down again upon the steps, and waited until the house should be quiet. For Curdie was there to do something, and he would need to go and find out what it was. Therefore, lest he should fall asleep, he set the end of the handle of his mattock on the ground, and seated himself on the cross part, leaning against the wall, so that as long as he kept awake he could rest, but the moment he began to fall asleep he would be woken up. He expected some of the servants to visit the cellar again that night; but perhaps they believed more of the butler's story than they had admitted, for not one of them appeared.

When at length he thought he might venture out, he shouldered his mattock and crept up the stair with Lina. The lamp in the passage was out, but he could not miss his way to the servants' hall.

On reaching the hall they found it quiet and nearly dark. The last of the great fire was glowing red, but giving little light. Curdie stood and warmed himself for a few moments: even though he was a miner, he had found the cellar a cold place to sit doing nothing.

Then he looked for any bits of candle that were about. There were many candlesticks on the supper table, but to his disappointment the candles seemed to have all been left to burn out.

Presently, he came upon seven men fast asleep, most slumped upon tables, one in a chair, and one on the floor. They seemed to have eaten and drunk so much that they were dead to the world. He grasped the hand of each in succession, and found two ox hoofs, three pig hoofs, one which might have been the hoof of a donkey, and one dog's paw.

"A nice set of people to be around a king!" thought Curdie, and he turned again to his candle hunt. He did at last find two or three little pieces of candle, and stowed them in his pockets.

They left the hall by another door, and entered a short passage, which led them to the huge kitchen, vaulted and black with smoke. There, too, the fire was still burning, so that he was able to see the place.

It was dirty and disorderly. In a corner, on a heap of brushwood, lay a kitchen-maid, with a tablecloth around her: evidently she too had been drinking. In another corner lay a page-boy, and Curdie noted how like his clothes were to Curdie's own. In front of the hearth were huddled three dogs and five cats, all fast asleep, while the rats were running around the floor. Curdie's heart ached to think of the lovely child-princess living over such a sty. The mine was a paradise compared to a palace with such servants in it.

Leaving the kitchen, he went to the sculleries. There, horrible smells were wandering about, like evil spirits in the darkness. He lit a candle – only to see filth and disorder. Mangy dogs were lying about, and grey rats were gnawing at refuse in the sinks. It was like a hideous dream. He felt as if he should never get out of it, and longed for a glimpse of his mother's humble little kitchen, so clean and bright and airy. Turning away at last in miserable disgust, he almost ran back through the kitchen, re-entered the hall, and crossed it to another door.

This opened upon a wider passage, leading to an arch in a stately corridor, lit by lamps in niches. At the end of it was a large and beautiful hall, with great pillars. There sat three men in the royal livery, fast asleep, each in a great armchair, with his feet on a huge footstool. They looked like fools dreaming they were kings; and Lina looked as if she longed to throttle them. At one side of the hall was the grand staircase, and they went up.

Everything that now met Curdie's eyes was rich and soft – except where, now and then, some rough old rib of the ancient fortress came through, hard and discoloured: now some dark bare arch of stone, now some rugged, blackened pillar, now some huge beam, brown with the smoke of centuries, looking like a thistle in the midst of daisies.

They wandered about a good while, often finding themselves where they had been before. Gradually, however, Curdie was gaining some idea of the place.

By and by Lina began to look frightened. Now, by this time Curdie had come to understand that what made her look frightened was always the fear of frightening someone, and he therefore concluded that they must be drawing near to somebody.

At last, in a gorgeously painted gallery, he saw a curtain of crimson, and on the curtain a royal crown wrought in silks and gemstones. He felt sure this must be the king's chamber, and this must be where he was needed.

So he gently lifted the corner of the curtain. Behind it was a half-open door. He entered; and the moment he was in, Lina stretched herself along the threshold between the curtain and the door.

CHAPTER 19
The King's Chamber

Curdie found himself in a large room, dimly lit by a silver lamp that hung from the ceiling. At the other end was a great bed, surrounded with heavy curtains. He went softly toward it, his heart beating fast. It was a dreadful thing to be alone in the king's chamber at the dead of night. To gain courage he had to remind himself of the beautiful princess who had sent him.

But when he was halfway to the bed, a figure appeared from the far side of it, and came towards him, with a hand raised in warning.

He stood still. The light was dim, and he could distinguish little more than the outline of a young girl. But though the form he saw was taller than the princess Irene he remembered, he never doubted it was she. For one thing, he knew that most girls would have been frightened to see him there in the dead of night, but like the true princess that he used to know, she walked straight on to meet him.

As she came she lowered her hand, and laid her finger on her lips. She stopped, and stood a moment looking at him.

"You are Curdie," she said.

"And you are the Princess Irene," he returned.

"Then we know each other still," she said, with a sad smile of pleasure. "You'll help me."

"That I will," answered Curdie. He did not say, "If I can"; for he knew that whatever he was sent to do, he could do. "May I kiss your hand, little Princess?"

She was only between nine and ten, though indeed she looked several years older, and her eyes were almost those of a grown woman, for she had had terrible trouble of late. She held out her hand.

"I am not the little princess any more. I have grown up since I saw you last, Mr Miner." As she said this she smiled, with a strange mixture of playfulness and sadness.

"So I see, Miss Princess," answered Curdie. "Here I am, sent by your great-great-grandmother, to be your servant. May I ask why you are up so late, Princess?"

"Because my father wakes so frightened, and I don't know what he would do if he didn't find me by his bedside. There! he's waking now."

She darted over to the side of the bed. Curdie stood where he was.

A voice altogether unlike what he remembered of the mighty, noble king on his white horse came from the bed; it was thin, feeble, hollow, and husky, and its tone was like that of a petulant child.

"I will not, I will not. I am a king, and I will be a king. I hate and despise you, and you shall not torture me!"

"Never mind them, Father dear," said the princess. "I'm here, and they shan't touch you. They dare not, you know, so long as you defy them."

"They want my crown, darling; and I can't give them my crown, can I? For what is a king without his crown?"

"They shall never have your crown, my king," said Irene. "Here it is, safe. I'm watching it for you."

Curdie drew near the bed on the other side. There lay the grand old king. He looked grand still, but twenty years older. His beard descended long and white over the crimson coverlet; and his crown, its diamonds and emeralds gleaming in the twilight, lay in front of him, his long thin old hands folded round it, and the ends of his beard straying among the lovely stones. His face was noble, but his eyes, even while they moved about, looked dead. He saw neither his daughter nor his crown: it was the voice of the one and the touch of the other that comforted him.

He kept murmuring. Curdie could not tell what he was saying, although, to judge from the look on Irene's face, she understood him.

By degrees his voice sank away and the murmuring ceased, although his lips still moved. Thus lay the old king on his bed, slumbering with his crown between his hands; on one side of him stood a lovely little maiden, with blue eyes, and brown hair pushed back a little, as if blown by a wind that no one felt but herself; and on the other a stalwart young miner, with his mattock over his shoulder. A stranger sight still was Lina lying along the threshold – only nobody saw her just then.

A moment more and the king's lips ceased to move. His breathing had grown regular and quiet. The princess gave a sigh of relief, and came round to Curdie.

"We can talk a little now," she said, leading him towards the middle of the room. "My father will sleep till the doctor wakes him to give him his medicine. It is not really medicine, though, but wine. Nothing but that, the doctor says, could have kept him alive so long. He always comes in the middle of the night to give it him with his own hands. But it makes me cry to see my father wake up when he is so nicely asleep."

"What sort of man is your doctor?" asked Curdie.

"Oh, such a dear, good, kind gentleman!" replied the princess. "He speaks so softly, and is so sorry for his dear king! He will be here presently, and you shall see for yourself. You will like him very much."

“Has your father been ill for long?” asked Curdie.

“A whole year now,” she replied. “Did you not know? The lord chancellor told me that not only Gwyntystorm but the whole land was mourning over his illness.”

Now Curdie himself had not heard a word of His Majesty’s illness, and had no reason for believing that a single soul anywhere he had visited on his journey had heard of it. Moreover, although mention had been made of His Majesty again and again in his hearing since he came to Gwyntystorm, never once had he heard anyone mention the state of his health.

And now it dawned upon him also that he had never heard the least expression of love for the king. But for now he thought it better to say nothing about it.

“Does the king wander like this every night?” he asked.

“Every night,” answered Irene mournfully. “That’s why I never go to bed at night. He is a little better during the day, and then I sleep in the dressing room there, to be with him in a moment if he should call me. It is so sad he should have only me and not my mamma! A princess is nothing compared to a queen!”

“I wish he might like me,” said Curdie, “for then I might watch him at night, and let you go to bed, Princess.”

“But he does want you – didn’t you know?” replied Irene, in wonder. “How was it you came? Ah! You said my grandmother sent you. But I thought you knew that he wanted you.”

“Not I,” said Curdie, bewildered, but very glad.

“He used to be constantly saying – before he was so ill – that he wished he had you near him. The master of the horse told papa’s own secretary that he had written to the miner-general to find you; but the miner-general wrote back that they had searched every mine in the kingdom and could hear nothing of you. My father gave a great sigh, and said he feared the goblins had got you after all, and that your father and mother were dead of grief. And he has never mentioned you since, except when delirious. I cried very much. But one of my grandmother’s pigeons with its white wing flashed a message to me through the window one day, and then I knew that my Curdie wasn’t eaten by the goblins. Where were you, Curdie, when they couldn’t find you?”

“We will talk about that another time, when we are not expecting the doctor,” said Curdie. As he spoke, his eyes fell upon something on the table under the lamp. His heart gave a great throb, and he went nearer. Yes, there could be no doubt – it was the same flagon that the butler had filled in the wine cellar.

“It looks worse and worse!” he said to himself, and went back to Irene, where she stood half dreaming.

“When will the doctor be here?” he asked hurriedly.

The question was answered – not by the princess, but by something which that instant tumbled heavily into the room. Curdie hurried over, anxious about Lina.

On the floor lay a little round man, puffing and blowing, and uttering incoherent language. Curdie thought of his mattock, and ran and laid it aside.

“Oh, dear Dr Kelman!” cried the princess, running up and taking hold of his arm; “I am so sorry! I hope you have not hurt yourself?” She pulled at his hand, but could not raise him to his feet.

“Not at all, not at all,” said the doctor, trying to smile and to rise both at once, but finding it impossible to do either.

Curdie held out his hand to help him. But when he took hold of it, Curdie very nearly let him fall again, for what he held was not even an animal’s foot: it was the belly of a creeping thing. He managed to hold on, however, and pulled the doctor roughly to his feet.

“Your Royal Highness has rather a thick mat at the door,” said the doctor. Curdie looked at the doorway: Lina was not there.

The doctor approached the bed. “And how has my beloved king slept tonight?” he asked.

“No better,” answered Irene, with a mournful shake of her head.

“Ah, that is very well!” returned the doctor, his fall seeming to have muddled either his words or his meaning. “When we give him his wine, he will be better still.”

Curdie darted at the flagon, and lifted it high, as if he had expected to find it full, but had found it empty.

“That stupid butler! I heard them say he was drunk!” he cried in a loud whisper, and began to glide from the room.

“Come here with that flagon, you! Page!” cried the doctor.

Curdie came a few steps towards him with the flagon dangling from his hand.

“Are you aware, young man,” said the doctor, “that it is not every wine that can do His Majesty the benefit I intend?”

“Quite aware, sir,” answered Curdie. “The wine for His Majesty’s use is in the third cask from the corner.”

“Run off and fetch it, then,” said the doctor, looking satisfied.

Curdie stopped outside the curtain and blew the very faintest of whistles, no more than a breath: and up came Lina noiseless as a shadow. He showed her the flagon.

“The cellar, Lina: let’s go,” he said.

She galloped away on her soft feet, and Curdie had to run to keep up with her. Not once did she make even a dubious turn. From the king’s gorgeous

chamber to the cold cellar they raced. Curdie threw the wine down the back stair, rinsed the flagon out as he had seen the butler do, filled it from the cask from which he had seen the butler drink, and hastened with it up again to the king's room.

The little doctor took it, poured out a full glass, smelt it, but did not taste it, and set it down. Then he leaned over the bed, shouted in the king's ear, blew upon his eyes, and pinched his arm: Curdie thought he saw him run something bright into it.

At last the king half woke. The doctor seized the glass, raised his head, poured the wine down his throat, and let his head fall back on the pillow again. Tenderly wiping his beard, and bidding the princess good night, he then took his leave. Curdie would gladly have driven his pick into his head, but that was not his task, and he let him go. The little round man looked very carefully at his feet when he crossed the threshold.

"That attentive pageboy has removed the mat," he said to himself, as he walked along the corridor. "I must remember him."

CHAPTER 20
Counterplotting

Curdie was already learning how things were going, and saw that he and the princess must work together.

It was clear that some of those around the king were plotting against him: and it was plain too that the doctor was working to harm the health of His Majesty. It was a bad sign that the people outside the palace were ignorant of His Majesty's condition: Curdie believed that those inside the palace – except the butler – were ignorant of it as well. Doubtless His Majesty's councillors wanted to alienate the hearts of his subjects from their sovereign.

Curdie had the idea that they intended to kill the king, marry the princess to one of themselves, and found a new dynasty; but whatever their purpose, there was treason in the palace of the worst sort – and they were making the king ill and incapable, in order to carry it out.

The first thing to be seen to, therefore, was that His Majesty should neither eat nor drink anything prepared for him in the palace. If this could this have been managed without the princess, Curdie would have preferred leaving her in ignorance of the horrors around her. He also feared also that if she knew, she might betray the knowledge to the evil eyes about her; but it must be risked. She had always been a wise child. He did not doubt that the old princess had sent him to frustrate the wicked plans.

While he stood thinking this, the princess was earnestly watching the king, with looks of love and tenderness that went to Curdie's heart. Now and then she would fan him very softly with a great fan of peacock feathers; or, seeing a cloud begin to gather upon the sky of his sleeping face, she would climb upon the bed, and whisper into his ear until the cloud dispersed. In his deepest slumber, the soul of the king lay open to his child's voice, which had power to breathe hope into his heart.

Curdie came near, and softly called her.

"I can't leave Papa just yet," she answered in a low voice.

"I will wait," said Curdie; "but I want very much to say something."

In a few minutes she came over to him.

"Well, Curdie, what is it?" she said.

"Princess," he replied, "I want to tell you that I know why your grandmother sent me."

"Tell me, then," she answered, "where I can see the face of my king."

Curdie placed a chair for her where she would be near enough to see her father's face, and yet where their low-voiced talk would not disturb him. He sat

down beside her and told her all the story – how her grandmother had sent her pigeon for him, and how she had instructed him, and sent him here.

Then he told her what he had discovered in Gwyntystorm, and what he had heard and seen in the palace that night.

"Things are in a bad state," he said at the end, "with lying and selfishness and dishonesty everywhere; and they speak with disrespect of the good king, and nobody knows that he is ill."

"You frighten me dreadfully," said Irene, trembling.

"You must be brave for your king's sake," said Curdie.

"Indeed I will," she replied, and turned a long loving look upon the beautiful face of her father. "But what is to be done? And how am I to believe such horrible things of Dr Kelman?"

"My dear Princess," replied Curdie, "you know nothing of him but his face and his tongue, and they are both false. I can tell you, by the gift your grandmother gave me of testing hands, that this man is a snake. Perhaps the creature lies inside that round body, as in its nest, coiled round and round inside."

"Horrible!" said Irene.

"Horrible indeed. Is not your father sleeping better since he had the wine?"

"Yes."

"Does he always sleep better after having it?"

She reflected. "No; always worse – until tonight," she answered.

"Remember that was the wine I got him, not what the butler brought. From now on, nothing must pass his Majesty's lips from any hand except yours or mine, till he is well."

"But how, dear Curdie?" said the princess, almost crying.

"That we must work out," answered Curdie. "I know how to take care of the wine; but as for his food – we must think."

"He hardly eats any," said the princess, with a pathetic shake of her head.

"All the more need," he replied, "that there should be no poison in it." Irene shuddered. "As soon as he has honest food he will begin to grow better. And you must be just as careful with yourself, Princess, in case they may begin to poison you, too."

"There's no fear of me," said Irene. "But how are we to get good food, Curdie?"

"I'm thinking," answered Curdie. "Let me see! Those servants of yours are sure to have the best of everything for themselves: I will go and see what I can find on their table."

"The chancellor sleeps in the house, and he and the master of the king's horse always have their supper together in a room off the great hall, to the right of the stairs," said Irene. "I would go with you, but I dare not leave my

father. Alas! He scarcely ever takes more than a mouthful. He often asks for a bit of bread, but I can hardly ever get any for him: Dr Kelman has forbidden it."

"Bread at least he shall have," said Curdie; "and that, with the honest wine, will do as well as anything, I do believe. I will go at once and look for some. But I want you to see Lina first, and get to know her, in case you come upon her by accident and are frightened."

"I should very much like to see her," said the princess.

Warning her not to be startled by her ugliness, Curdie went to the door and called Lina.

She entered, creeping with downcast head, and dragging her tail over the floor behind her. Curdie watched the princess as the frightful creature came nearer and nearer. One shudder went through her, and next instant she stepped forward to meet Lina.

Lina dropped flat on the floor, and covered her face with her two big paws. It went to the princess's heart: in a moment she was on her knees beside her, stroking her ugly head, and patting her all over. "Good dog! Dear ugly dog!" she said. Lina whimpered.

"I believe," said Curdie, "from what your grandmother told me, that Lina is a woman, and that she was naughty, but is now growing good."

Lina had lifted her head while Irene was caressing her; now she dropped it again between her paws; but the princess took it in her hands, and kissed the forehead between the gold-green eyes.

"Shall I take her with me or leave her?" asked Curdie.

"Leave her, poor dear," said Irene, and Curdie, since he knew the way now, went without her.

He went first to the room the princess had spoken of, and there were the remains of supper; but neither there nor in the kitchen could he find a scrap of wholesome-looking bread.

So he returned and told her that as soon as it was light he would go into the city for some bread, and asked her for a handkerchief to tie it in. If he could not bring it himself, he would send it by Lina, who could keep out of sight better than he could, and as soon as all was quiet at night he would come to the princess again. He also asked her to tell the king that he was in the house.

He knew that bakers everywhere go to work early. But it was still much too early even for them. So he persuaded the princess to lie down, and promised to call her if the king should stir.

CHAPTER 21
The Loaf

His Majesty slept very quietly. The dawn had almost become day, and still Curdie lingered, unwilling to disturb the sleeping princess.

At last, however, he called her, and she was in the room in a moment, saying she felt quite refreshed. Delighted to find her father still peacefully asleep, she sat down by the bed to watch him.

Curdie got his mattock from where he had hidden it behind a great mirror, and went to the cellar with Lina. When they passed through the hall they took some breakfast, and as soon as they had eaten it they left the palace through the cellar.

At the mouth of the passage Curdie seized the rope, drew himself up, pushed away the shutter, and entered the dungeon where they had been imprisoned. Then he swung the end of the rope to Lina, and she caught it in her teeth. When her master said, “Now, Lina!” she gave a great spring, and he ran away with the end of the rope as fast as he could. And such a spring had she made, that by the time he had to bear her weight she was within a few feet of the hole. The instant she got a paw through, she was all through.

Apparently their enemies were waiting till hunger should have cowed them, for there was no sign of anyone having tried to open the door. A blow or two of Curdie’s mattock drove the shattered lock clean from it. Telling Lina to wait there till he came back, and to let no one in, he walked out into the silent street, and closed the door behind him. He could hardly believe it was not yet a whole day since he had been thrown in there with his hands tied behind his back.

Down through the town he went, walking in the middle of the street, so that if anyone saw him, they might see he was not afraid, and might hesitate to attack him. As for the dogs, the shadow of his mattock was enough to make them scamper. As soon as he reached the archway of the city gate he turned towards the baker’s shop, and seeing no sign of movement, waited there.

After about an hour, the door opened, and the baker’s man appeared with a pail in his hand. He went to a pump that stood in the street, and having filled his pail returned with it into the shop.

Curdie stole after him and found the door on the latch. Opening it very gently, he peeped in, saw nobody, and entered. Remembering which shelf the baker’s wife had taken the best loaf from, and seeing just one loaf upon it, he seized it, laid the price of it on the counter, and sped softly out and up the street.

Once more in the dungeon beside Lina, his first thought was to fasten up the door again. It would have been easy, as so many iron fragments of all sizes lay about; but he decided that if he left it as it was, and the people came to find him, they would conclude that he and Lina had escaped through the door, and would look no farther – and so would not discover the hole. So he merely pushed the door closed and left it. Then once more carefully arranging the earth behind the shutter, so that it should again fall with it, he returned with Lina to the cellar.

And now he had to take the loaf to the princess. He crept to the door of the servants' hall, and found the sleepers beginning to stir. One said it was time to go to bed; another, that he would go to the cellar instead, and have a mug of wine to waken him up; while a third challenged a fourth to give him his revenge at some game or other.

Perceiving it would be risky to pass them, and reflecting that the porters in the great hall would probably be awake also, Curdie went back to the cellar. He took Irene's handkerchief, wrapped the loaf in it, tied it round Lina's neck, and told her to take it to the princess.

Using every shadow and every shelter, Lina slid through the servants like a shapeless terror through a guilty mind, and so, by corridor and great hall, up the stair to the king's chamber.

Irene trembled a little when she saw Lina glide soundless in across the silent dusk of the morning, that filtered through the heavy drapery of the windows; but she recovered at once when she saw the bundle about her neck. She untied it with joy, and Lina stole away, as silently as she had come.

Irene's joy was all the greater because the king had woken up a little before, and expressed a desire for food – not that he felt exactly hungry, he said, and yet if only he might have a piece of nice fresh bread! Irene had no knife, but with eager hands she broke a great piece from the loaf, and poured out a glass of wine. The king ate and drank, greatly enjoyed the bread and the wine, and instantly fell asleep again.

It was hours before the lazy servants brought their breakfast. When it came, Irene crumbled a little about, threw some into the fireplace, and managed to make the tray look just as usual.

In the meantime, down below in the cellar, Curdie was lying in the hollow between the upper sides of two of the great casks, the warmest place he could find. Lina was keeping watch. She lay at his feet, across the two casks, and did her best to arrange her huge tail so that it should be a warm coverlet for her master.

By and by Dr Kelman called to see his patient. Now that Irene's eyes were opened, she saw clearly enough that he was both annoyed and puzzled at finding His Majesty rather better. However, he pretended to congratulate him,

saying he believed he was quite fit to see the lord chamberlain, who wanted his signature to something important; only his Majesty must not strain his mind to understand it, whatever it might be. The king said he would see the lord chamberlain, and the doctor went.

Then Irene gave him more bread and wine, and the king ate and drank, and smiled a feeble smile, the first real one she had seen for many a day. He said he felt much better, and would soon be able to take matters into his own hands again. He had a strange miserable feeling, he said, that things were going terribly wrong, although he could not tell how.

Then the princess told him that Curdie had come; and that at night, when all was quiet – for nobody in the palace must know – he would pay His Majesty a visit. Her great-great-grandmother had sent him, she said. The king looked strangely upon her, but the strange look changed into a smile, and filled Irene's heart with delight.

CHAPTER 22
The Lord Chamberlain

At noon the lord chamberlain appeared. With a long, low bow, and holding documents in his hand, he stepped softly into the room. Greeting His Majesty respectfully, he congratulated him on the progress he had made, and declared that he was sorry to trouble him, but there were certain papers which required his signature.

He drew nearer to the king, who lay looking at him doubtfully. He was a lean, long, yellow man, with a small, balding head. He had a very thin, hooked nose; his eyes were small, sharp, and glittering. He had hardly enough of a mouth to make a smile with. His left hand held the paper, and the skinny fingers of his right held a pen just dipped in ink.

But the king, who for weeks had scarcely known what he did, was today so much himself as to be aware that he was not quite himself; and the moment he saw the paper, he resolved that he would not sign it without understanding and approving of it. So he asked the lord chamberlain to read it. His Lordship began at once, but the difficulties he seemed to encounter, and the fits of stammering that seized him, roused the king's suspicion tenfold. He called the princess.

"You can read print well, my child," he said. "Let me hear how you can read handwriting. Take that paper from His Lordship's hand, and read it to me from beginning to end, while my lord drinks a glass of wine, and watches for your blunders."

"Pardon me, Your Majesty," said the lord chamberlain, with as much of a smile as he was able to manage, "but it would a thousand pities to put Her Royal Highness to such a severe test. Your Majesty can scarcely expect her to be able to read such long words, that to her mean nothing."

"I think much of my little princess and her capabilities," returned the king, more and more awake. "Pray, my lord, permit her to try."

"Consider, Your Majesty: that would be to make sport of state matters," said the lord chamberlain.

"Perhaps you are right, my lord," answered the king, who to his growing joy felt new life and power throbbing in his heart and brain. "So this morning we shall read no further. I am indeed not able to undertake business of such weight."

"Will Your Majesty please sign your royal name here?" said the lord chamberlain, pointing to a spot on the paper.

"Not today," replied the king.

“It is of the greatest importance, Your Majesty,” softly insisted the other.

“I detected no such importance in it,” said the king.

“Your Majesty heard only a part.”

“And I can hear no more today.”

The lord chamberlain made more attempts at persuasion; but he was at last compelled to retire without the paper being signed.

And well might his annoyance be keen! For that paper was the king’s will, drawn up by the attorney-general; they needed the king’s signature before venturing farther. But the chamberlain’s greatest unease was at finding the king so alert and capable, for the doctor had promised to weaken his brain so that he should be like a child in their hands, incapable of refusing anything. The lord chamberlain began to doubt the doctor’s word.

But the princess was delighted. She had not for weeks heard her father speak so many words, or with such strength and reason: day by day he had been growing weaker and more lethargic. However, he was so exhausted after this effort, that he asked for another piece of bread and more wine, and then fell fast asleep the moment he had taken them.

The lord chamberlain sent in a rage for Dr Kelman. He came, and promised that on the next day the king would do whatever was required of him.

The day went on. When His Majesty was awake, the princess read storybooks to him; and the king listened as if he had never heard anything so good before. Every now and then he asked for a piece of bread and a little wine, and every time he ate and drank he slept, and every time he woke he seemed better than the last time. The princess ate too, so that the loaf was finished and the flagon emptied before night. The butler took the flagon away, and brought it back filled to the brim; but both were thirsty and hungry when Curdie came again.

Meantime he and Lina, watching and waking alternately, had plenty of sleep. In the afternoon, peeping from the recess in the cellar, they saw several of the servants enter hurriedly, one after the other, draw wine, drink it, and steal out; but Curdie’s business was to take care of the king, not his cellar, and he let them drink.

When the butler came to fill the flagon, he restrained himself. The butler looked terribly frightened, and had brought a large candle and a small terrier which went roving and sniffing about until he came to the recess where they were. But Lina opened her jaws so wide, and glared at him so horribly, that, without even a whimper, he tucked his tail between his legs and ran to his master.

When suppertime approached, Curdie took his place at the door to the servants’ hall. After a long hour’s vain watch, he began to fear he should get nothing: there were so many people idling about, as well as coming and going.

He could see a splendid loaf, just fresh out of the oven, which he longed to secure for the king and princess. At length his chance arrived: he pounced upon the loaf and carried it away, and soon afterwards got hold of a pie.

This time, however, both loaf and pie were missed. The cook was called, and he declared that one of the servants must have carried them away for some friend outside the palace. Then a housemaid, who had not worked there long, said she had seen someone like a pageboy running towards the cellar with something in his hands. Instantly they turned upon the pages, accusing them. All the pages denied it, but nobody believed them. Where there is no truth there can be no faith.

The servants all set out to the cellar to look for the missing pie and loaf. Lina heard them coming, for they were talking and quarrelling loudly. She gave her master warning: he snatched up everything, and got out by the back door before the servants entered.

When they found nothing, they turned on the chambermaid, and accused her of lying about the pageboy, and said she had taken the things herself. Their language and behaviour disgusted Curdie, who was listening. He saw the danger of discovery was now much increased.

He began to consider how to rid the palace of the whole pack of servants. That, however, would be of little use so long as the treacherous officers of state continued there – they must be dealt with first. A thought came to Curdie, and the longer he looked at it the better he liked it.

As soon as the servants were gone, quarrelling all the way, Curdie and Lina returned to the cellar and finished their supper. Then Curdie, who had long been convinced that Lina understood almost every word he said, told her his plan. He knew by the wagging of her tail and the flashing of her eyes that she understood. However, until they had the king safe through the worst part of the night, nothing could be done.

They had now merely to wait till the household was asleep. This waiting was very hard for Curdie. He took his mattock and, going into the long passage, lit a candle end and began to examine the rock on all sides.

This was not merely to pass the time: he had a reason for it. When he had broken the stone in the street over which the baker fell, its appearance had led him to pocket a fragment; and when he examined it later, he found that it was the kind of stone in which gold is found, and that the yellow particles in it were pure gold.

If such stone existed here in any quantity, he could soon make the king rich, and independent of his subjects. So now he was examining the rock; and before long he was persuaded that there were large quantities of gold in the white stone. Every piece he broke was spotted with particles and little lumps of a lovely greenish yellow – and that was gold.

Curdie had worked only in silver, but he knew all about gold. As soon as he had got the king free of rogues and villains, he would have all the best and most honest miners, with his father at the head of them, to work this rock for the king.

It was a great delight to him to use his mattock once more. The time went quickly, and when he left the passage to go to the king's chamber, he had already a good heap of fragments behind the broken door.

CHAPTER 23
Dr Kelman

As soon as he thought the way was clear, Curdie ventured softly into the hall, with Lina behind him. By the fading fire a girl sat weeping. It was the same girl who had seen him carrying off the food, and had been accused and sworn at for saying so. She opened her eyes when he appeared, but did not seem frightened.

"I know why you weep," said Curdie, "and I am sorry for you."

"It's hard not to be believed just because one speaks the truth," said the girl. "My mother taught me to speak the truth, so it's hard for me to tell a lie, though I could invent many a story these servants would believe; for the truth is a strange thing here, and they don't know it when they see it!" She burst out weeping afresh. "You are a stranger," she said, "but the stranger you are to such a place and such people, the better for you!"

"I am the person you saw carrying the things from the supper table," said Curdie, and he showed her the loaf. "If you can trust the truth, I will trust you. Can you trust me?"

She looked at him steadily for a moment.

"I can," she answered.

"One thing more," said Curdie: "have you courage as well as truth?"

"I think so."

"Look my dog in the face and don't cry out. Come here, Lina."

Lina obeyed. The girl looked at her, and laid her hand on Lina's head.

"Now I know you are a true woman," said Curdie. "I have come to set things right in this house. Not one of the servants knows I am here. Tomorrow morning, will you tell them that, if they do not alter their ways, and stop drinking and lying and stealing and unkindness, they shall all be driven from the palace?"

"They will not believe me."

"Most likely; but will you give them the chance?"

"I will."

"Then I will be your friend," he said. "Wait here till I come again." The girl looked him once more in the face, and sat down.

When he reached the royal chamber, he found His Majesty awake, and anxiously expecting him. The king received him with the utmost kindness, and at once told him all he knew about the state he was in. His voice was feeble, but his eye was clear, although now and then his words and thoughts seemed to wander.

The king told him that for some years, ever since his queen's death, he had been losing heart over the wickedness of his people. He had tried hard to make them good, but they got worse and worse. Evil teachers, unknown to him, had crept into the schools; there was a decay of truth and honesty in the city; and that spread outwards to the country.

This made him so unhappy that it was the main cause of his illness. He could not sleep, and had terrible dreams; while, to his unspeakable shame and distress, he doubted almost everybody. He had striven against his suspicions, but in vain, and his heart was sore, for his courtiers and councillors were really kind.

Yet the whole country was discontented, he heard, and there were also signs of gathering storm outside his borders. The master of the horse gave him sad news of the disobedience of the army; and his great white horse was dead, they told him; and his sword had lost its sharpness: and they could not find his shield.

Thus the poor king went wandering in a maze of sorrows, some of which were imaginary, while others were truer than he understood. He told how thieves came at night and tried to take his crown, so that he never dared let it out of his hands even when he slept; and how, every night, an evil demon in the shape of his physician came and poured poison down his throat. He somehow knew it to be poison, he said, although it tasted like wine. Here he stopped, faint with the unusual exertion of talking.

Curdie seized the flagon, and ran to the wine cellar. In the servants' hall the girl still sat by the fire, waiting for him. As he returned from the cellar he told her to follow him, and left her at the chamber door.

When the king had had a little wine, Curdie informed him that he had already discovered some of His Majesty's enemies, and one of the worst of them was the doctor – for the demon was the doctor himself, who had been coming every night, and giving him a slow poison.

"So!" said the king. "I thought it was only a dream! Is it possible Kelman can be such a wretch? Who then am I to trust?"

"No one in the house, except the princess and me," said Curdie.

"I will not go to sleep," said the king.

"That would be as bad as taking the poison," said Curdie. "No, no, sire; you must show your confidence by leaving all the watching to me, and doing all the sleeping you can."

The king smiled a contented smile, turned on his side, and was presently fast asleep.

Then Curdie persuaded the princess also to go to sleep; and instructing Lina to keep watch, he went to the housemaid. He asked her if she could tell

him which of the council slept in the palace, and show him their rooms. She took him round all their doors, telling him who slept where.

He then dismissed her, and returned to the king's chamber. He sat behind a curtain at the head of the bed, on the side farthest from the king. He told Lina to get under the bed, and make no noise.

At about one o'clock the doctor came stealing in. He looked round for the princess, and seeing no-one, smiled with satisfaction as he approached the wine where it stood under the lamp. Having partly filled a glass, he took from his pocket a small phial, and filled up the glass from it. The light fell upon his face from above, and Curdie saw the snake in it plainly visible. He had never seen such an evil face: this man hated the king, and delighted in harming him.

With the glass in his hand, he drew near the bed, and began his usual rousing of His Majesty. When he did not at once succeed, he took a sharp lancet from his pocket, with an involuntary hiss of hate between his closed teeth – when Curdie stooped and whispered to Lina.

"Take him by the leg, Lina."

She darted noiselessly upon the doctor. With a face of horrible consternation, he gave his leg a tug to free it; the next instant Curdie heard the scrunch with which she crushed the bone like a stick of celery. He tumbled on the floor with a yell.

"Drag him out, Lina," said Curdie.

Lina took him by the collar, and dragged him out. Curdie followed her, and they left the doctor lying across the lord chamberlain's door, where he gave another horrible yell, and fainted.

The king had wakened at his first cry, and by the time Curdie re-entered he had got his sword, had drawn it, and was trying to get out of bed. But when Curdie told him all was well, he lay down again as quietly as a child comforted by his mother from a troubled dream. Curdie went to the door to watch.

The doctor's yells had aroused many, but no-one had yet ventured to appear. Bells were rung violently, but none were answered; and in a minute or two Curdie saw what he was watching for. The door of the lord chamberlain's room opened, and, pale with terror, His Lordship peeped out.

Seeing no-one, he stepped into the corridor, and tumbled over the doctor. Curdie ran up, and took his hand to pull him up. It felt like the claw of a bird of prey – a vulture or an eagle.

The chamberlain took Curdie for one of the pages. He abused him for not coming sooner, and threatened him with dismissal. He was beginning a sermon on the duties of a page, when he caught sight of the man who lay at his door. Seeing it was the doctor, he abused Curdie afresh for standing there doing nothing, and ordered him to fetch help.

Curdie left him, but slipped into the King's chamber, closed and locked the door, and left the rascals to look after each other. Before long he heard hurrying footsteps, and a great muffled tumult of scuffling feet, low voices and deep groanings; then all was still again.

Irene slept through it all – so confidently did she rest, knowing Curdie was in her father's room watching over him.

CHAPTER 24
The Prophecy

Curdie sat and watched the sleeping king all night, while the palace lay quiet. At sunrise he called the princess.

"How has His Majesty slept?" were her first words as she entered the room.

"Peacefully," answered Curdie; "that is, since the doctor was got rid of."

"How did you manage that?" inquired Irene; and Curdie had to tell her all about it.

"How terrible!" she said. "Did it not startle the king dreadfully?"

"It did rather. I found him getting out of bed, sword in hand; but he went back to sleep. For a little while he was restless, and once when he lifted his hand it came down on the spikes of his crown, and he half waked."

"But where is the crown?' cried Irene, in sudden terror.

"I stroked his hands," answered Curdie, "and took the crown from them; and ever since he has slept quietly, and smiled in his sleep. The crown is over here."

Curdie moved away from the bedside and Irene followed him. There, in the middle of the floor, she saw a strange sight. Lina lay at full length, fast asleep, her tail stretched out straight behind her and her forelegs before her: between her two front paws, her nose just touching it, glowed and flashed the crown.

Irene gazed at this. "But what if a thief were to come?" she said. "Shall I try her?" And as she spoke she stooped toward the crown.

"No, no!" cried Curdie. "She would frighten you out of your wits. I would do it to show you, but she would wake your father. You have no idea with what a roar she would spring at my throat. But you shall see how lightly she wakes the moment I speak to her. Lina!"

Lina was on her feet the same instant, with her great tail sticking out straight behind her.

"Good dog!" said the princess, and patted her head. Lina wagged her tail solemnly. Irene took the crown, and laid it where the king would see it when he woke.

"Now, Princess," said Curdie, "I must leave you for a few minutes. Bolt the door, please, and do not open it to any one."

Away to the cellar he went with Lina; taking care, as they passed through the servants' hall, to get her a good breakfast. In about one minute she had eaten what he gave her, and looked up in his face: it was not more food she wanted, but work.

So out of the cellar they went through the passage, and into the dungeon, where Curdie pulled up Lina, opened the door, let her out, and shut it again

behind her. Then he returned to the king. Meanwhile Lina was flying out of the gate of Gwyntystorm as fast as her mighty legs could carry her.

As for the chambermaid: when she appeared among the servants that next morning, there was something in her face which did not like.

"What's wrong with the girl?" growled the menservants to one another. "Are we all dirt?" they said to her. "What are you thinking about?"

She made no answer.

"Speak, you hussy!" said the cook. "I want to know what right you have to put on a face like that!"

"You won't believe me," said the girl. "But I must tell you anyway."

"Of course you must."

"It is this, then: if you do not repent of your bad ways, you are all going to be punished – turned out of the palace."

"And why, pray, should we be turned out?" said the butler. "What have I to repent of, your holiness?"

"That you know best yourself," said the girl.

"A pretty piece of insolence from a chambermaid! Pray, Miss judgement, who gave you such an impertinent message to His Majesty's household?"

"One who is come to set things right in the king's house."

"Right, indeed!" cried the butler; but at that moment he remembered the roar he had heard in the cellar, and he turned pale and was silent.

The steward took it up next.

"And pray, pretty prophetess," he said, attempting to chuck her under the chin, "what have I got to repent of?"

"That you know best yourself," said the girl.

"Can you tell me, then, what I have to repent of?" said the groom of the chambers.

"That you know best yourself," said the girl once more. "The person who told me to tell you said the servants of this house had to repent of thieving, and lying, and unkindness, and drinking; and they will be made to repent of them, if they don't do it by themselves."

Then there arose a great hubbub as all the servants talked together in towering indignation.

"Thieving, indeed!" cried one maidservant. "A pretty word in a house where everything is left lying about in a shameless way, tempting poor innocent girls! A house where nobody has the least respect for property!"

"I suppose you're jealous of this brooch of mine," said another. "There was only a half sheet of note paper covering it, in a drawer that's always open in the writing table in the study! What sort of a place is that for a jewel? Can you call it stealing to take a thing from such a place as that? Nobody cared a straw about it."

“Drinking!” said the chief porter, with a husky laugh. “And who wouldn’t drink when he had a chance? Tell me that, Miss Innocence.”

“Lying!” said a great, coarse footman. “Lying, indeed! Tell us something worth repenting of! Lying is the way of Gwyntystorm.”

“Unkindness! Who’s unkind? Going and listening to any stranger against her fellow servants, and then bringing back his wicked words!” said the oldest and worst of the housemaids. “You hypocrite! This is all an invention of yours and your young man’s, to take your revenge because we found you out in a lie last night. Tell true now: wasn’t it the same man that stole the loaf and the pie, that sent you with the impudent message?”

As she said this, she stepped up to the housemaid and gave her a box on the ear that almost knocked her down; and the others began to push and pinch and punch her.

“You invite your fate,” she said quietly.

In fury they drove her from the hall with kicks and blows, hustled her along the passage, and threw her down the stair to the wine cellar. Then they locked the door, and went back to their breakfast.

In the meantime the king and the princess had had their bread and wine. And now Curdie tried to interest and amuse the king. At His Majesty’s request, he began from the beginning, and told everything he could recall of his life, about his father and mother and their cottage on the mountain, of the inside of the mountain and the work there, about the goblins and his adventures.

When he came to finding the princess and her nurse in the twilight on the mountain, Irene took up her share of the tale, and then Curdie took it up again; and so they went on, each fitting in the part that the other did not know; and the king listened with wonder and delight.

At last, Curdie brought up the whole tale to the present, with the mission given him by the wonderful princess and his consequent adventures. Then a silence fell, and Irene and Curdie thought the king was asleep. But he was far from sleeping; he was thinking. After a long pause he said:

“Now at last, my children, I am compelled to believe many things I do not understand – things I used to hear, and sometimes see, when I visited my mother's home. I heard and saw strange things in that house; but gradually, because I could not understand them, I stopped thinking of them. And indeed I had almost forgotten them. But now the memories keep coming back to me, one by one; and I shall just hold my peace, and lie here quite still, and think about them till I get well again.” What he meant, they could not quite understand, but they saw plainly that already he was better.

“Put away my crown,” he said. “I am tired of seeing it, and have no fear of its safety.”

They put it away, withdrew from the bedside, and left him in peace.

CHAPTER 25
The Avengers

There was nothing now to be dreaded from Dr Kelman; but it made Curdie anxious to think that not a soul belonging to the court had been to visit the king that day, or asked how he was. He feared a more determined assault.

Towards night the king fell asleep. Curdie thought more and more uneasily of the moment when he must again leave them for a little while. Deeper and deeper fell the shadows, and no-one came to light the lamp. The princess drew her chair close to Curdie: she would rather it were not so dark, she said. She was afraid of something – she could not tell what; the only reason she could give for her fear was that everything was so dreadfully still.

When it had been dark about an hour, Curdie thought Lina might have returned; and he would have to risk going out. So, telling the princess to lock all the doors of the bedchamber, and let no one in, he took his mattock. Then, alternately running and hiding, he reached the door at the top of the cellar stairs. To his surprise he found it locked, and the key was gone. There was no time for deliberation. He dealt the lock a tremendous blow with his mattock. When it opened, someone laid a hand on his arm.

"Who is it?" said Curdie.

"I told you they wouldn't believe me, sir," said the housemaid. "I have been here all day."

He took her hand, and said, "You are a good, brave girl. Now come with me." He took her to the cellar, locked the door, lit a bit of candle, and gave her a little wine. Then he told her to wait there till he came, and went out the back way.

Swiftly he swung himself up into the dungeon. Lina had done her part. The place was swarming with creatures – animals that were wilder and more grotesque than ever romped in nightmare dreams. Lina had laid herself down close to the hole, awaiting his coming, her green eyes shining. All around the vault and up the slope of the rubbish heap lay and stood and squatted the forty-nine creatures whom Lina had befriended in the wood. Now they all came crowding around Curdie.

He needed to get them into the cellar as quickly as he could. But when he looked at the size of some of them, he feared it would be a long business to enlarge the hole enough to let them through. He hit the edge of the hole vigorously with his mattock.

Before he could go on, a creature like a tapir, only with a long nose as hard as steel, pushed him gently aside, making room for another creature with a

head like a great club, which it began banging upon the floor with terrible force and noise. After about a minute of this battery, the tapir came up again, shoved Clubhead aside, and putting its own head into the hole began sawing at the sides of it with its nose, so that fragments fell in a continuous gravelly shower. In a few minutes the opening was large enough for the biggest creature to get through it.

Next came the difficulty of letting them down: some were quite light, but half of them were too heavy for the rope, not to mention for Curdie's arms. The creatures themselves seemed to be puzzled. One after another of them came up to the hole, looked down through it, and drew back. Curdie thought if he let Lina down, perhaps that would give them the idea; possibly they could not see the opening on the other side. He did so, and Lina stood lighting up the entrance of the passage with her gleaming eyes.

One by one the creatures looked down again, and one by one they drew back, each standing aside to glance at the next, as if to say, Now you have a look. At last it came to the turn of the serpent with the long body, the four short legs, and the little wings. He poked his head through – and further through – and further, and further yet, until there was little more than his legs left in the dungeon. He had got his head and neck well into the passage beside Lina. Then his legs gave a great waddle and spring, and he tumbled heels over head into the passage.

"That is all very well for you, Mr Legserpent!" thought Curdie; "but what about the rest?" A moment later, however, the creature's head appeared again through the floor. It caught hold of the iron bar to which Curdie's rope was tied, and held it tightly with its teeth.

Curdie saw at once what it was doing. The beast had stretched his long body up and across the chasm to serve as a bridge for the rest. Instantly Curdie mounted upon his neck, threw his arms round him as far as they would go, and slid down in ease and safety, the bridge just bending a little as his weight glided over it.

One by one the oddities followed, and slid down in safety. When they seemed to be all landed, he counted them: there were only forty-eight. Up the rope again he went, and found one which had been afraid of using the bridge, and no wonder! For this beast was as round as a ball, about a foot in diameter, with a nose and mouth and eyes on one side. He had made his journey by rolling – but because the back of the legserpent was not flat, he could not quite trust himself to roll straight and not drop into the gulf.

So Curdie took Ballbody in his arms, and he slid into the passage in safety.

He ran first to the cellar to warn the girl not to be frightened. Then he called to Lina to bring in her friends. One after another they came trooping in, till the cellar seemed full of them. The housemaid regarded them without fear.

“Sir,” she said, “there is one of the page boys who is not a bad fellow.”

“Then keep him near you,” said Curdie. “And now can you show me a way to the king’s chamber that is not through the servants’ hall?”

“There is a way through the chamber of the colonel of the guard,” she answered, “but he is ill, and in bed.”

“Take me that way,” said Curdie.

By many ups and downs and windings and turnings she brought him to a dimly lit room, where an elderly man lay asleep. His arm was outside the covers, and Curdie gave his hand a hurried grasp as he went by. His heart beat for joy, for he had found a good, honest, human hand.

“I suppose that is why he is ill,” he said to himself.

It was now close to suppertime. When the girl stopped at the door of the king’s chamber, he told her to go and give the servants one warning more.

“Say the messenger sent you,” he said. “I will be with you very soon.”

The king was still asleep. Curdie talked to the princess for a few minutes, and told her not to be frightened no matter what noises she heard, and to keep her door locked till he came; then he left her.

CHAPTER 26
The Vengeance

When the girl reached the servants' hall, they were seated at supper. They all exclaimed when she came in, and no one made room for her; they stared with unfriendly eyes, except for a page who came to her side.

"Where have you been, hussy?" shouted the butler, thumping the table with his fist. When he had gone to fetch wine, he had found the stair door broken open and the cellar door locked, and had turned and fled. Among his fellows, however, he had now regained courage.

"The cellar," she replied. "The messenger broke open the door, and sent me to you again."

"The messenger! Pooh! What messenger?"

"The same who sent me before to tell you to repent."

"What! Are you still talking such foolishness?" cried the butler in a rage, jumping to his feet.

"I must do as I am told," said the girl.

"Then why don't you do as I tell you, and hold your tongue?" said the butler. "Who wants your preaching? You come with me, young woman; we'll see if we can find a lock somewhere in the house that'll hold you in!"

"Hands off, Mr Butler!" said the page, and stepped between them.

"Oh, ho!" cried the butler, and pointed his fat finger at him. "So it's you that's up to her tricks, is it?"

The youth did not answer, only stood with flashing eyes fixed on him.

The butler, growing angrier and angrier, but not daring to step nearer, burst out:

"Leave the house, both of you! Threaten your masters, indeed! Out of the house with you!" Two or three of the footmen got up and stood behind him.

"I don't threaten you, Mr Butler," exclaimed the girl. "The messenger said I was to tell you again, and give you one chance more."

"Did the messenger mention me in particular?' asked the butler, looking uneasy.

"No, sir," answered the girl.

"I thought not! I should like to hear him!"

"Then hear him now," said Curdie. He had just entered at the opposite end of the hall. "I speak of the butler in particular because I know more evil of him than of any of the rest. I proclaim him a villain, and a traitor to His Majesty the king. But what better is any one of you who cares only for himself, who eats,

drinks, takes good money, and gives vile service in return, stealing and wasting the king's property, and making the palace a disgrace to the country?"

For a moment all stood astonished into silence by this bold speech from a stranger, even though they could see from his mattock that he was nothing but a miner boy. Then with a great roaring laugh the biggest of the footmen came shouldering his way through the crowd toward Curdie.

"Yes, I thought as much!" he cried. "This messenger is nothing but a gallows bird – a fellow the city marshal was going to hang. He broke out of prison, and here he is preaching!" As he spoke, he stretched out his great hand to lay hold of him.

Curdie caught it in his left hand. Finding nothing worse than an ox hoof, he stepped back a pace or two, shifted his mattock to his left hand, and struck him a smart little blow on the shoulder. The man's arm dropped, and with a roar he drew back.

But his companions came crowding upon Curdie, some calling the dogs, some swearing, some screaming. The footmen and pages got round him in a half circle, which he prevented from closing by swinging his mattock, threatening to hit them.

"Whoever confesses to having done anything wrong in this house, however small, however great, and means to do better, let him come to this corner of the room," he cried.

None moved but the page, who went toward him. When they caught sight of him, the crowd broke into a hiss of derision.

"There! Look at the sinner! He actually confesses! Come, what did you steal? The hypocrite! Where's the other one?"

But the maid had left the room, and they let the page leave too, for he looked too dangerous to stop. While he was on his way out, in rushed the butler with the huge kitchen poker, made red-hot in the fire – followed by the cook with his longest spit.

They rushed through the crowd, which scattered right and left, and bore down upon Curdie. Uttering a shrill whistle, Curdie hit the poker with his mattock, knocking the red-hot end to the ground. The page behind him seized the spit and held on to it with both hands, although the cook kicked him furiously.

Then, with a roar to terrify the dead, Lina dashed into the room, her eyes flaming like candles. She went straight at the butler. He was down in a moment, and she stood on top of him like a lioness.

"Don't kill him, Lina," said Curdie.

"Oh, Mr Miner!" cried the butler.

"Put your foot on his mouth, Lina," said Curdie.

The rest of the creatures now came stalking, rolling, leaping, gliding and hobbling into the room. They lined up along the wall, solemn and grotesque, awaiting orders.

And now some of the culprits were creeping towards the doors. Curdie whispered to the two creatures next to him. Off went Ballbody, rolling and bounding through the crowd like a cannon; he lay at the foot of one door grinning, while to the other door scuttled a scorpion, as big as a huge crab.

The other creatures stood so still that some began to think they were only boys dressed up to look frightening, and their evil spirits began to rise again. Curdie, who had seized the spit from the cook, now turned to the avengers.

"Go at them," he commanded. The whole nine-and-forty obeyed at once, each in its own way.

Confusion and terror followed. The crowd scattered like flies. The creatures had been instructed not to hurt them much, but to hunt them down, until everyone had rushed out of the house. The women shrieked, and ran hither and thither through the hall; if one threw herself down in hysterical despair, she was instantly poked or clawed or nibbled till she got up again.

The men did not run so fast; and some of them, finding they were only being followed, and not attacked, began to summon up their courage. The tapir was chasing the big footman, who stood stock-still, and let the beast come up to him. He put out his finger and playfully patted his nose.

The tapir gave the nose a little twist, and the finger lay on the floor. Then indeed did the footman run.

Another servant, seeing that one of the doors was no longer guarded, sprang at it, and ran out. More followed, until they had all rushed out of the hall, and gathered in the kitchen.

There they began to congratulate themselves that it was over – when in came the creatures trooping after them. The servants were flung about in all directions; their clothes were torn from them; they were pinched and scratched; Ballbody kept rolling up them and over them, while the scorpion grabbed at their legs with his huge pincers; a three-foot centipede was crawling up their bodies, nipping as he went; and there were numerous other woes. Before long, they had all fled from the kitchen to the sculleries.

But again they were followed, and again they were hunted. They were bespattered with the dirt they had never cleaned up; they were drenched in the stinking water that had boiled greens; they were smeared with rancid dripping; their faces were rubbed in maggots.

At last they opened the door into a back yard, and rushed out. The wind was howling and the rain falling in sheets. But there was no rest for them even there. They were still followed by the inexorable avengers, and the only door here led out of the palace.

So out they were driven, and were left, some standing, some lying, some crawling, amidst the buffeting whirlwinds and rain in every street of the city. The door was flung closed behind them, and they heard it being locked and barred and bolted.

CHAPTER 27
More Vengeance

As soon as the servants were gone, Curdie brought the creatures back to the hall, and told them to eat up everything on the table. It was a sight to see them all standing round it – or on it – eating and drinking, each in its own manner. Soon everything eatable had vanished. Then Curdie requested them to clean up, and asked the page to assist them.

Everyone set about it except Ballbody: he could hot help, for the more he rolled, the more he spread the dirt. There was such a clearing out, such a burying and burning of refuse, such a rinsing of jugs and swilling of sinks as would have delighted all true housekeepers.

Meanwhile Curdie was with the king, telling him everything he had done. Having promised His Majesty and Princess Irene a good breakfast, Curdie now went to finish the business. The courtiers must be dealt with. A few who were the worst, and the leaders of the rest, must be made examples of; the others should be driven into the street.

He found the chiefs of the conspiracy holding a consultation in a small room off the hall. These were the lord chamberlain, the attorney-general, the master of the horse, and the king's private secretary: the lord chancellor and the rest were merely the foolish tools of these four men.

The housemaid showed Curdie a little closet behind the room, where he could overhear all that happened there. Now he heard enough to understand that they planned to bring a company of soldiers into the palace in the dead of that night. They intended to kill the king, capture the princess, announce the sudden death of His Majesty, read out the will they had drawn up, and then govern the country at their ease.

With this plan settled, they agreed to retire for a few hours' quiet sleep – all but the secretary, who was to stay up and wake them at the right moment. Curdie allowed them half an hour to get to bed.

Then he called Lina, and opened the door of the room where the secretary sat. She crept in and laid herself down against the door. When the secretary stood up to stretch his legs, he caught sight of her, and stood frozen with terror.

Lina made no sound or movement. The secretary gathered courage and took a step forward. Lina showed her teeth, with a horrible growl, and he sank fainting into a chair, for he was not a brave man.

Next, Curdie conducted the legserpent to the lord chamberlain's door, and let him in.

Now His Lordship had had a decorative bedstead made for himself out of gilded rods: the legserpent found him asleep upon this bed, and crept under it. But out he came on the other side, and crept over it, and then again under it, and so over it, under it, five or six times, every time leaving a coil of himself behind, until he had softly folded all his length around the lord chamberlain and his bed. Then he raised his head, looking down over His Lordship, and began to hiss in his face.

The lord chamberlain woke in terror, and would have jumped up – but the moment he moved, the legserpent pulled his coils closer and tighter, until the quaking traitor heard the joints of his bedstead grinding. He told himself that it was only a horrid nightmare, and began to struggle to throw it off.

At that, the legserpent gave his hooked nose such a bite that his teeth met through it; and then he knew that it was no dream. The vulture was in the grasp of his enemy the snake, and yielded.

As soon as he was quiet the legserpent began to untwist and retwist, to uncoil and recoil himself, swinging and swaying, knotting and relaxing himself with strange curves and convolutions, always, however, leaving at least one coil around his victim. At last he undid himself entirely, and crept from the bed.

Then the lord chamberlain discovered that his tormentor had bent and twisted the bedstead, legs and canopy and all, around him so that he was shut in a silver cage. He began to shout for help. But the instant he opened his mouth his keeper darted at him and bit him, and he lay still.

The master of the horse Curdie gave in charge to the tapir. The soldier was lying awake; and when he saw the tapir enter, he sprang from his bed, and flew at him with his sword. But the creature's hide was invulnerable to his blows, and he pecked at the man's legs with his steely nose until he jumped into bed again, groaning, and covered himself up. After that the tapir contented himself with now and then paying a visit to his toes.

As for the attorney-general, Curdie led to his door a huge spider, with a body about two feet long. The attorney-general had not gone to bed, but sat in a chair asleep before a great mirror. He had been trying on a diamond star which he had that morning taken from the jewel room.

When he woke he fancied himself paralysed. Every limb, every finger, was motionless: coils and coils of spider's web bandaged his limbs to his body, and tied him to the chair. In the mirror he saw himself wound all about – while on a footstool a yard off sat the spider glaring at him.

Clubhead had mounted guard over the butler, where he lay tied hand and foot under the third cask. The doctor, with his crushed leg, needed no one to guard him.

And now Curdie proceeded to expel the rest. From room to room through the house he went, and sleeping or waking took each man by the hand.

Such was the dreadful state of the court, that he found only three with human hands. The possessors of these he allowed to dress and depart in peace.

Then there began a general hunt to clear the house of vermin. Out of their beds in their night clothes, out of their gorgeous chambers or garret nooks, the creatures hunted them. Not one was allowed to escape. There was little noise, for their fear was too deadly for outcry. Ferreting them out everywhere, following them upstairs and downstairs, the avengers persecuted them, until the last of them was shivering outside the palace gates, not knowing where to turn.

When they set out to look for shelter, they found every inn full of the servants expelled before them, and not one would yield his place. Most houses refused to admit them because of the wickedness that must have brought such a punishment; and many would have been left in the streets all night, if Derba had not opened her doors and given up her house to them. The lord chancellor was only too glad to share a mattress with a stableboy.

In the morning Curdie appeared at Derba's house, and the outcasts were in terror, thinking he had come after them again.

But he took no notice of them. Instead he asked Derba to go to the palace: the king required her services. She need not worry about her cottage, he said; the palace would be her home: she would be the mistress of his household. And this very morning she must cook His Majesty a nice breakfast.

CHAPTER 28
The Preacher

Various reports went through the city about what had happened. The people gathered outside the palace, and stared at it. But it looked sedate and silent. They saw no one come out or go in. Smoke arose from a chimney or two; there was hardly another sign of life.

After a while it was reported that the highest officers of the crown as well as the lowest servants of the palace had been dismissed in disgrace. By morning most of the courtiers crept down to the river, hired boats, and took themselves off to their homes or their friends in the country. It was assumed in the city that the servants had been discovered stealing; for dishonesty was so common in the city that it was easily believed.

Now, that day was Religion day, and some of the clergy, always glad to seize on any passing event to give interest to their dull sermons, spoke about this one to their congregations. The first priest of the great temple which held the royal pew chose as his theme the proverb "Honesty Is the Best Policy."

The most fundamental principle of their religion, he said, was that every one should take care of that One. This was the first duty of Man. If every one would just obey this law, then every one would be perfectly cared for. But any extra care, that could overflow and run to waste, ought to be gently turned in the direction of one's neighbour. What stronger proof of this proverb's wisdom and truth could they desire than the sudden vengeance which had fallen upon those sinners, who had offended the King by forgetting that "Honesty Is the Best Policy"?

At this point, the head of the legserpent rose from the floor of the temple, towering above the pulpit, above the priest, and with open mouth slowly descended upon him. Horror froze him. He stared upward aghast. The great teeth of the animal closed upon a mouthful of the sacred vestments, and slowly he lifted the preacher from the pulpit, like a handful of linen from a washtub, and, on his four stumps, carried him out of the temple, dangling aloft from his jaws; and dropped him in the dust.

Bone-freezing horror pervaded Gwyntystorm. If their best and wisest were treated with such contempt, what should the rest of them look for? Alas for their city! Their grandly respectable city! Their loftily reasonable city! Where it was all to end?

But something must be done. Hastily assembling, the priests chose a new head priest, and declared that the king had, through the blackest magic, turned the palace into a nest of demons. The king's bodyguard, finding they had no

master of the horse to lead them, placed themselves under the orders of the new priest.

They all blamed the evil on the miner and his mongrel; and the butchers vowed that if they could get hold of them again, they would roast them alive. They formed themselves into a regiment, and trained their dogs to attack.

There was a great deal of discussion about what to do. But they agreed that as soon as the priests had expelled the demons, they would depose the king, and shut him in a cage. Then they would choose governors, with the lord chancellor at their head, whose first duty should be to remove every possible tax; and the magistrates ordered all able-bodied citizens to be ready to take up arms.

A mighty ceremony was performed in the temple, in the market place, and in front of the palace, for the expulsion of the demons. Then the leaders retired to arrange their attack upon the palace.

But that night, people reported seeing frightful things. Demons of indescribable ugliness had been spied rushing through the midnight streets. A citizen – some said in the very act of burgling a house, but no one cared about that – had been seized from behind by something he could not see, and soused in the river. A well-known receiver of stolen goods had had his shop broken open, and in the morning had found everything in ruins on the pavement.

The gluttonous magistrate had been pulled from his bed in the dark, by beings of which he could see nothing but the flaming eyes, and treated to a bath of the turtle soup that had been left simmering in the kitchen. Having poured it over him, they put him back into his bed, where he felt like a mummy wrapped in its bindings.

Worst of all, a notice was fixed in the market place, with the king's own signature, saying that anyone who showed inhospitality to strangers should be instantly expelled from the city. A second notice, in the butchers' quarter, ordained that any dog which attacked a stranger should be immediately destroyed.

It was plain, said the butchers, that the clergy were useless; they could not get rid of demons! That afternoon, catching sight of a poor old fellow in rags, quietly walking up the street, they set their dogs upon him – and if Derba's door had not been standing open, so that he could dart in and shut it, he would have been torn in pieces.

And thus things went on for some days.

CHAPTER 29
Barbara

In the meantime, with Derba to feed him, with Curdie to protect him, and Irene to nurse him, the king was rapidly getting stronger. Good food was what he most wanted, and there was plenty of that in the palace. Since the cleansing of the kitchens, the air was clean and sweet, and under the honest hands of the good housemaid the king's chamber became more pleasant. It was no wonder that his heart grew lighter as well as his brain clearer.

But evil dreams still troubled him, the lingering result of the wicked medicines the doctor had given him. Every night he would wake up in terror, and it would be some minutes before he could come to himself. In consequence, he was always worse in the morning, and had to recover during the day. While he slept, either Irene or Curdie had to stay by his side.

One night, when it was Curdie's turn with the king, he heard a cry somewhere in the house. Since there was no other child in the palace, he decided that it must be Barbara. Fearing something might be wrong, and noting that the king slept quietly, he ran to Derba's quarters to see.

He found the child in the middle of the floor, weeping bitterly, and Derba slumbering peacefully in bed. The instant she saw him Barbara ceased her crying, smiled, and stretched out her arms to him. Unwilling to wake the old woman, who had been working hard all day, he took the child, and carried her back with him. She clung to him tightly, pressing her tear-wet radiant face against his.

When Curdie re-entered the chamber, he found the king sitting up in bed, fighting the phantoms of some hideous dream. Generally when this happened he would be raving for a while. But the moment his eyes fell upon little Barbara, whom he had never seen before, a smile like the dawn spread over his face; the dream was nowhere, and the child was in his heart. He stretched out his arms to her, the child stretched out hers to him, and in five minutes they were both asleep in each other's embrace.

From that night on, Barbara had a crib in the king's chamber, and whenever he woke, Irene or Curdie took the sleeping child and laid her in his arms; upon which the bad dream would vanish. For much of the day, too, she would play around the king's bed; and it was a delight to the princess to see Barbara amusing herself with the crown, rolling it about the room like a hoop. Her grandmother entered once while Barbara was pretending to make porridge in it, and held up her hands in horror-struck amazement; but the king

would not allow her to interfere, for the king was now Barbara's playmate, and his crown was their plaything.

The colonel of the guard also was growing better. Curdie went often to see him. They were soon friends, for the best people understand each other the easiest, and the grim old warrior loved the miner boy like a son. He was very anxious about his regiment. He said he believed that the officers were mostly honest men, but how might they be doing without him, in ignorance of the real state of affairs?

Curdie offered take a message to the major. The colonel agreed, and off Curdie went.

Now the officers had been told by the master of the horse that their colonel was dead. The king's enemies said that the king had poisoned the good colonel, and had murdered the master of the horse, and other faithful councillors; and that his oldest and most attached servants had escaped from the palace with their lives. The king, they said, was unfit to rule any longer.

So the major regarded the letter from the colonel as a trap, and sent his orderly to arrest the messenger. But Curdie had the wisdom not to wait for an answer.

Meanwhile, the moment the lord chancellor reached his house in the country, he began to work out how to destroy his master the king. The next morning he set out for the neighbouring kingdom of Borsagrass, to make an agreement with its monarch, and to invite them to invade.

CHAPTER 30
Peter

At Curdie's cottage in the mountain everything for a time went on just as before. It was dull for his parents without Curdie, but whenever they looked at the emerald it was gloriously green, so they had nothing to fear.

One morning, however, Peter turned suddenly to his wife with the stone in his hand, and held it up with a look of ghastly dismay.

"Why, that's never the emerald!" said Joan.

"It is," answered Peter; "though it looks like a bit of bottle glass!"

For, except one spot right in the centre, of brilliant green, it looked as if the colour had been burnt out of it.

"Run, run, Peter!" cried his wife. "Run and tell the old princess. It may not be too late. The boy must be lying at death's door."

Without a word Peter caught up his mattock, darted from the cottage, and hurried down the hill to the king's house. The door stood open; he rushed in, and up the stair. But after wandering about in vain for an hour, opening door after door, and finding no way further up, the heart of the old man nearly failed him. Empty rooms, empty rooms! Desolation everywhere.

At last he found the door to the tower stair. Up he darted. At the top, he found three doors, and knocked at them all. But no voice answered.

Slowly, hesitatingly, he opened one. It revealed a bare garret room, with nothing in it but a chair and a spinning wheel. He closed it, and opened the next – to start back in terror, for he saw nothing but a great gulf, a moonless night, full of stars, yet dark, dark!

He opened the third door, and a rush like the tide of a living sea invaded his ears. Many wings flapped and flashed in the sun, and, like the ascending column from a volcano, innumerable white birds shot into the air in a cloud, and then, with a sharp sweep, as if bent sideways by a sudden wind, flew away northward, and vanished. The place felt like a tomb. There seemed no breath of life left in it.

Despair laid hold upon him; he rushed down with heavy feet. The housekeeper accosted him, but Peter rushed past, heedless and careless, and sped along the road to Gwyntystorm. Whatever help he could, he would take to his boy.

Joan sat up all night awaiting his return. The mountain was very still, and the sky was clear; but all night long the miner sped northward, and the heart of his wife was troubled.

CHAPTER 31
The Sacrifice

Things in the palace were in a strange condition. The king was playing with a child and dreaming, waited upon by a little princess with the heart of a queen, and a youth from the mines, who went nowhere without his mattock on his shoulder and a horrible animal at his heels. In a room nearby the colonel of his guard, also in bed, had not a soldier to obey him; in six other rooms, far apart, were six miscreants, each watched by a beast-jailer; and in the wine cellar were forty-three more grotesque animals. No-one dared approach the palace gates.

The people of the city were united against the palace. It swarmed with evil spirits, they said – whereas the real evil spirits were in the city, unsuspected. This meant that when the rumour came that a great army was on the march against Gwyntystorm, instead of rushing to make new gates and drawbridges, each flew first to their treasures, burying them in their cellars and gardens, and hiding them in their chimneys. They might as well invited the King of Borsagrass to enter at their open gates, and take over their country.

The isolation soon affected the palace: its invalids needed better food. What was to be done? If the butchers sent meat to the palace, was it not likely to be poisoned? Curdie told Derba he would think of some plan before morning.

But that night, as soon as it was dark, Lina made Curdie understand that she wanted to go out. He unlocked a little gate for her, left it so that she could push it open when she returned. Before midnight she came back with a young deer.

Early the next morning the legserpent crept out of the wine cellar, shot into the river, and soon appeared in the kitchen with a splendid fish – a sturgeon. Every night Lina went out hunting, and every morning Legserpent went fishing, so that there was plenty to eat. The page, in plain clothes, would now and then venture out into the market place, and gather news.

One night he came back with the report that the army of the king of Borsagrass had crossed the border. Two days later, he brought the news that the enemy was now only twenty miles from Gwyntystorm.

The colonel of the guard rose, and staggered across to the barracks in the next street. The sentry took him for a ghost, ran into the guardroom, bolted the door, and stopped his ears. The poor colonel, who was hardly able to stand, crawled back despairing.

As for Curdie, when he heard the news, he resolved that if the king was unable to give orders, he would call Lina and the creatures, and march out to meet the enemy. He had no preparations to make, except a good sleep.

So he asked the king to let the housemaid take his place by His Majesty that night, and he lay down on the floor of the corridor, near the chamber door. There, with an old cloak thrown over him, he was soon fast asleep.

Somewhere about the middle of the night, he woke suddenly, started to his feet, and rubbed his eyes. He could not tell what had woken him. But surely he was dreaming? For the dull red curtain of the king's door was glowing a gorgeous, radiant purple; and the crown embroidered on it was flashing as if it burned! What could it mean? Was the king's chamber on fire?

Curdie darted to the door and lifted the curtain. Glorious and terrible sight!

A long, broad marble table had been drawn into the middle of the room, and on it burned a great fire, of a sort that Curdie knew – a fire of glowing, flaming roses, red and white. In the midst of the roses lay the king, moaning, but motionless. Whenever a rose fell from the table to the floor, someone, whom Curdie could not plainly see for the brightness, lifted it and laid it burning upon the king's face, until at length his face was covered with the live roses, and he lay entirely within the fire, moaning still, with now and then a shuddering sob.

And the shape that Curdie saw and could not see, wept over the king as he lay in the fire, and often she hid her face in handfuls of her shadowy hair, and her tears dropped like sunset rain in the light of the roses. At last she lifted a great armful of her hair, and shook it over the fire, and drops fell from it in showers; they did not hiss in the flames, but there arose instead the sound of running brooks.

And the glow of the red fire died away, and the glow of the white fire grew grey, and the light was gone, and everything on the table was black – except the face of the king, which shone from under the burnt roses like a diamond in the ashes of a furnace.

Then Curdie, no longer dazzled, saw and knew the old princess. The room was bright with the splendour of her face, her blue eyes, and her sapphire crown. Her golden hair went streaming out from her into mist and light. She was as large and strong as a Titaness. She stooped over the table, put her mighty arms under the king, lifted him like a little child, and carried him over to his bed. Then darkness fell.

The miner boy turned silently away, and lay down again in the corridor. An absolute joy filled him. All was safe; all was well. With his mattock tight in his grasp, he sank into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER 32
The King's Army

Curdie woke refreshed. When he went into the king's chamber, the housemaid sat where he had left her, and everything in the room was as it had been the night before, except that a heavenly odour of roses filled the air.

He went up to the bed. The king opened his eyes, and the soul of perfect health shone out of them.

"Is it not time to rise, Curdie?" said the king.

"It is, your Majesty. Today we must be doing," answered Curdie, in delight.

"What must we be doing, Curdie?"

"Fighting, sire."

"Then fetch me my armour, in the chest there."

As he spoke, the king reached out his hand for his sword, which hung in the bed before him. He drew it, and examined the blade.

"A little rusty!" he said, "but sharp. We shall polish it ourselves today. Curdie, my son, I wake from a troubled dream. A glorious torture has ended it, and I live. I know now how things are, but you shall explain them to me as I put on my armour. Call the colonel of the guard."

In his own complete armour, the old man stepped into the chamber. He knew it not, but the old princess had passed through his room in the night.

"Why, Sir Bronzebeard!" said the king, "you are dressed before me! You need no servant, when there is battle in the wind!"

"Battle, sire!" returned the colonel. "Where are our soldiers?"

"Why, there and here," answered the king, pointing to the colonel first, and then to himself. "The enemy will be upon us before sunset, if we do not act. What else was in your brave brain when you donned your armour, friend?"

"Your Majesty's orders, sire," answered Sir Bronzebeard.

The king smiled and turned to Curdie. "And what was in your mind, Curdie, when you spoke of battle?"

"See, Your Majesty," answered Curdie; "I have polished my mattock. If Your Majesty had not taken command, I would have met the enemy at the head of my beasts, and either won or died."

"Brave boy!" said the king. "You shall head your beasts today. Sir Bronzebeard, will you die with me if need be?"

"Seven times, my king," said the colonel.

"Then we shall win this battle," said the king. "Can you find me a horse, Sir Bronzebeard? Alas! they told me my white charger was dead."

"I will go and seek a horse for Your Majesty, and one for myself."

“And bring one for my miner boy too,” said the king, “and a sober old horse for the princess.”

“Pardon me, sire,” said Curdie; “a miner can fight best on foot. I might smite my horse with a blow. And also I must be near my beasts.”

“As you will,” said the king. “Three horses then, Sir Bronzebeard.”

The colonel departed, although he was doubtful about how to get three horses from the barrack stables, now that his regiment had revolted. In the hall he met the housemaid.

“Can you lead a horse?” he asked her.

“Yes, sir.”

“Are you willing to die for the king?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Can you do as you are bid?”

“I can try, sir.”

“Come then. If I were not a man, I would be a woman such as you.”

When they entered the barrack yard, the soldiers scattered like autumn leaves. They went into the stable unchallenged – and there, in a stall, stood the king’s white charger, with the royal saddle and bridle hung high beside him!

“Traitorous thieves!” muttered the old man, and he went along the stalls, looking for his own black horse. Having found him, he returned to saddle the king’s. But the maid had already begun to saddle it. He then chose for the princess a great red horse, twenty years old, which he knew was tranquil. He and the maid led the horses to the palace.

The king and Curdie stood in the court, the king in full armour of silvered steel, with a circlet of rubies and diamonds round his helmet. He almost leaped for joy when he saw his great white charger come in. When the horse saw his master, he reared and bounded in jubilation, yet did not break away from the maid’s hand.

Then out came princess Irene, with a hunting knife her father had given her by her side. They brought her mother’s saddle, resplendent with gems and gold, set it on the great red horse, and lifted her to it. But the saddle was so big, and the horse so tall, that the child found no comfort in them.

“Please, King Papa,” she said, “can I not have my white pony?”

“I did not think of him, little one,” said the king. “Where is he?”

“In the stable,” answered the maid. “I found him half starved, the day after the servants were driven out. He has been well fed since then.”

“Go and fetch him,” said the king.

As the maid appeared with the pony, from a side door came Lina and the forty-nine creatures, following Curdie.

“I will go with Curdie and the Uglies,” cried the princess; and as soon as she was mounted she rode into the middle of the pack.

So out they set, the strangest force that ever went against an enemy. The king in silver armour sat stately on his white steed; beside him the grim old colonel rode his black charger; behind the king, Curdie walked on foot, his mattock shining in the sun; Lina followed at his heel. Behind her came the wonderful company of Uglies; in the midst of them rode little Irene, dressed in blue, and mounted on the pretty white pony.

Behind the colonel walked the page, armed in a breastplate, headpiece, and a sword he had found in the palace, all much too big for him, and carrying a huge brass trumpet which he did his best to blow; and the king smiled at his music, although it was little more than a brazen grunt.

Alongside the beasts walked Derba, carrying Barbara. They were to head for the mountains, if the king should lose; and as soon as they were over the river they turned to ascend the cliff, ready to watch from there. Then Curdie saw that the housemaid, whom they had all forgotten, was following, mounted on the great red horse, and seated in the royal saddle.

Many were the unfriendly eyes of women staring at them from door and window as they passed through the city; and laughter and evil mockery from the lips of children rippled about their ears; but the men were all gone to welcome the enemy, the butchers first, the king's guard the last.

And now on the heels of the king's army out rushed the women and children, to gather flowers ready to welcome their conquerors.

About a mile down the river, Curdie, looking behind him, saw the maid still following on the great red horse. At the same moment the king caught sight of the enemy's tents, pitched on the wide bank of the river.

CHAPTER 33
The Battle

The king commanded the page to blow his trumpet, which he did in a most warlike manner.

But the butchers and the guard, who had gone over armed to the enemy, rushed over at once to make short work of the king. The butchers came on first, brandishing their knives, and urging on their dogs.

Curdie and the page, with Lina and her pack, bounded to meet them. Curdie struck down the foremost with his mattock. The page, finding his sword too heavy for him, threw it away and seized the butcher's knife, which he plunged into a dog.

Lina rushed raging and gnashing among them. She did not kill any of the butchers, only with one grind of her jaws crushed a leg of each. When they were all down, she attacked the dogs.

Meantime the king and the colonel had ridden towards the advancing guard. The king clove the major through the skull and collar bone, and the colonel stabbed the captain in the throat. Then a fierce combat began – two against many. But once the butchers and their dogs had been disposed of, up came Curdie and his beasts. The horses of the guard, struck with terror, turned and fled in confusion.

The army of Borsagrass could see little of all this, but correctly imagined a small determined force in front of them. So they hastened to the attack. The king, the colonel, the page, Curdie and the beasts went charging upon them.

Their attack, especially the rush of the Uglies, threw the first line of Borsagrass soldiers into great confusion, but the second line came up quickly. The beasts could not be everywhere, and there were thousands to one against them. The king and his three companions were in the greatest possible danger.

Then a dense cloud came over the sun. The cloud sank rapidly toward the earth, moving as one – yet it was made up of thousands of white flakes, each flying in ceaseless and rapid motion. Those flakes were the wings of pigeons.

Down swooped the birds upon the invaders. They flew at the faces of man and horse with swift-beating wings, blinding eyes and confounding brains. Horses reared and plunged and wheeled. All was in confusion. The men made frantic efforts to seize the birds, but not one could they touch.

As they clutched wildly they were pecked by beaks and buffeted by wings. The birds would dart at them with the swiftness of arrows, then soar aloft before descending again – much as a thin stone can be sent skimming along a lake, touching and tearing the surface many times. It was a storm in which the

wind was birds, and the sea was men. And as the birds fell back they wheeled round to charge again and again.

The moment the battle began, the princess's pony took fright, and turned and fled. But the maid rode her horse across the road and stopped him; and they waited together.

As they waited, it seemed to the princess very strange that the pigeons, as they spun round to gather force for the re-attack, always turned around the head of the maid on the red horse; so that about them there was a continuous flapping and flashing of wings, and a curving, sweeping torrent of wheeling birds.

It seemed strange also that the maid should be constantly waving her arm toward the battle. It looked as if the birds obeyed her gesture, and she was casting living javelins by the thousand against the enemy. The moment a pigeon had rounded her head, it sped off as straight as a bolt from a bow.

Others besides the princess had noticed these things. From a slope where they watched the battle in growing dismay, the leaders of the enemy saw the maid, and, concluding that she was an enchantress, they spurred their horses and charged at her.

But suddenly by her side there appeared a stalwart old man in miner's clothing: as the general rode at her, with sword in hand, this miner heaved his swift mattock, and brought it down with such force that the horse fell to the ground like a log. His rider shot over his head and lay stunned.

With lifted sword, one of the officers rode at the old miner. But a mass of pigeons darted in the faces of him and his horse, and the next moment he lay beside his commander. The rest of the soldiers turned and fled, pursued by the birds.

"Ah, friend Peter!" said the maid; "you have come as I told you! Welcome, and thanks!"

By this time the battle was over. The enemy were routed. They ran back to their own camp, with the beasts roaring, and the king and his army pursuing them. But presently the king pulled up his horse.

"Call off your beasts, Curdie, and let the pigeons do the rest," he shouted.

The invaders fled in panic, sweeping down their own tents, stumbling over their baggage, trampling on their dead and wounded, ceaselessly pursued by the white-winged army of heaven. Homeward they rushed along the road they had come, heading straight for the borders.

And still the pigeons chased them as they ran. At length, Curdie could see nothing but a cloud of dust below, and a cloud of birds above. Before night the bird cloud came back, flying high over Gwyntystorm. Sinking swiftly, it disappeared among the ancient roofs of the palace.

CHAPTER 34
Judgement

The king and his army returned, bringing with them only one prisoner: the lord chancellor. Curdie had dragged him from under a fallen tent, grasping his hand – which was not the hand of a man, but the foot of a mule.

When they entered the city, it was as still as the grave. The citizens had fled home in fear of the king and his demons. The king rode through the streets in silence, ill-pleased with his people. But he stopped his horse in the midst of the market place, and called, in a voice as loud and clear as the cry of a silver trumpet,

"Go and bury your dead, and bring home your wounded."

Then he turned gloomily to the palace.

As they went, Peter had been telling his tale to Curdie. Just as they reached the gates he ended it with the words: "And so there I was, in the nick of time to save the two princesses!"

"Two princesses, Father! The one on the great red horse was the housemaid," said Curdie, and he ran to open the gates for the king. They found Derba there before them, busy preparing food. The king took his charger to the stable, rubbed him down, and fed him.

When they had washed, and had eaten and drunk, the king called the colonel, and told Curdie and the page to bring the traitors and the beasts to the market place.

By this time the people were crowding back into the city, bearing their dead and wounded. And there was lamentation in Gwyntystorm, for no one could comfort himself, nor could they comfort each other. The nation was victorious, but the people were conquered.

The king stood in the centre of the market place, upon the steps of the ancient cross. He had laid aside his helmet and put on his crown, but he stood armed, with his sword in his hand. He called the people to him, and they dared not disobey. They drew near, trembling.

Then the king said to Curdie and the page, "Set the evil men before me."

He looked upon the men for a moment in mingled anger and pity, then turned to the people and said:

"Ye slaves, behold your leaders! I would have freed you, but you would not be free. Now shall you be ruled with a rod of iron, so that you may learn what freedom is, and love it and seek it. These wretches I will send where they shall mislead you no longer."

He made a sign to Curdie, who immediately brought up the legserpent. They tied the lord chamberlain, speechless with horror, to the animal's body. The butler began to shriek and pray, but they tied him on the back of Clubhead. One after another, they bound all the terrified villains upon the largest of the creatures.

Then the king said: "I thank you, my good beasts; and I hope to visit you before long. Take these evil men with you, and go to your place."

Like a whirlwind the animals went through the crowd, scattering it like dust. They rushed from the city with their burdens howling and raving. What became of them I have never heard.

Then the king turned once more to the people and said, "Go to your houses." They crept home like scolded hounds.

The king returned to the palace. He made the colonel a duke, and the page a knight, and he appointed Peter as general of all his mines. But to Curdie he said:

"You are my own boy, Curdie. My child cannot choose but love you, and when you are grown up – if you both wish – you shall marry each other, and be king and queen when I am gone. Till then, be the king's Curdie."

Irene held out her arms to Curdie. He lifted her in his arms, and she kissed him.

"And my Curdie too!" she said.

After that the people called him Prince Conrad; but the king always called him just Curdie, or my miner boy.

They sat down to supper, and Derba and the knight and the housemaid waited on them, and Barbara sat at the king's left hand. The housemaid poured out the wine; and as she poured out the red wine for Curdie, she looked him in the eyes.

Curdie sprang up from his seat, and dropped on his knees, and burst into tears. And the maid said with a smile:

"Did I not tell you, Curdie, that maybe you would not know me when next you saw me?"

Then she left the room, and in a moment returned in royal purple, with a crown of diamonds and rubies, from under which her hair went flowing to the floor. Her face was radiant with joy, and the king rose and kneeled before her.

All kneeled in homage. The king would have given her his royal chair; but she made them all sit down, and placed seats at the table for Derba and the page. Then in her crown and royal purple she served them all.

CHAPTER 35
The End

The king sent Curdie out into his kingdom to search for men and women that had human hands. And many such Curdie found, honest and true, and brought them to his master. So a new and upright court was formed, and strength returned to the nation.

But the treasury was almost empty, for the evil men had squandered everything, and the king hated to tax his people. Then Curdie told the king that the city stood upon gold. And the king sent for men wise in the ways of the earth, and they built smelting furnaces, and Peter brought miners, and they mined the gold, and the king coined it into money, so that the land grew rich.

After the battle Peter set out to go home. When he told the good news to Joan, his wife, she rose from her chair and said, “Let us go there.” And they left the cottage, and went to Gwyntystorm. On a mountain above the city they built themselves a warm house for their old age, high in the clear air.

One day as Peter was mining, at the back of the king’s wine cellar, he broke into a cavern that was crusted with gems. It brought much wealth to the king, and he used it wisely.

Queen Irene – that was the right name of the old princess – was seldom long absent from the palace. Once or twice when she was missing, Barbara, who seemed to know where she had gone when nobody else did, said she was with the dear old Uglies in the wood.

All the uppermost rooms in the palace were left for her use, and when anyone needed her help, they went up there. But they did not always succeed in finding her. However, she always knew when someone had been looking for her.

Curdie went to find her one day. As he ascended the last stair, he found the well-known scent of her roses; and when he opened the door, lo! there was the same gorgeous room in which his touch had been glorified by her fire! And there burned the fire – a huge heap of red and white roses.

Before the hearth stood the princess, an old grey-haired woman, with Lina a little behind her, wagging her tail, and looking like an eager beast of prey that is ready to spring. The queen was casting more and more roses upon the fire.

At last she turned and said, “Now Lina!” – and Lina dashed burrowing into the fire. There went up a black smoke and a dust, and Lina was never seen again in the palace.

Irene and Curdie were married. The old king died, and they were king and queen. As long as they lived, Gwyntystorm was a better city, and good people grew in it. But they had no children, and when they died the people chose a new king.

And the new king went mining in the rock under the city, and grew more and more eager for gold, and paid less and less heed to his people. Rapidly they sank toward their old wickedness. But still the king went on mining, and coining gold, until the people were worse even than in the old time. And so greedy was the king, that when at last the ore began to fail, he made the miners reduce the pillars which had left standing to bear the weight of the city. And from the girth of an oak a thousand years old, they chipped them down to the width of a fir tree of fifty.

One day at noon, the whole city fell with a roaring crash. The cries of men and the shrieks of women went up with its dust, and then there was a great silence.

In that place there now rushes a stony rapid of the river. All around it spreads a wilderness of wild deer, and the very name of Gwyntystorm has ceased from the lips of men.

THE END

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