

Fair-haired Eckbert

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In a district of the Harz dwelt a knight, whose common designation in that quarter was Fair-haired Eckbert. He was about forty years of age, scarcely of middle stature, and short light-colored locks lay close and sleek round his pale and sunken countenance. He led a retired life, had never interfered in the feuds of his neighbors; indeed, beyond the outer wall of his castle he was seldom to be seen. His wife loved solitude as much as he; both seemed heartily attached to one another; only now and then they would lament that heaven had not blessed their marriage with children.

Few came to visit Eckbert, and when guests did happen to be with him, their presence made but little alteration in his customary way of life. Temperance abode in his household, and Frugality herself appeared to be the mistress of the entertainment. On these occasions Eckbert was always cheerful and lively; but when he was alone, you might observe in him a certain mild reserve, a still, retiring melancholy.

His most frequent guest was Philip Walther, a man to whom he had attached himself after finding in him a way of thinking like his own. Walther's residence was in Franconia, but he would often stay for half a year in Eckbert's neighborhood, gathering plants and minerals, and then sorting and arranging them. He lived on a small independency, and was connected with no one. Eckbert frequently attended him in his sequestered walks; year after year a closer friendship grew between them.

There are hours in which a man feels grieved that he should have a secret from his friend, which, till then, he may have kept

with niggard anxiety; some irresistible desire lays hold of our heart to open itself wholly, to disclose its inmost recesses to our friend, that he may become our friend still more. It is in such moments that tender souls unveil themselves, and stand face to face; and at times it will happen, that the one recoils affrighted from the countenance of the other.

It was late in autumn, when Eckbert, one cloudy evening, was sitting, with his friend and his wife Bertha, by the parlor fire. The flame cast a red glimmer through the room, and sported on the ceiling; the night looked sullenly in through the windows, and the trees without rustled in wet coldness. Walther complained of the long road he had to travel; and Eckbert proposed to him to stay where he was, to while away half of the night in friendly talk, and then to take a bed in the house till morning. Walther agreed, and the whole was speedily arranged: by and by wine and supper were brought in; fresh wood was laid upon the fire; the talk grew livelier and more confidential.

The cloth being removed, and the servants gone, Eckbert took his friend's hand, and said to him, "Now you must let my wife tell you the history of her youth; it is curious enough, and you should know it."

"With all my heart," said Walther; and the party again drew round the hearth.

It was now midnight; the moon looked fitfully through the breaks of the driving clouds. "You must not reckon me a babler," began the lady. "My husband says you have so generous a mind, that it is not right in us to hide aught from you. Only do not take my narrative for a fairy tale, however strangely it may sound.

"I was born in a little village; my father was a poor herdsman. Our circumstances were not of the best; often we knew not where to find our daily bread. But what grieved me far more than this, were the quarrels that my father and mother often had about their poverty, and the bitter reproaches they cast on one another. Of myself too, I heard nothing said but ill; they were forever telling me that I was a silly, stupid child, that I could not do the simplest turn of work; and in truth I was extremely inexpert and helpless. I let things fall; I neither learned to sew nor spin; I could be of no use to my parents; only their straits I understood too well. Often

I would sit in a corner, and fill my little heart with dreams of how I would help them, if I should all at once grow rich; how I would overflow them with silver and gold, and feast myself on their amazement. Or sometimes spirits came hovering up, and showed me buried treasures, or gave me little pebbles that changed into precious stones. In short, the strangest fancies occupied me, and when I had to rise and help with anything, my inexperience was still greater, as my head was giddy with these motley visions.

"My father in particular was always very cross to me; he scolded me for being such a burden to the house; indeed he often used me rather cruelly, and it was very seldom that I got a friendly word from him. In this way I had struggled on to near the end of my eighth year; and now it was seriously fixed that I should begin to do or learn something. My father still maintained that it was nothing but caprice in me, or a lazy wish to pass my days in idleness: accordingly he set upon me with furious threats; and as these made no improvement, he one day gave me a most cruel chastisement, and added that the same should be repeated day after day, since I was nothing but a useless sluggard.

"That whole night I wept abundantly; I felt myself so utterly forsaken, I had such a sympathy with myself that I even longed to die. I dreaded the break of day; I knew not on earth what I was to do or try. I wished from my very heart to be clever, and could not understand how I should be worse than the other children of the place. I was on the borders of despair.

"At the dawn of day I awoke, and scarcely knowing what I did, unfastened the door of our little hut. I stepped upon the open field; next minute I was in a wood, where the light of the morning had yet hardly penetrated. I ran along, not looking round; for I felt no fatigue, and I still thought my father would catch me, and in his anger at my flight would beat me worse than ever.

"I had reached the other side of the forest, and the sun was risen a considerable way; I saw something dim lying before me, and a thick fog resting over it. Before long my path began to mount, at one time I was climbing hills, at another winding among rocks; and I now guessed that I must be among the neighboring mountains, a thought that made me shudder in my loneliness. For, living in the plain country, I had never seen a hill; and the very word mountains, when I heard talk of them, had been a sound of

terror to my young ear. I had not the heart to go back, my fear itself drove me on; often I looked round affrighted when the breezes rustled over me among the trees, or the stroke of some distant woodman sounded far through the still morning. And when I began to meet with charcoal-men and miners, and heard their foreign way of speech, I nearly fainted for terror.

"I passed through several villages, begging now and then, for I felt hungry and thirsty, and fashioning my answers as I best could when questions were put to me. In this manner I had wandered on some four days, when I came upon a little footpath, which led me farther and farther from the highway. The rocks about me now assumed a different and far stranger form. They were cliffs so piled on one another, that it looked as if the first gust of wind would hurl them all this way and that. I knew not whether to go on or stop. Till now I had slept by night in the woods, for it was the finest season of the year, or in some remote shepherd's hut; but here I saw no human dwelling at all, and could not hope to find one in this wilderness; the crags grew more and more frightful: I had many a time to glide along by the very edge of dreadful abysses. By degrees, my footpath became fainter, and at last all traces of it vanished from beneath me. I was utterly comfortless; I wept and screamed; and my voice came echoing back from the rocky valleys with a sound that terrified me. The night now came on, and I sought out a mossy nook to lie down in. I could not sleep for in the darkness I heard the strangest noises. Sometimes I took them to come from wild beasts, sometimes from wind moaning through the rocks, sometimes from unknown birds. I prayed, and did not sleep till towards morning.

"When the light came upon my face, I awoke. Before me was a steep rock; I climbed up, in the hope of discovering some outlet from the waste, perhaps of seeing houses or men. But when I reached the top, there was nothing still, so far as my eye could reach, but a wilderness of crags and precipices. All was covered with a dim haze; the day was grey and troubled, and no tree, no meadow, not even a bush could I find, only a few shrubs shooting up stunted and solitary in the narrow clefts of the rocks. I cannot utter what a longing I felt but to see one human creature, any living mortal, even though I had been afraid of hurt from him. At the same time I was tortured by a gnawing hunger. I sat down,

and made up my mind to die. After a while, however, the desire of living gained the mastery; I roused myself, and wandered forward amid tears and broken sobs all day. In the end, I hardly knew what I was doing. I was tired and spent, I scarcely wished to live, and yet I feared to die.

"Towards night the country seemed to grow a little kinder; my thoughts, my desires revived, the wish for life awoke in all my veins. I thought I heard the rushing of a mill afar off; I redoubled my steps, and how glad, how light of heart was I, when at last I actually gained the limits of the barren rocks, and saw woods and meadows lying before me, with soft green hills in the distance! I felt as if I had stepped out of hell into a paradise; my loneliness and helplessness no longer frightened me.

"Instead of the hopped-for mill, I came upon a waterfall, which, in truth, considerably dampened my joy. I was lifting a drink from it in the hollow of my hand, when all at once I thought I heard a slight cough some little way from me. Never in my life was I so joyfully surprised as at this moment: I went near, and at the border of the wood saw an old woman sitting on the ground. She was dressed almost wholly in black; a black hood covered her head, and the greater part of her face; in her hand she held a crutch.

"I came up to her, and begged for help; she made me sit by her, and gave me bread, and a little wine. While I ate, she sang in a screeching tone some kind of spiritual song. When she had done, she told me I might follow her.

"The offer charmed me, strange as the old woman's voice and look appeared. With her crutch she limped away pretty fast, and at every step she twisted her face so oddly, that at first I was like to laugh. The wild rocks retired behind us more and more; we crossed a pleasant meadow, then passed through a considerable stretch of woods. The sun was just going down when we stepped out of the woods, and I never shall forget the aspect and the feeling of that evening. All things were as molten into the softest golden red; the trees were standing with their tops in the glow of the sunset; on the fields lay a mild brightness; the woods and the leaves of the trees were standing motionless; the pure sky looked like an open paradise, and the gushing of the brooks, and, from time to time, the rustling of the trees, resounded through the serene still-

ness, as in pensive joy. My young soul was here first taken with a forethought of the world and its vicissitudes. I forgot myself and my conductress; my spirit and my eyes were wandering among the shining clouds.

"We now mounted an eminence planted with birch-trees; from the top we looked into a green valley, likewise full of birches; and down below, in the middle of them, was a little hut. A glad barking reached us, and immediately a little, nimble dog came springing round the old woman, fawned on her, and wagged its tail; it next came to me, viewed me on all sides, and then turned back with a friendly look to its old mistress.

"On reaching the bottom of the hill, I heard the strangest song, as if coming from the hut, and sung by some bird. It ran thus:

Alone in wood so gay
 'Tis good to stay,
 Tomorrow like today,
 Forever and aye:
 O, I do love to stay
 Alone in wood so gay.

"These few words were continually repeated, and to describe the sound, it was as if you heard forest-horns and shawms sounded together from a far distance.

"My curiosity was wonderfully on the stretch; without waiting for the old woman's permission, I stepped into the hut. It was already dusk. Here all was neatly swept and orderly; some bowls were standing in a cupboard, some strange-looking casks or pots on a table; in a glittering cage, hanging by the window, was a bird, and this in fact proved to be the singer. The old woman coughed and panted: it seemed as if she never would get over her fatigue. She parted the little dog, she talked with the bird, which only answered her with its accustomed song; and as for me, she did not seem to recollect that I was there at all. Looking at her so, many qualms and fears came over me; for her face was in perpetual motion; and, besides, her head shook from old age, so that, for my life, I could not make out what sort of countenance she had.

"Having gathered strength again, she lit a candle, covered a very

small table, and brought out supper. She now looked round for me, and bade me take a little cane chair. I was thus sitting close facing her, with the light between us. She folded her bony hands, and prayed aloud, still twisting her countenance, so that I was once more on the point of laughing; but I took strict care that I might not make her angry.

"After supper she again prayed, then showed me a bed in a low narrow closet; she herself slept in the room. I did not remain awake long, for I was half snuffed; but in the night I now and then awoke, and heard the old woman coughing, and betweenwhiles talking with her dog and her bird, which last seemed dreaming, and replied with only one or two words of its rhyme. This, with the birches rustling before the window, and the song of a distant nightingale, made such a wondrous combination, that I never fairly thought I was awake, but only falling out of one dream into another still stranger.

"The old woman awoke me in the morning, and soon after gave me work. I was put to spin, which I now learned very easily; I had likewise to take charge of the dog and the bird. I soon learned my business in the house and now felt as if it all must be so. I never once remembered that the old woman had so many singularities, that her dwelling was mysterious, and lay apart from all men, and that the bird must be a very strange creature. Its beauty, indeed, always struck me, for its feathers glittered with all possible colors: the fairest deep blue, and the most burning red alternated about his neck and body; and when singing, he blew himself proudly out, so that his feathers looked still finer.

"My old mistress often went abroad, and did not come again till night; on these occasions I went out to meet her with the dog, and she used to call me child and daughter. In the end I grew to like her heartily, as our mind, especially in childhood, will become accustomed and attached to anything. In the evenings she taught me to read; and this was afterwards a source of boundless satisfaction to me in my solitude, for she had several ancient hand-written books, that contained the strangest stories.

"The recollection of the life I then led is still singular to me: visited by no human creature, secluded in the circle of so small a family; for the dog and the bird made the same impression on me that in other cases long-known friends produce. I am surprised

that I have never since been able to recall the dog's name, a very odd one, often as I then pronounced it.

"Four years I had passed in this way (I must now have been nearly twelve), when my old dame began to put more trust in me, and at length told me a secret. The bird, I found, laid every day an egg, in which there was a pearl or a jewel. I had already noticed that she often tended to the cage in private, but I had never troubled myself farther on the subject. She now gave me charge of gathering these eggs in her absence, and carefully storing them up in the strange looking pots. She would leave me food, and sometimes stay away longer, for weeks, for months. My little wheel kept humming round, the dog barked, the bird sang; and whilst there was such a stillness in the neighborhood, that I do not recollect of any storm or foul weather all the time I stayed there. No one wandered thither; no wild beast came near our dwelling. I was satisfied, and worked along in peace from day to day. One would perhaps be very happy, could he pass his life so undisturbedly to the end.

"From the little that I read, I formed quite marvelous notions of the world and its people, all taken from myself and my society. When I read of witty persons, I could not figure them but like the little dog; great ladies, I conceived, were like the bird; all old women like my mistress. I had read somewhat of love, too; and often, in fancy, I would tell myself strange stories. I thought up the fairest knight on earth, adorned him with all perfections, without knowing rightly, after all my labor, how he looked; but I could feel a hearty pity for myself when he ceased to love me. I would then, in thought, make long, melting speeches, or perhaps aloud, to try if I could win him back. You smile! These young days are, in truth, far away from us all.

"I now liked better to be left alone, for I was then sole mistress of the house. The dog loved me, and did all I wanted; the bird replied to all my questions with his rhyme; my wheel kept briskly turning, and at bottom I had never any wish for change. When my dame returned from her long wanderings, she would praise my diligence; she said her house, since I belonged to it, was managed far more perfectly. She took a pleasure in my growth and healthy looks. In short, she treated me in all points like her daughter.

"Thou art a good girl, child," said she once to me, in her creaking tone; 'if thou continuest so, it will be well with thee: but none ever prospers when he leaves the straight path; punishment will overtake him, though it may be late.' I gave little heed to this remark of hers at the time, for in my temper and movements I was very lively; but by night it occurred to me again, and I could not understand what she meant by it. I considered all the words attentively. I had read of riches, and at last it struck me that her pearls and jewels might perhaps be something precious. Ere long this thought grew clearer to me. But the straight path, and leaving it? What could she mean by this?

"I was now fourteen; it is the misery of man that he arrives at understanding through the loss of innocence. I now saw well enough that it lay with me to take the jewels and the bird in the old woman's absence, and go forth with them and see the world of which I had read. Perhaps, too, it would then be possible that I might meet that fairest of all knights, who forever dwelt in my memory."

"At first this thought was nothing more than any other thought; but when I used to be sitting at my wheel, it still returned to me, against my will. I sometimes followed it so far, that I already saw myself adorned in splendid attire, with princes and knights around me. On awakening from these dreams, I would feel a sadness when I looked up, and found myself still in the little cottage. For the rest, if I went through my duties, the old woman troubled herself little about what I thought or felt."

"One day she went out again, telling me that she should be away on this occasion longer than usual; that I must take strict charge of everything, and not let the time hang heavy on my hands. I had a sort of fear on taking leave of her, for I felt as if I should not see her anymore. I looked long after her, and knew not why I felt so sad; it was almost as if my purpose had already stood before me, without myself being conscious of it."

"Never did I tend the dog and the bird with such diligence as now; they were nearer to my heart than formerly. The old woman had been gone some days, when I rose one morning in the firm mind to leave the cottage, and set out with the bird to see this world they talked so much of. I felt pressed and hampered in my heart: I wished to stay where I was, and yet the thought of that

afflicted me. There was a strange contention in my soul, as if between two discordant spirits. One moment my peaceful solitude would seem to me so beautiful; the next the image of a new world, with its many wonders, would again enchant me."

"I knew not what to make of it. The dog leaped up continually about me, the sunshine spread abroad over the fields, the green birch-trees glittered. I always felt as if I had something I must do in haste; so I caught the little dog, tied him up in the room, and took the cage with the bird under my arm. The dog writhed and whined at this unusual treatment; he looked at me with begging eyes, but I feared to have him with me. I also took one pot of jewels, and concealed it by me; the rest I left."

"The bird turned its head very strangely when I crossed the threshold; the dog tugged at his cord to follow me, but he was forced to stay."

"I did not take the road to the wild rocks, but went in the opposite direction. The dog still whined and barked, and it touched me to the heart to hear him; the bird tried once or twice to sing; but as I was carrying him, the shaking put him out."

"The farther I went, the fainter grew the barking, and at last it altogether ceased. I wept, and had almost turned back, but the longing to see something new still hindered me."

"I had got across the hills, and through some forests, when the night came on, and I was forced to turn aside into a village. I was very shy on entering the inn; they showed me to a room and bed, and I slept pretty quietly, except that I dreamed of the old woman, and her threatening me."

"My journey had not much variety; the farther I went, the more was I afflicted by the recollection of my old mistress and the little dog. I considered that in all likelihood the poor thing would die of hunger, and often in the woods I thought my dame would suddenly meet me. Thus amid tears and sobs I went along; when I stopped to rest, and put the cage on the ground, the bird struck up his song, and brought but too keenly to my mind the fair habitation I had left. As human nature is forgetful, I imagined that my former journey, in my childhood, had not been so sad and woeful as the present. I wished to be as I was then."

"I had sold some jewels, and now, after wandering on for several days, I reached a village. At the very entrance I was struck

with something strange; I felt terrified and knew not why, but I soon bethought myself, for it was the village where I was born! How amazed was I! How the tears ran down my cheeks for gladness, for a thousand singular remembrances! Many things were changed: new houses had been built, some just raised when I went away were now fallen, apparently destroyed by fires; everything was far smaller and more confined than I had fancied. It rejoiced my very heart that I should see my parents once more after such an absence. I found their little cottage, the well-known threshold; the door-latch was standing as of old, and it seemed to me as if I had shut it only yesternight. My heart beat violently, I hastily lifted that latch, but faces I had never seen before looked up and gazed at me. I asked for the shepherd Martin; they told me that his wife and he were dead three years ago. I drew back quickly, and left the village weeping aloud.

"I had figured out so beautifully how I would surprise them with my riches; by the strangest chance, what I had only dreamed in childhood was become reality, and now it was all in vain, they could not rejoice with me, and that which had been my first hope in life was lost forever.

"In a pleasant town I rented a small house and garden, and took to myself a maid. The world, in truth, proved not so wonderful as I had painted it, but I forgot the old woman and my former way of life rather more, and on the whole I was contented.

"For a long while the bird had ceased to sing; I was therefore not a little frightened, when one night he suddenly began again, and with a different rhyme. He sang:

Alone in wood so gay,
Ah, far away!
But thou wilt say
Some other day,
'Twere best to stay
Alone in wood so gay.

"Throughout the night I could not close an eye; all things again occurred to my remembrance, and I felt, more than ever, that I had not acted rightly. When I rose, the sight of the bird distressed me greatly; he looked at me continually, and his presence did me

ill. There was now no end to his song; he sang it louder and more shrilly than he had been wont. The more I looked at him, the more he pained and frightened me; at last I opened the cage, put in my hand, and grasped his neck. I squeezed my fingers hard together, he looked at me pleadingly, I slackened them; but he was dead. I buried him in the garden.

"After this, there often came a fear over me of my maid; I looked back upon myself, and fancied she might rob me or even murder me. For a long while I had been acquainted with a young knight, whom I altogether liked. I bestowed on him my hand; and with this, Sir Walther, ends my story."

Ay, you should have seen her then," said Eckbert warmly; "seen her youth, her loveliness, and what a charm her lonely way of life had given her. She seemed to me a miracle and I loved her beyond all measure. I had no fortune; it was through her love these riches came to me. We moved hither, and our marriage has at no time caused us any regret."

"But with our tarting," added Bertha, "it is growing very late; we must go to sleep."

She rose, and proceeded to her chamber; Walther, with a kiss of her hand, wished her good-night, saying, "Many thanks, noble lady; I can well imagine you beside your strange bird, and how you fed poor little *Strohmann*."

Walther likewise went to sleep; Eckbert alone still walked in a restless humor up and down the room. "Are not men fools?" said he at last. "I myself occasioned this recital of my wife's history, and now such confidence appears to me improper! Will he not abuse it? Will he not communicate the secret to others? Will he not, for such is human nature, cast unblessed thoughts on our jewels, and form pretenses and lay plans to get possession of them?"

It now occurred to him that Walther had not taken leave of him so cordially as might have been expected after such a mark of trust: the soul once set upon suspicion finds in every trifle something to confirm it. Eckbert, on the other hand, reproached himself for such ignoble feelings toward his worthy friend; yet still he could not cast them out. All night he plagued himself with such uneasy thoughts, and got very little sleep.

Bertha was unwell next day, and could not come to breakfast. Walther did not seem to trouble himself much about her illness

and left her husband also rather coolly. Eckbert could not comprehend such conduct; he went to see his wife, and found her in a feverish state; she said last night's story must have agitated her. From that day, Walther visited the castle of his friend but seldom, and when he did appear, it was but to say a few trivial words and then depart. Eckbert was exceedingly distressed by this demeanor. To Bertha or Walther he indeed said nothing of it; but to any person his internal disquietude was visible enough.

Bertha's sickness wore an aspect more and more serious; the doctor grew alarmed—the red had vanished from his patient's cheeks, and her eyes were becoming more and more inflamed. One morning she summoned her husband to her bedside; the nurses were ordered to withdraw.

"Dear Eckbert," she began, "I must disclose a secret to you, which has almost taken away my senses, which is ruining my health, unimportant trifle as it may appear. You may remember, often as I talked of my childhood, I could never call to mind the name of the dog that was so long beside me. Now, that night on taking leave, Walther all at once said to me, 'I can well imagine you, and how you fed poor little *Strophianin*.' Is it chance? Did he guess the name; did he know it, and speak it on purpose? If so, how stands this man connected with my destiny? At times I struggle with myself as if I but imagined this mysterious business; but, alas! it is certain, too certain. I felt a shudder that a stranger should help me to recall the memory of my secrets. What do you think, Eckbert?"

Eckbert looked at his sick and agitated wife with deep emotion; he stood silent and thoughtful, then spoke some words of comfort to her, and went out. In a distant chamber, he walked to and fro in indescribable disquiet. Walther, for many years, had been his sole companion; and now this person was the only mortal in the world whose existence pained and oppressed him. It seemed as if he should be gay and light of heart, were that one thing but removed. He took his crossbow, to dissipate these thoughts, and went to hunt.

It was a rough stormy winter day; the snow was lying deep on the hills, and bending down the branches of the trees. He roved about; the sweat was standing on his brow. He found no game, and this embittered his ill humor. All at once he saw an object

moving in the distance; it was Walther gathering moss from the trunks of trees. Scarce knowing what he did, he cocked his bow; Walther looked round, and made a threatening gesture, but the bolt was already flying, and he sank transfixed by it.

Eckbert felt relieved and calmed, yet a certain horror drove him home to his castle. It was a good way distant; he had wandered far into the woods. On arriving, he found Bertha dead; before her death, she had spoken much of Walther and the old woman.

For a great while after this occurrence, Eckbert lived in the deepest solitude; he had all along been melancholy, for the strange history of his wife disturbed him, and he had dreaded some unlucky incident or other, but at present he was utterly at variance with himself. The murder of his friend arose incessantly before his mind; he lived in the anguish of continual remorse.

To dissipate his feelings, he occasionally visited the neighboring town, where he mingled in society and its amusements. He longed for a friend to fill the void in his soul; and yet, when he remembered Walther, he would shudder at the thought of meeting with a friend, for he felt convinced that, with any friend, he must be unhappy. He had lived so long with his Bertha in lovely calmness; the friendship of Walther had cheered him through so many years; and now both of them were suddenly swept away. As he thought of these things, there were many moments when his life appeared to him some fabulous tale, rather than the actual history of a living man.

A young knight named Hugo made advances to the silent, melancholy Eckbert and appeared to have a true affection for him. Eckbert felt exceedingly surprised, but he met the knight's friendship with great readiness, because he had so little anticipated it. The two were now frequently together. Hugo showed his friend all possible attentions. One scarcely ever went to ride without the other; in all companies they got together. In a word, they seemed inseparable.

Eckbert was never happy longer than a few transitory moments, for he felt too clearly that Hugo loved him only by mistake, that he knew him not and was unacquainted with his history. He was seized again with the same old longing to unbosom himself wholly, that he might be sure whether Hugo was his friend or not. But again his apprehensions, and the fear of being hated and abhorred,

withheld him. There were many hours in which he felt so much impressed with his entire worthlessness that he believed no mortal not a stranger to his history could entertain regard for him. Yet still he was unable to withstand his urge; on a solitary ride, he disclosed his whole history to Hugo, and asked if he could love a murderer. Hugo seemed touched, and tried to comfort him. Eckbert returned to town with a lighter heart.

But it seemed to be his doom that, in the very hour of confidence, he should always find materials for suspicion. Scarcely had they entered the public hall, when, in the glitter of the many lights, Hugo's looks had ceased to satisfy him. He thought he noticed a malicious smile. He remarked that Hugo did not speak to him as usual, that he talked with the rest, and seemed to pay no heed to him. In the party was an old knight, who had always shown himself the enemy of Eckbert, had often asked about his riches and his wife in a peculiar style. With this man Hugo was conversing; they were speaking privately, and casting looks at Eckbert. The suspicions of the latter seemed confirmed; he thought himself betrayed, and a tremendous rage took hold of him. As he continued gazing, suddenly he discerned the countenance of Walther, all his features, all the form so well known to him. He gazed, and looked, and felt convinced that it was none but Walther who was talking to the knight. His horror cannot be described; in a state of frenzy he rushed out of the hall, left the town overnight, and after many wanderings, returned to his castle.

Here, like an unquiet spirit, he hurried to and fro from room to room. No thought would stay with him; out of one frightful idea he fell into another still more frightful, and sleep never visited his eyes. Often he believed that he was mad, that a disturbed imagination was the origin of all this terror; then, again, he recollected Walther's features, and the whole grew more and more a riddle to him. He resolved to take a journey, that he might reduce his thoughts to order; the hope of friendship, the desire of social intercourse, he had now forever given up.

He set out, without prescribing to himself any certain route; indeed, he took small heed of the country he was passing through. Having hastened on some days at the quickest pace of his horse, he, on a sudden, found himself entangled in a labyrinth of rocks, from which he could discover no outlet. At length he met an old

peasant, who took him by a path leading past a waterfall: he offered him some coins for his guidance, but the peasant would not have them. "What do you think of that?" said Eckbert to himself. "I could believe that this man, too, was none but Walther." He looked round once more, and it was Walther. Eckbert spurred his horse as fast as it could gallop, over meads and forests, till it sank exhausted to the earth. Regardless of this, he hastened forward on foot.

In a dreamy mood he mounted a hill. He fancied he caught the sound of lively barking at a little distance; the birch-trees whispered in the intervals, and in the strangest notes he heard this song:

Alone in wood so gay,
Once more I stay;
None dare me slay,
The evil far away:
Ah, here I stay,
Alone in wood so gay.

Now it was all over with Eckbert's senses, with his consciousness; it was all a riddle that he could not solve, whether he was dreaming now, or had before dreamed of a woman named Bertha. The marvelous was mingled with the common: the world around him seemed enchanted, and he himself was incapable of thought or recollection.

A crooked, bent old woman crawled coughing up the hill with a crutch. "Art thou bringing me my bird, my pearls, my dog?" cried she to him. "See how injustice punishes itself! No one but I was Walther, was Hugo."

"God of heaven!" said Eckbert, muttering to himself, "in what frightful solitude have I passed my life?"

"And Bertha was thy sister."

Eckbert sank to the ground.

"Why did she leave me deceitfully? All would have been fair and well; her time of trial was already finished. She was the daughter of a knight, who had her nursed in a shepherd's house; the daughter of thy father."

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“Why have I always had a forecast of this dreadful thought?”
cried Eckbert.
“Because in early youth thy father told thee: he could not keep
this daughter by him because she was the child of another woman.”
Eckbert lay distracted and dying on the ground. In dull, hollow
confusion he heard the old woman speaking, the dog barking, and
the bird repeating its song.

*Translated by Thomas Carlyle
and revised by the editors*

A Wondrous Oriental Fairy Tale of a Naked Saint

Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder

The Orient is the home of all that is marvelous. In the ancient, childlike views prevailing there one finds strange signs and riddles still unsolved by Reason, which considers itself so much more clever. Thus, for example, one often finds living in the desert strange creatures whom we would call mad, but who are there revered as supernatural beings. The oriental mind regards these naked saints as the wayward vessels of a higher intelligence or genius that has strayed from the realm of the firmament and come to dwell in human form and now does not know how to behave in human fashion. But all the things of this world are this way or that according to whether we look at them this way or that—human understanding is a magic tincture whose contact transforms everything that exists to conform with our desires.

It so happened that one of these naked saints lived in a remote cave in a cliff beside a small river. No one knew how he had got there; for some years his presence had been known—a caravan first discovered him, and since that time people had been making frequent pilgrimages to his solitary dwelling.

In his place of sojourn this queer creature had no rest by day or night. It seemed to him he always heard drumming in his ears the unceasing, swiftly rushing revolution of the wheel of time. Because of this din he could do nothing, plan nothing—the overwhelming anxiety that kept him in constant, strenuous activity prevented him from perceiving anything except the way this dreadful wheel, which reached to the stars and beyond them, turned and turned, roaring

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