



Puck

the Gnome

Jakob Streit

Puck the Gnome

Told by

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Translator's note: I made up the word "sootify" as a good gnome description for the German *verrussen* which means "to cover with soot or blacken."

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The First Pranks

Once upon a time there was a little gnome by the name of Puck. He had one little foot that pointed to the front and one little foot that pointed to the back. When he went forwards, his front foot was happy and when he went backwards, his back foot was happy. So he often cheerfully went about going forward and back again and always ended up at the same place he had started. He played this walking game every day that he felt like it and he never did anyone any harm. But his friends snickered about him and his turned-around little feet and made fun of his walking game.

For a long time Puck thought they were snickering and laughing because he made them happy and he really tried very hard to delight his friends. But once when he was resting under a big rock in the forest he noticed that two of his companions were on top of the rock. They were Gries and Grum, the inseparable brothers. But the two of them hadn't noticed Puck under the rock.

Suddenly Grum began to speak: "Gries, did you notice this morning how Puck was limping again when he walked forward?"

Everything is awry with him; his foot is turned around, his nose is slanted to the left, his beard is slanted to the right and one ear is bigger than the other.”

Gries answered: “I think he even has one arm longer than the other. He’s really the ugliest gnome in our whole clan.”

“Yes, that he is,” Grum went on. “And then the daffy fellow still thinks that we like him and he doesn’t notice that we’re smirking at him. He’s stupid on top of everything else.”

Puck became very sad when he overheard everything that Grum and Gries said about him. He crawled a little deeper under the rock and put his head in his hands. Big tear drops fell from his eyes. His tears rained down on a snail’s house. The snail suddenly felt wet. She slowly crawled out of her little house and thought there was a good, warm rain. As she peeked out to look at the rain cloud, she saw two gnome-eyes that were dripping.

“Oh,” thought the snail. “That’s just Puck with the backwards foot. Has something bad happened to make him so sad?”

After she had washed herself with a few of the nice drops, she called up to Puck with her dainty, snail voice: “What is it, Puck, that you’re making such rainy weather? Are you sad? Are you in pain? Look, the spring sunshine is bright and the flowers are sprouting. This is really no time for tears!”

Puck had already often had trouble understanding snail language. It sounded like slimy sniveling. He wiped away the last tears and softly lamented so that those on top of the rock couldn’t hear: “Gries and Grum are making fun of me because I have two feet that aren’t the same and one big and one little ear. And my little beard is askew and my nose is crooked on my face.”

The snail was incensed and whispered: “Phooey! Those are mean fellows. You should glue their lips together so they can’t talk bad about you anymore.”

Puck replied: “How can I do that? They’re stronger than I.”

“I’ll help you,” answered the snail. “Just a moment, I want to give you some gluey slime.” After these words the snail drew in her horns, pressed into her house and the slime flowed out of all her pores. On the ground before her there was a big pool of sticky slime. Then she commanded: “All right, Puck, look out above to see if both of them have fallen asleep. I can’t hear them talking anymore.”

Puck gently crawled out from under the rock and looked up top. The two of them really were lying there sound asleep. He reported this to the snail and she advised him: “Now go find something to gather up the gluey slime. Then let a little fall between the lips of each of them. That will stick well, you’ll see. Those two won’t be able to get out one single bad word for three days. My gluey slime really sticks!”

Puck searched under a nearby tree for a dry, stiff oak leaf from last autumn. He carefully gathered up the gluey slime with a piece of bark. The snail followed his every move and gleefully see-sawed her little horns: “That’s good, that’s good! Slimy glue sticks fast!”

Puck now carefully climbed to the top of the rock and let the thread-like slime drops fall first between Gries’s lips. They flowed slowly and glued the whole width of his mouth. Since that went well, it was Grum’s turn. A little bit spilled on Grum’s beard as the first drops fell, but luckily he didn’t wake up. Since



the sun was shining down very hot, the slime dried quickly and both slanderous muzzles were firmly glued.

Puck could hardly wait until the two of them awakened. He really wanted to see what would happen now. He waited a long time under the rock. When the snail asked: "Can you give me some drops from your eyes one more time?" Puck answered: "I feel like laughing now and not crying anymore. I can't do it!" The snail understood and she crawled back into her house in order to brew some more slime.

Puck waited a long time in the shadow under the rock. From time to time he would crawl out and have a look at the two of them up above. Out of his impatience he broke off a grass stem and began to tickle Gries on the tip of his nose. But he quickly slid behind a bush beside the rock. Two, three times Gries put his hand on his nose as if he wanted to brush off a fly. But he didn't wake up. Puck got up close once again and now he put the grass stem into one of Gries's nostrils and twirled it quickly around. In an instant he was away!

Gries hit himself on the nose with his fist as if he wanted to squash the fly. He woke up and had to sneeze really hard. In doing so, he hit his head on Grum's skull. Then Grum woke up. Right away he started to complain to Gries about disturbing his rest. But with his glued-together lips he could only get out an agitated: "Hm, hm, hm, and hm?" He wanted to say: "Did *you* tickle me?" Now Puck, behind the bushes, broke out into loud laughter. He gave himself away. Gries and Grum deftly turned their heads toward the bush from where the laughter had come and discovered Puck hidden there. Both of them mumbled:

“M, m, hm and hm!” They wanted to say: “Puck did this to us!” They jumped up with raised fists but Puck quickly disappeared into the undergrowth. Just as they started to follow him they ran into a thorn hedge and Puck got away.

Gries and Grum got very red faces from the many angry “hm”s. They returned to their rock and tried to open their mouths with their fingers. But all of their prying didn’t help. The gluey slime was stuck fast. They began to rub their mouths with their arms; that also was useless. The gluey slime held. Gries pointed in the direction of the little stream and said: “M-hm-m-m-hm!” He wanted to say: “I’m going to try with water!” So they got themselves over to the forest stream. They held their beards, chins and mouths in the water for a long time, all for naught. They had to stay with “hm”!

Anger was now slowly creeping into their limbs. Gries wanted to go straight away to the Gnome King and lodge a complaint against Puck. But Grum simply couldn’t understand how stupid Puck had pulled off something like that and where did he get the glue? They would have had to have noticed when he was pouring glue on them. Grum had the horrible thought that their lips had actually grown together because they had pressed them together too hard in their sleep. If they had to be cut open: Ouch, ouch! Tears came to Grum’s eyes. But Gries grabbed him roughly by the arm and pushed him into the crack in the cliff face from which they had come before their little nap.

When Puck realized during his flight that the two were not following him anymore, he sat down in the moss and laughed and laughed. He felt such mirth from the successful snail prank

that he somersaulted for the first time in his life. Neither his turned-around foot nor his slanted nose bothered him while he was doing it.

He sat down again in the moss and thought: “Until now my gnome brothers have always snickered and laughed at me. Now I want to laugh at them a little bit. What kind of prank could I play now? What could I do now that would be funny?”

As he walked gleefully through the forest, first forwards and then a little backwards, he came to a small stream. He heard voices. At the water’s edge sat three gnome brothers. They had their feet in the water and were talking about the fact that no fish had appeared. Yes, it was just these three who had often laughed at him. He quickly hid close by behind a tree trunk. Puck thought: “I’ll show them a fish!”

A little rock landed with a splash in the water in front of them. One of them enthusiastically called out: “Uh, a fat trout just jumped up and splashed us. Where is it now? Look out, next time we’ll grab it!” All three of them sprang to their feet and stared into the little stream. When the fish didn’t come back, they sat down again on the water’s edge.

Puck was having a lot of fun and he became bolder. He found a larger rock and in his excitement his aim was a little off and – oh, no! The rock grazed Napp’s head and then fell into the water. Napp cried out loudly. Terrified, Puck ran away. But one of the gnomes saw him disappear between the fir trees and he yelled: “Look there, it’s Puck. He did it, bad Puck!”

Napp, the injured gnome, got a good bump on his head and he whined: “Ow, ow, it hurts, it hurts!” Another one, who

had seen Puck, said: “We’re going to go tell the King. Everyone come with me! You are my witnesses.” They took the injured Napp between them and went back to the Gnome Kingdom.

In the meantime, frightened Puck had run into the forest. He crawled into a hollow trunk and lay still. He thought the fake trout splash was funny but he was ashamed about his false aim and the bump on the head. He was sorry about injured Napp. He had only wanted to splash them. He thought: “Should I go find the three of them, say I’m sorry and comfort the injured one and look for an herb that will help the bump on his head? No, I can’t do that. In their anger they would beat me up and pull out the hairs in my beard.”

Puck was bored and he began to scratch out rotten wood from inside the trunk with his fingers. Without really thinking about it, he filled his pockets with the stuff. Suddenly he heard a voice from outside that was coming closer to the hollow trunk. It was deep and a little gruff. “Aha,” thought Puck. “That’s Proll, who always wants to give orders and tell everyone what to do. But who is that with him?”

Puck peeked out through a crack in the tree trunk and saw that Proll had Din there with him as his servant who always had to run errands. Proll could talk very loudly and bellow too, which he did if Din wasn’t fast enough.

The two of them sat down close to the tree in which Puck was hiding. Proll thundered: “Watch out, you skinny-necked, turtle-slime-licker, that you find me good, ripe strawberries and none with white spots! They’re sour. Otherwise, I’ll smear them all over your legs! March – on your feet or I’ll teach you to cough

in harmony! I'm going to have a little nap. When I wake up I want to smell the perfume of dark red strawberries right here on this rock. Ha!"

Din jumped up and hurried nervously away. After a little while, Puck could hear Proll snoring. He was disgusted at how Proll yelled at poor Din and sent him away. He thought: "I'm going to play a prank on him that he won't forget! But what kind of prank would be good? How he leads poor, weak Din around like a donkey and yells at him and tortures him. What should I do?" Puck contemplated this way and contemplated that way. "A pine cone on the nose? No, that's not enough. Snail slime on the lips? No, his snoring mouth is always open." Suddenly Puck began to laugh: "Should I do it, or is it too bad?"

While he was contemplating back and forth, Puck saw Din tiptoeing back again. He was carrying ripe strawberries in both hands. He carefully laid them on the rock next to Proll so they wouldn't get bruised. Proll was sleeping so deeply that Din thought: "I'm also going to lie down a little until he wakes up. I'm tired." Puck could see through a crack in the tree trunk that the harried Din soon fell asleep.

Puck carefully slipped out of his hiding place and got close to the strawberries. He couldn't resist the heavenly smell and Proll was snoring. Puck eagerly began to eat one strawberry after another. Proll snored. Oh, how delightful they tasted. The strawberries were almost gone. There was only one left. Proll snored. Puck arranged some small, hard rocks into a little pile around a very smelly mushroom. Proll was still snoring. Then Puck shook the scratched-out rotten wood from his pockets

onto the little pile and set the strawberry on top. He took one more look at Proll, who always blew air out his mouth after every snore, and then he hurried back to the hollow tree trunk in order to observe what would happen.

After a while, the waiting was becoming too much for Puck. He tore off a strip of rotten wood from inside the trunk and threw it at the snorer. He hit him on the nose. Proll gave a loud, grunting snore and lifted his head. Who had awakened him? What kind of strange smell was that in the air? Was it the strawberries, or something else? He looked at the rock beside him and saw the little pile of rotten wood with the beautiful, dark-red strawberry on top. "Why did stupid Din cover up the strawberries with wood shavings? Did he want to protect them from flies? That snail tail!" He squished the red strawberry between his teeth and grabbed the little pile with his hefty hand to get more. "Ahhh!" he screamed and threw the stinking "strawberry" far away from himself. Then he rubbed and cleaned his very stinking hand on the forest floor. Only then did he notice the sleeping Din not far away. He gave him a rough kick and yelled: "Where are your strawberries, you stink-fish? Do you dare to trick me? Huh? Huh?!"

Poor Din didn't understand a thing. Stuttering, he wanted to explain, but the blindly angry Proll put up his fists to pommel Din into the ground. At that moment, Puck shot out of the tree trunk. He tore Din away so that Proll hit himself in the belly with his fist. Puck quickly pulled Din into his hollow trunk.

Proll now rammed against the tree in order to go in and grab them both. But he was too fat to get inside. He hammered

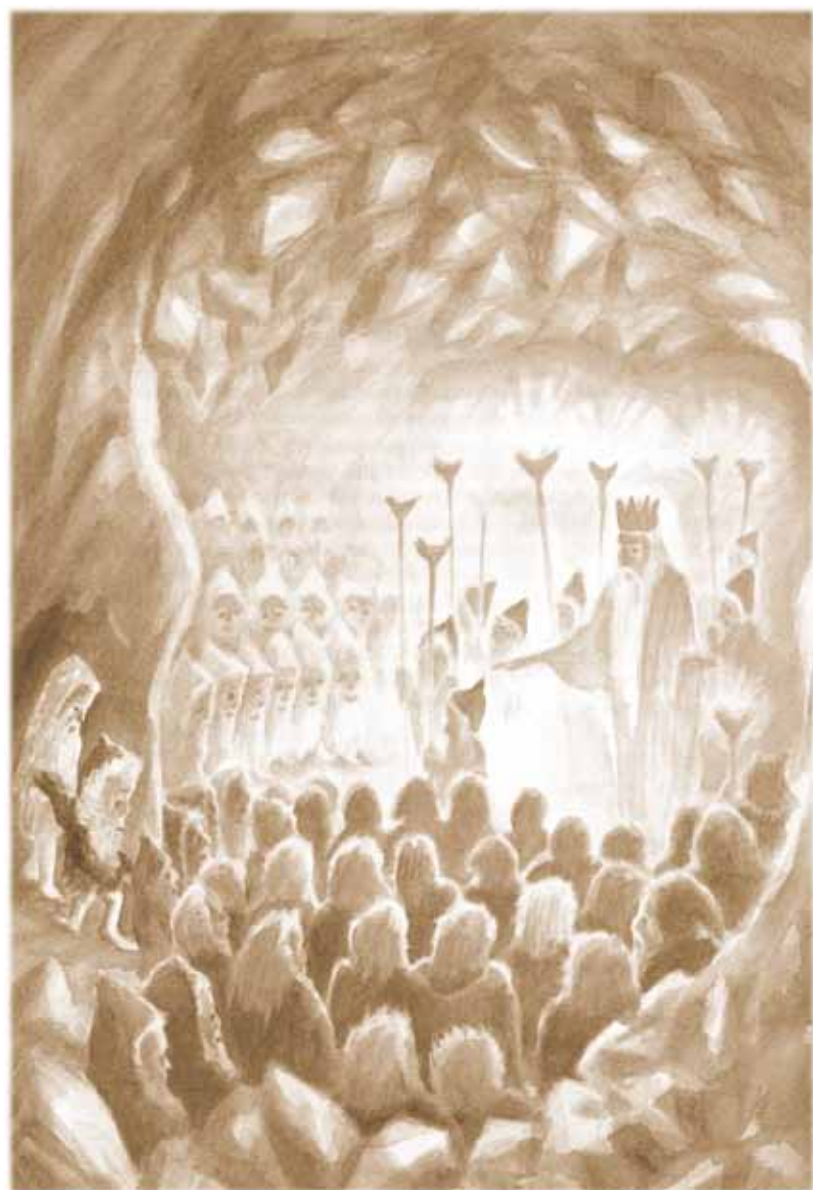
angrily against the tree until his fists were bruised. Then he went away, cursing and threatening: “Just wait until I catch you! I’ll take you both and hang you by your ankles upside down from a branch for a week!”

Inside the hollow trunk, Din’s entire thin body was quaking with fear. He was completely confused by all the racket and didn’t understand what had made Proll so angry. Puck tried to calm him. He explained how he had seen everything from here inside the hollow tree trunk: “I saw how Proll was insulting you and ordering you around. When you put the strawberries so nicely in a little pile, I thought: ‘I’m going to play a really good prank on Proll and give him a lesson.’ So, *I* ate the strawberries while he was snoring.”

He paused a moment and then he also told Din what happened next with the stinky mushroom and Din was even more shocked: “Now Proll will think *I* played the trick on him. What’s going to become of me? I can’t go back to the Gnome Kingdom. Proll will do something terrible to me and beat me every day.”

But Puck had become brave and he said to Din: “I’m your friend now and I will protect you.” Din looked at him in disbelief. What could Puck do against Proll? But Puck went on: “Just let me take care of it. When the Gnome Assembly takes place this evening I’ll tell the King how Proll was yelling and cursing. Proll will certainly lodge a complaint. I just hope the King doesn’t take the prank that I played on Proll too badly. I’ll admit, it doesn’t sound too good to a King’s ears, but it just popped into my head.”

Din wasn't very hopeful that everything would come out all right for the two of them. He said: "Puck, I'm happy to be your friend. But there will certainly be a punishment for us. Look, the sun is sinking lower. We have to get back to the Gnome Kingdom. Soon, when the sun has set, our assembly with the King begins."





The Gnome Assembly

After everything that had happened on this day, Puck was also a little afraid to return to the Gnome Kingdom. It was certain that those sticky-muzzles, Gries and Grum, had recognized him as he was fleeing the scene. And the accidental stone-throw at Napp's head by the trout stream would also surely be reported, and now Proll... Yes, it was a little too much for one day. But Puck thought: "You have to find the courage to admit what you've done. I've never done anything to anyone before. Even if I am the ugliest gnome and have a turned-around foot, I still like to be happy and enjoy myself and I'm not going to let myself be made fun of by my gnome brothers. That's what I'll tell the King if he's angry with me."

When they both reached the crack in the cliff face, the entrance to the Gnome Kingdom, Din said: "Puck, give me your hand. I'm so scared I'm shaking. My feet almost don't want to carry me anymore." Puck took Din's hand in his strong grip and he trilled a little song in order to give himself courage: "Tra-la-la-la-la, bim – bim, tra-la-la-la-la, bam – bam..."

The deeper they went into this earthly kingdom the bluer shone the crystal light because of the many different layers of

rock. Gnomes were coming towards them from every direction. Like scurrying shadows they streamed into a wide cave with many crystal layers and formations that one could sit upon like a stool. Some of the gnomes had small glowing rocks in their hands which they carried before them like little lanterns. Here and there a little hammer could be seen glinting in the light. There was scuttling and crackling like inside an ant hill.

“Come on, Din,” said Puck. “We’ll sit in a corner at the back. Look there, sitting clear in the front, are my two sticky-muzzles and Proll will surely also go right up front so he can quickly lodge his complaint. The King will be here soon.”

All at once the whispering and fidgeting stopped. Delicate, crystal tones sounded. The King approached, accompanied by light-bearing servants. They formed a circle around a raised, crystal dais. The King sat upon his throne. Everything was quiet. He calmly drew a figure in the air with his glittering staff and everything in the wide cave was quieter still.

The King raised his voice and said: “Dear Gnomes! The Earth above us is now in the time of spring. It is growing and blooming into a new summer. We all want to be helpful to Mother Earth at all times and guide the growth forces in the plants and tree roots from here underneath. So that our task will be successful, you brothers should always work together in peace and friendship. When little disagreements come up between you, then you should discuss them with your gnome chief. When something more severe happens and you need my counsel, you may bring your grievances before me. I now ask: Is there anyone present who wishes to lodge a complaint? He

should give the sign. Perhaps someone also has something funny to tell that would amuse us? We also like to hear such things. Laughing is healthy!”

As soon as the King ended his speech, three hefty strikes of a little hammer sounded. It was Proll announcing himself. The King nodded for him to approach. Agitated and with a reddened face he climbed upon the Complaining Rock which was situated below the King’s throne like a stone bench. Proll began:

“Highly honored King, I must report something shocking that happened up in the forest. As long as I can remember nothing like this has ever happened. It is so dishonorable that I can hardly bring myself to utter it before your royal ears. And it would probably be better if I remained silent because what happened is a shame upon the gnome folk. And I am the victim of this terrible act!”

Proll blew his nose in a laborious fashion and the voices became loud: “Hear ye, hear ye! But, he’s still alive. . . . What could it be?” Even the King raised his eyebrows a little and opened his eyes wide. There was attentive, taut silence. Proll went on:

“Listen, listen! Today I was resting peacefully in the forest after a hard day’s work. I asked my dear servant, Din, in a friendly manner, to pick some nice strawberries for me to slake my thirst. I was so tired from all the heavy work of the day that I lay down in the forest and fell asleep from exhaustion. Suddenly I awakened. Someone had thrown something hard against my face. Beside me there was a little pile of something covered over with wood shavings. On top a sweet strawberry was peeking out. It tasted good. I took the little pile in my hand to eat some strawberries

thinking there were beautiful, big strawberries inside. But, what was it? Forgive me, Your Highness, I shouldn't even say it to your royal ears, what a smelly little pile it was. There are such people, such blighters, among us who would stick a strawberry on top of a stinking, smelly little pile!"

To Proll's surprise the entire Gnome Assembly broke out in loud, resounding laughter that echoed up and down throughout the crystal cave. Hats soared in the air and even the King's crown was tottering back and forth on his dignified royal head. Proll's face flushed dark red and he waved his fists around in the air. But he finally put his fists down since the laughing simply would not stop. Just when he thought it was finally quiet, someone in a corner would begin to chuckle and everyone else would start laughing again too.

At last, the King raised his scepter and commanded silence. He said: "Proll, as you can see, you have brought us all much joy with your amusing jest. It has been a long time since a joke in the Gnome Assembly has earned so much laughter. It was not, however, a very subtle tale. One could almost believe that it really happened. Gnomes need amusement. It awakens their zest for life and because there was so much laughter, I forgive you. Go, sit yourself down!"

Proll made a face as if he had swallowed the Moon. The King was more friendly to him than he had been in a long time. So he forgot about making a complaint against Din. He bowed so low that his chin touched his belly and retreated to his place. Everywhere that he walked gnomes shook his hand and Proll was satisfied.

Puck was embarrassed by the whole thing. How lucky that he didn't have to step forward and speak.

The King once again looked questioningly over the assembly. The raps of two little hammers rang out clearly. Everyone listened quietly for what would come next, but all that could be heard was: "Mm-m-hm! Mm-m-hm!" Two little chaps pried themselves from the crowd and climbed up to the Complaining Rock. Of course, it was Gries and Grum. They animatedly pointed to their stuck-together lips and reeled out whole streams of "hm"s. But no one understood what they wanted.

The King spoke to an ancient white-haired gnome: "Medicus, look and see what is wrong with those two!" Medicus was a gnome doctor. He put a shining crystal up to the mouths of them both, shook his head and said: "They both have lock-mouth. Seems to me to be a completely new disease. I've never seen it before. Hopefully it's not catching. Your Highness, it would be best to bring these two to a small cave chamber, away from the others, for observation, until we see what comes of it."

The King nodded in agreement. Even though Gries and Grum protested with a hundred "hm"s, a guard took them by their shirt collars and led them away. Medicus called out loudly: "Is there anyone here in the assembly whose mouth also wants to stick together by itself? If so, then report to me at once!" No sooner had he said this than a thousand mouths began moving up and down, wiggling with their chins, in order to see if their mouths were glued shut as well. But nobody had the lock-mouth disease and Puck was feeling much more uncomfortable than before.



The Last Grievance and the Confession

Just as the King wanted to close the assembly, the raps of another hammer rang out. Three gnomes, one of them with a bump on his head, hurried to the front and climbed upon the Complaining Rock. The first began: “Today we three were sitting around at the forest brook and wanted to see some little fish. Then, a sneaky brother threw rocks at us. A big rock hit our dear Napp on the head, and look, Your Highness, what kind of shape poor Napp is in now!”

The King looked down and wrinkled his forehead. Napp called out: “Luckily, we know who the rock-thrower was. It was Puck with the turned-around foot!” Puck went very pale and was having a hard time getting his breath. From up front, the King’s voice called: “Puck, come forward to the Complaining Rock!”

A low murmur went through the cave as Puck made his way to the front. One of the King’s servants handed Puck the Cup of Truth from which every accused must take a sip so that he speaks the truth. However, Puck said: “I don’t need this drink, I’ll tell the truth anyway.” When there was quiet, he began:

“Honorable King! I’m sorry that I have caused you concern. Yes, I unintentionally injured poor Napp. When these three

brothers were sitting by the forest brook I wanted to give them a little splash and so I threw a small rock in the water in front of them. They were happy and thought it was a trout that had jumped up. Then I wanted to show them a bigger trout jumping out of the water. But, unfortunately, my throw was off and, to my dismay, the rock hit poor Napp. I'm so sorry that he had to suffer pain! I would like to ask him to forgive me. I would like to do something nice for him. I could give him a beautiful crystal!"

An approving murmur arose from the gnomes, but some others grumbled: "Rocks are not for throwing! Rocks are not for throwing!" The King spoke: "Dear Napp, Medicus will rub a good ointment on your head. If you are satisfied now, then give Puck a handshake of peace and reconcile with him."

That is what happened. Medicus searched in his large bag and went a little to one side with Napp in order to relieve his pain with a shining crystal. But Puck once again found his voice: "Your Highness, I have to own up to a second prank. Gries and Grum, I'm the one who glued their mouths shut!"

Now the gnomes became very restless. Shouts could be heard: "What's wrong with Puck? How is this possible? He was always a little bit of a frog!"

Puck told about how many gnomes made fun of his turned-around foot and giggled about him. Both Gries and Grum had especially insulted him and called him the ugliest gnome ever. He wanted to laugh at them just once and so he glued their mouths shut while they were sleeping. Medicus came up very close to Puck and asked: "But what kind of glue? What did you use for glue?" Puck answered: "It was snail slime that dried very

quickly in the sun. And in three days it will dissolve all by itself. That's what the snail told me."

"A good recipe," remarked Medicus to the King. "I will remember that. In the future when someone lies and slanders, we will glue his mouth shut for three days with snail slime. A first-rate recipe!"

The King listened in amazement to Puck's confession. He now stepped before the assembly and spoke: "You have all been privy to Puck's two confessions. Do you want punishment for Puck or acquittal for Puck?" Because most of the gnomes really did like and understand Puck, there was a resounding: "Puck goes free!" But from the back a thick, deep voice thudded: "Punish Puck!"

When it had quieted down and the King was just about to give him the signal to stand down, Din thought: "If only he would remain silent now!" But Puck wanted to make everything right. Puck found his voice for the third time. He said: "Your Highness, the thing with Proll and the strawberries is no joke. What he told really happened. *I* played the prank on Proll. I was sitting in a hiding place in the forest when he came by with poor Din, yelling at him, scolding and cursing. He called him a turtle slime licker and many other worse names that I will not say here before the King's throne. Din had placed the strawberries beside Proll when he was sleeping and then went off a little way. As soon as Proll was snoring loudly, I slipped out of my hiding place and ate all the strawberries except one. And then, there was a rotten, stinking mushroom sitting right there. Yes, *I'm* the sinner of the little pile."

Giggles and sympathetic murmurings went through the group of gnomes. "Puck goes free!" some of the voices called and the King nodded discreetly. Only from way in the back the thick voice could be heard again saying: "Punish Puck!" The King held up his glittering scepter above Puck's head and that signified: "Puck goes free!"

The King then turned to the assembly: "Dear brothers, return now to your work. Serve the Earth, loosen the soil, help the plants thrive and grow. Be peaceful among yourselves, help each other and then a pleasant tone will vibrate through the Earth clear down to the precious metals."

The king was impressed with Puck's courage in the way he freely and openly told of his suffering and his guilt, and he thought: "I must give him some encouragement." He bade a servant give him a shining crystal, motioned Puck to him and said: "Puck, today you have stood the test of truth. I give you this crystal rock. It will protect you from some things and it will enlighten many things for you."

It was a very wonderful thing for Puck that the King was so nice to him. He thanked the King and held back a tear of joy. Then he made ready to go search out Din. With this rock they could now go everywhere under the Earth and there would always be light around them. On the way to find Din he went by Proll who was still boiling mad. His eyes were rolling to the left and right. When he noticed Puck, he whispered to him: "Just wait, laddie, I'll get you yet for making me a laughing stock in front of the King and the whole Gnome Assembly. You can take Din with you. You're two peas in a pod. I've found better lads."



“I’ll have revenge, revenge!” Proll pointed to three, grinning rascals whom Puck had always tried to avoid. He then turned his poisonous gaze upon Puck’s shining crystal and repeated: “I’ll have revenge, revenge!”

With these words he flung his fists so close to Puck’s nose that Puck thought he was going to get hit so he quickly jumped to the side and hurried away from there. He told Din how Proll had just threatened him.

Din clung to Puck and pleaded: “Puck let me be *your* servant! Together with you I have much less fear of Proll.” When Puck reported to him about Proll’s three new servants, Din said: “I know them. They are clever and mean. We have to be careful of them. They have just one name together and they call themselves *Crackzers*.”

“Listen Din,” said Puck, “you shouldn’t be my servant. I wouldn’t know what to order you to do for me as my servant. Just be my good friend. Come on, we want to get away from here, far away from Proll. We’ll go together deep inside the Earth. My shining crystal is also your shining crystal. Since the King gave it to me, I find I have more courage to undertake something.”

Din replied: “I know my way around very well inside the Earth. For a long time I was the companion of a rock magician. We took our little hammers along. Deep inside the Earth can be found gold and rare, precious stones. Shall we give our dear King, who was so good to you today, everything beautiful that we find along the way?” “Yes,” agreed Puck. “That we will.”

The Gnome Assembly broke up after the King, along with his escorts, left the crystal cave. The small gnomes slipped through cracks and channels to go back to work as the King had advised them. But Proll snuck off with his Crackzers to his cliff-face chamber and brewed dismal thoughts and plans for revenge.





In the Kingdom of Deep Earth

As Din and Puck slipped into a crack that led deep inside the Earth, they didn't notice that the three Crackzers slipped in after them as deftly as spiders. Proll had ordered them to not let Din and Puck out of their sight: "Creep after Puck in secret. Follow and observe him. When you get a chance to harm him, do it. If there is something important to report, then the fastest one of you should come back to tell me. Perhaps you will be successful in stealing the shining crystal from him." The Crackzers nodded and grinned as they now picked up Puck's trail.

Clueless, Puck and Din descended deeper into the Earth. The shining crystal lighted the way wonderfully. Every so often they would stop and hammer on the rocks. Since they were still close to the top, the tone was a dull thud everywhere. "That's limestone," remarked Din. "It's not much good to us. It has neither crystal nor metal. But look here, the beautiful fossilized shell from ancient times when there was a large sea here where we are walking."

Puck was amazed at everything Din knew and he asked: "How do you know all this?" Din explained: "Before I came to Proll, I had a good master. For a long time I served the wise

rock gnome Grano. He traveled all the cliffs and rock layers of the Earth. His hammer was all stubby from so much use. He taught me a lot about what's inside the Earth."

Puck could not understand why Din did not stay with this master: "Why did you leave Grano and go to that crass oaf, Proll?"

Din answered: "Life doesn't always go as one would wish. Grano became a servant to the King. He is one of the twelve Light Bearers. And then, as I was standing around feeling a little lost, Proll came by, took me by my shirt collar and said: 'You have to me my servant! The one I had ran away. I'll watch you better!' Now I'm just happy that I found you, Puck. If we really stick together, then Proll shouldn't be able to hurt us. We're already far away from him."

"Yes," nodded Puck. "We are getting deeper. My hammer is already quivering in my hand."

On the way down they would hammer on the rock from time to time. Suddenly Din said: "Do you hear, Puck? It sounds different. The blue rock begins here. Now we have to hammer diligently. It could be that a seam of gold goes through here. Do you hear how it sounds harder?" Puck's ears weren't so practiced as Din's, but he also thought he heard a somewhat different tone.

Din went on: "Gold is trapped, melted sunlight that has become hardened in the darkness of Earth. When we hammer it free our King is well pleased. You can hear that the tone sounds very staccato: tock, tock, tock. When gold is nearby there is a soft, bright echo."

As Din and Puck were hammering and listening, suddenly they heard a sliding noise. Above, one of the Crackzers had slipped and fallen. Puck called: "Hello! Is someone there?" There was no answer. Din said: "Maybe a rock broke off further up. There where we hammered before."

They went down deeper into the rock layers, always hammering as they went. Suddenly Din called out very excitedly: "Puck, do you hear it, that's gold!" When he hammered it went "tock" and afterward there was a soft "ting, tock – ting, tock – ting!" Din found the place where the "ting" sound was clearest and encouraged Puck: "Now we can hammer really hard until we come to the gold seam!"

There began a "tock-tock, tick-tick, tuck-tuck – ting! Tock-tock, tick-tick, tuck-tuck – ting!" so that the rock splinters were flying. The shining crystal served them well. Suddenly Din cheered: "It's glittering golden! Be careful! Don't hammer the gold, go gently around it." Puck took the shining crystal: "I'll shine the light for you a little and watch how you do it. You're really fabulous, Din!"

Under Din's hammering, little by little, a fine seam of gold shone forth that further in became thicker and wider like a waving ribbon. After a while, Din became very tired and he stopped hammering. "Puck, now you have to hammer. My arm is almost lame. You saw how I did it. I'll hold the light for you. Always hammer *under* the gold or above it and then the rock will splinter away. Don't ever hit the gold seam itself."

Puck began, delicately at first and then bolder. Once he ran his left hand over the narrow band of gold that now, having

been skillfully excavated, was showing in the rock wall. When he started hammering again with his right hand he hadn't withdrawn his left hand far enough and he hit his thumb with the hammer. He cried out so loudly that Din was startled into dropping the shining crystal. From above Din clearly heard from above a short, snickering laugh. Who was laughing?

But he was concerned with the shining crystal that had fallen. Luckily, it wasn't broken. When he picked up the shining crystal and the beam of light fell on Puck's thumb, he noticed that it was a little flatter than normal but not seriously hurt. Din inquired: "Does it hurt very much, Puck?" Puck pressed his lips together and shook his head. "But did you hear a laugh before, like a snicker?"

Puck retorted: "How am I supposed to hear anything when my thumb feels like it's on fire? It was probably just an echo from when I cried out."

But Din remained convinced that he had heard a snickering laugh. He picked up his hammer again and Puck held the crystal lantern for him with his right hand. He rubbed his left thumb on the shining crystal and, strangely enough, the pain quickly subsided. "Aha," he thought, "this is not only a lantern crystal; it is also a healing crystal."

After hammering for some time, Din said: "Puck, do you see that? The band of gold is becoming thinner again." When there was only a thin strand of gold visible Din said: "Look at that; it looks almost like a crown that becomes wider in the middle. It really is a gold crown, enchanted here into this rock, and we have freed it! But let's rest a little now or maybe have

a nap. We're both tired from hammering. A tired arm works poorly. I don't want to do any damage to the gold crown right at the last. After we have rested we will carefully finish the task. How's your thumb? Can I do anything for you?"

"Thanks, Din, but the shining crystal helped. I can hardly feel any pain now, but I'm just as tired as you. Let's get some sleep." They both lay down in a little niche in the rock and Puck stuck the shining crystal in his pocket so that the light wouldn't disturb their sleep.

And it was a good thing he did for as soon as soft snoring could be heard, a faint shimmer scurried to and fro. It scratched on the rock. It scratched on the gold. Finally one of the Crackzers grabbed the band of gold with his claw-like fist. He bent it back and forth until it was ripped out. Then all three crawled and scampered away with their stolen gold to bring it to Master Proll. One of them croaked on the way: "Proll will praise us! He'll give us something tasty to lick with our tongues. Quickly, let's get up to Proll!"

Puck and Din slept peacefully a while longer. Puck had a nice dream. He dreamed that he and Din brought the band of gold to the King. How happy the King was. He told Puck: "Place your turned-around foot upon the seat of my throne." And then the King stroked his little feet. And suddenly his foot twitched and turned itself around and pointed towards the front just like his other foot.

The twitch in his foot, however, was caused by Din who had turned over in his sleep and hit Puck's foot without realizing it. Puck sat up and looked around. It was dark everywhere. He felt

in his pocket, took out the shining crystal and shone it on Din. He was still sleeping soundly. Puck thought: "I'm going to go admire our gold."

He couldn't believe his eyes when he came to the hammered out rock. The gold was gone! He put the crystal lantern on the floor, rubbed his eyes and held the crystal up to the hammered out place again. Just one, tiny, broken-off sliver of gold was visible and nothing else. He searched on the floor. There was nothing. In a state of shock, he roughly awakened Din and yelled: "Where is our gold?!"

Din was still half asleep. He said: "Why are you screaming like that? Is your thumb hurting again?"

Puck shook him and yelled once again: "Din, where is our gold?!"

"What do you mean *where*? You're still dreaming, Puck. The gold is still stuck fast in the rock. Now I'm so wonderfully rested. We can go do some more hammering. Soon we'll be finished."

Puck thought about it: "Maybe Din is right and I was only dreaming or still too sleepy to see correctly." With the help of the shining crystal they both made their way back to the place they had been hammering. Din let out a scream: "Where is the gold?!" The two of them began to wildly search the area even down to the most unlikely chinks. The gold was nowhere to be found.

Suddenly Din started to cry and Puck was gulping for air. But then he said: "I'm certain that those spider Crackzers stole it. Didn't you hear someone snickering?"

Din nodded glumly; then he said: "Puck, we will continue hammering in spite of it. Who knows, maybe the ribbon of gold

will become thick and wide again.” Puck agreed. They didn’t need to hammer long before some little leftover bit of gold fell out. Puck picked it up and said angrily: “I’m going to throw this mouse tail of a snippet into the deepest crevice!”

Din stretched out his hand and said: “Gold is gold! Please, put it in my pocket.” Puck was agreeable to that but he began to hammer everywhere on the nearby rock in the hope of discovering a new gold tone. But he could only hear an empty sounding “tock-tock.” There were no reverberating gold tones to be heard.

Puck suggested: “Come on Din, let’s go back to our little niche and sit down and think.” They put their chins in their hands and wrinkled their foreheads. After a little while Puck asked: “Din, has something come into your head?”

“No, I only know that the two of us can’t do anything against Proll,” Din said.

Puck had another idea: “We could go to Proll and investigate him. Then we would know for sure if *he* has the gold.”

Din replied: “I would rather not meet him again. He would make such terrible fun of us.”

Puck protested: “Then *I* will go to him, all alone. I’m not afraid of him.”

No sooner had Puck said those words than they both heard a noise that sounded like something sliding a little ways off. And since it was traditional in the Gnome Kingdom to answer every “hali” with a “halu,” Puck loudly called out: “Hali!” But there was no “halu” returned. Puck grabbed his hammer and said: “If that’s one of the Crackzers sneaking around, then I’ll hammer his skull.” But near or far, there was nobody to be found.



The Stolen Gold

In the meantime, the three gold robbers had reached Proll. They showed him the shining band of gold and all three cackled among themselves: “We took it from Din and Puck. They were asleep and beside them this gold was hanging out of the rock wall. We were able to grab it and break it off. Those two sleepy heads are probably still snoring inside the mountain.”

Proll praised the three companions very much and gave them a rabbit-pellet bean to chew on which the Crackzers loved above all else. He stroked the gold band, grinned and stuck it deep in his pocket. Then he said: “Go, my dear Crackzers, and sneak after Puck and Din again. Observe them well. If one of you is successful in taking away the shining crystal from Puck, then you will each receive three rabbit-pellet beans.”

One Crackzer said: “Proll, you always give us such great jobs. Without you life would be very much more boring. Can we also use Puck’s bright stone once in awhile? We only have these weak little glimmers!”

Proll answered: “First you have to bring it here; then you can all play around with it a little for three days.” The Crackzers

laughed and scrambled away; but they took each other's hands so that they always stuck close together. Everywhere they went they looked around and asked other gnomes about Puck and Din, but no one had seen them.

Proll had a good, secret and hidden niche for himself in a cliff. That is where he kept all his treasures. There were glittering stones, shining silver, gold nuggets and a few small crystals. Even the Crackzers didn't know about this niche. Proll went to his secret place in order to hide the gold band there. He looked around to make sure no one was watching him and pushed the rock door aside. As he was laying the gold band inside, he had a thought: "Should I perhaps give it to the King? Then I would look good again in the eyes of the King and his servants. Since I told my story upon the Complaining Rock, many have been laughing at me and show me little respect. The King didn't ask me again to be one of his guards. Yes, I'll give him the gold band. That will impress the King. Maybe he will even employ me as one of his servants. Then I could give everyone orders and commands again! Maybe he would even give me a beautiful shining crystal!"

No sooner thought than done. Proll went immediately to the King's crystal palace. He rang the silver bell at the crystal door. Two guards appeared and asked Proll what he wished. He said: "I have a very precious gift of gold that I wish to present to His Royal Highness. I discovered it inside the blue cliffs and very carefully hammered it out. Announce me!"

The word "gold" had its effect. Both of the guards nodded and disappeared inside. After a short time they returned and

escorted Proll inside. Proll felt very important. He held his head high and stuck his thumbs in his vest pockets.

The King received him with these words: "Proll, I am told you have made a wonderful discovery. Let me see it!" Proll dug out the gold band. A servant brought it to the throne and put it in the King's outstretched hand.

Proll said: "Your Highness! You can see what a glorious gold band it is, so beautiful that only the King should wear it. Please accept it as a gift from your loyal subject, Proll!"

The King examined the gold in his hand from all sides and determined: "It has been hammered out with the greatest delicacy. The gold has not even been touched by the hammer. This work has been masterfully carried out. I thank you, Proll, for this beautiful gift. It is precious Sun-gold from the Earth."

Proll was flattered and bragged: "Yes, you know, Your Highness, *I*, Proll, am an old, practiced hand at hammering and when *I*, Proll, do something then I do it right!"

The King gave a long, hard look at the end of the gold band. He bade a servant fetch him a crystal magnifying glass. When he looked through the crystal he noticed that the very end of the gold band was missing and was probably torn off. However, he didn't criticize Proll for it. He thought that probably Proll's patience had worn out before he completed the demanding and delicate task. But somehow, the whole thing seemed a little strange to him.

Proll expected that the King would now ask him again to serve as a palace guard or give him a shining crystal. But nothing of the kind happened. The King waved benevolently at him

and spoke: "Proll, I will consider what I can do in return that would be pleasing to you. I thank you for the gold and for your fine work."

With that Proll was dismissed and was again escorted by the two guards out of the palace. Once outside, he sat down upon a rock not far from the palace. He thought: "The King still has something against me. Even the gold wasn't enough to get me back in his good graces and wash away his mistrust. That accursed Puck must have gossiped against me to the King. I have to drive him far away from here. The best place would be to the Ice Mountains of the North.

Proll got up from the rock with a grim look on his face and in a short time was back in his little cave that he shared with the Crackzers.





How Proll Lied for the Second Time

On their walk further down Puck and Din came to a large cave from which paths led off in all directions. Puck said: “Din, wait here for me. Look, over there is a little niche. I must and will find Proll to find out if he knows anything about our gold. I’ll know if he’s telling me the truth or not. I’ll leave the shining crystal here with you. Put it under your cap. Otherwise, the Crackzers could discover it and steal it. I’ll take my hammer with me.” Din nodded and slid a little deeper into the crack in the rock wall to wait for Puck’s return.

Puck came to Proll’s cave and found him sitting on a rock bench. It seemed to Puck that he was dozing with a frown on his face. Puck immediately spoke to him: “Proll, where are your Crackzers?”

Proll answered: “Aha, it’s you, Puck! My Crackzers left very early. I haven’t seen them yet today. I believe they went up to the Earth’s surface to water the flowers. Why do you ask? Shall I tell them you said hello?”

Proll was speaking so oily-smooth that Puck saw right away that he was not telling the truth. Puck kept at it: “Will they be back soon? They’re never away from you for very long.”

Instead of answering, Proll suddenly asked: "Puck, could you loan me your shining crystal for a short time? It lights so well and I've lost something in my cave. I could certainly find it with your crystal and in the meantime the Crackzers will probably return." Puck replied: "I don't have the shining crystal with me."

"But, Puck," Proll cried, "you always have it with you. Look in your pockets!"

"No, I don't have it!" Suddenly the hefty Proll grabbed Puck from behind and felt in his pockets with his hands.

"Let me go! Let me go!" Puck screamed. His anger gave him double strength. When Proll realized that the crystal really wasn't in the pockets, then he let go.

But Puck pushed him so hard in the belly with his backward-facing foot that Proll fell backwards and splash-landed with his hindquarters in a water puddle and sat there.

Puck ran away angrily and was still shaking from the agitation when he got back to where Din was waiting. "How good it was that I left the shining crystal here with you!" he croaked. "That devil Proll wanted to steal it out of my pocket."

Din asked: "Didn't he say anything about the gold band?"

"No, he told humbug and lies. He said he hadn't even seen the Crackzers today."

Din gave the shining crystal back to Puck and said: "Come on, Puck. We'll go far, far away where there is no Proll and no Crackzers. I know of a very deep Earth kingdom that the wise man, Grano, told me about. It's close to the inner fire of Earth where the fire spirits live. I've been longing to go there but I

didn't know who would go with me. Even Grano was there only once upon business for the King. Will you come along, Puck?"

Puck answered: "I don't care where I go as long as it's far away from here! But how will you find the way that will lead us to this deep, fiery Earth kingdom?"

Din replied: "Before, when I was hiding in the little niche, I felt a warm draught wafting up from a crack in the ground. Such cracks can lead down to the Earth fire. Let's go down there. If the crack becomes narrower we can make ourselves thinner. That way we can make it through every crevice."

"Good," said Puck. "Let's start!" They disappeared without anyone having seen them. The Crackzers were still searching around the blue-rock cliffs in order to earn their rabbit-pellet beans; but they didn't find a thing.



In the Kingdom of the Fiery Forge

Din and Puck were amazed that the crevice into which they were descending would sometimes widen and then get narrower and even branch out into many different corridors. All at once the shining crystal threw its light into a cave full of yellow crystal. Din knew about it: “That’s sulfur. It’s flammable. It was left in this cave in earlier times by earth fire.” Puck hammered off a piece of the sulfur crystal and put it in his pocket.

At another place the rocks were reddish black. They gave off a very hard, short tone when they were hammered. Din said: “A seam of iron goes through there. Grano explained to me that at one time the entire Earth was a world of fire. The heavenly spirits who served God, the Creator, brought liquid fire from other stars down to the Earth. That’s where metals came from and iron is one of them. But now it has cooled down and people use it for many things. Today, the creative fire is only found in the deepest regions of the Earth.”

Puck was astounded at these wondrous things Din knew and told him. He thought: “How I would also like to serve a wise man like Grano one day!”

Again Puck shone his crystal into a small cave. Din happily cried out: "Look, there is a glittering precious stone! It's most certainly a diamond!" Puck had to strain before he could see even a tiny glimmer. But Din went on: "It's far inside the stone. We'll have to hammer it free. A difficult task! One false move and it will break in half. I'm curious to see how big it is."

Puck didn't have quite enough nerve and said: "Din, you can hammer and I'll hold the light for you. Your hammer is finer than mine." Din competently went to work. First he hammered out a ringed indentation around the stone that was two fingers wide. When his hand became shaky then he would wait to begin again. When the first splinters of rock had fallen away from the stone, Din rejoiced: "It is bigger than I thought. Look, it's almost the size of a hazelnut!"

Din became more excited and animated. He was now only scratching around the area of the stone with his little hammer. Suddenly the diamond fell out. It rolled onto the floor and gave off a brilliant glow. It was not damaged. Puck asked: "Hey, Din! Did Grano ever tell you why there are precious stones and where they come from?"

"Sure, I asked him one time. He said he would have to tell it to me in a story because otherwise I wouldn't understand."

"Din, tell me the story, too. Here, take the diamond in your hand. It can sparkle onto my shining crystal and you can tell me the story."

The two sat down and Din began: "Once upon a time, a long time ago, Mother Earth was a fiery, brilliant star-ball. But she had to give away more and more of her light. The whole,

fiery Sun came out of her. Mother Earth had to become cooler so that mountains, plants, animals and people could be upon her. Since the Earth was becoming harder and darker and more rigid, it caused pain and hurt. So the Creator's angels allowed glitter drops to fall into the Earth so that she would be lit up inside and comforted. Those drops became the precious stones. That's why the kings and queens of the Earth kingdoms and also our Gnome King wear precious stones in their crowns."

Din was silent and the two of them looked thoughtfully at the twinkling light of the diamond. Then Puck said: "Din, you got it out of the rock, so it belongs to you. Put it in your pocket."

But Din replied: "Since we couldn't give our King the band of gold, then he shall have the diamond. Until then I'll keep it in my pocket. But, right now, let's go down deeper into the Earth."

During their descent, they both hammered from time to time on the rock walls. Suddenly there was a very dull tone. The hammer sunk into a soft metal. "That is lead," said Din. "It's softer than any stone. My wise teacher said that lead is very ancient, even older than iron. The star spirits of Saturn brought it." So they took a little bit of lead and put it in their pockets.

All at once they heard such bright sounding hard tones. "What is that?" asked Puck. Din knew right away: "Your hammer is hitting iron upon iron. Look, a thick seam of iron is running through the rock here. We cannot hammer anything free here; everything is melted together."

"Do you happen to know," Puck asked, "also from Grano, from which star iron comes?"



“Yes. He said there is a fiery iron star which is Mars. The creation spirits long, long ago let Mars swish through fiery Earth and it left behind fiery liquid iron. Now the iron has cooled and become hardened.” Puck was again amazed at all the things Din knew.

But what was that? Having gone a little deeper, the light from Puck’s shining crystal began to be mirrored in many small crystals. It glittered and glimmered out of small caves filled with crystals all around. Din explained: “You see, Puck, we have now come to the oldest, most ancient rocks of the Earth. Inside are many quartz crystals, large and small. Isn’t it wonderful how they glitter? If we hammer on the crystals very slightly then they make a sound. The shorter crystals have a higher tone and the longer ones emit lower tones.”

With very tender hammering, Din brought out the music of the crystals. It sounded as if a harp were playing deep inside the Earth. Puck also played the crystals. This music had the characteristic, like all crystal music, of putting one to sleep. Weariness overcame them both so that they had to lie down. The music softened and stopped altogether, but Puck and Din were sound asleep. They had wonderful dreams. Puck was floating in the light of a rainbow like a butterfly and helping to form a large star. But below him there was a dark cloud and there were Proll and the grimacing Crackzers peering out at him and grinning.

Puck sat up and awakened Din. Neither of them knew how long they had been asleep. They said adieu to the crystal cave and their wandering took them still deeper into the Earth. It became warmer and warmer. Puck said: “Din, if it becomes much hotter, I’ll melt and soak into the floor.”

Din laughed: "It won't happen so fast. We gnomes can stand a lot of heat. Certainly, the real Earth fire would burn up even us. The fire spirits and the fire trolls are the only ones who can stand it."

Suddenly they heard a strange noise. "Is that the Crackzers?" asked Puck.

"No," replied Din. "Let's get closer. I have an idea what it might be."

The crack in the stone wall led into a long corridor that became steadily wider and higher. A cave opened up. Firelight flickered. The noise now sounded like a steady hammering. Din pulled Puck down with him behind a rock and whispered in his ear: "Puck, we've come to a place that is forbidden to us. Did you know that there is a hidden fiery forge where all the gnome hammers come from? We have just entered into that secret cave without permission. If we went further on we would come to the smith's workshop. But woe to us if we were discovered! Someone would grab us and let us stew in the fire. Come on, Puck. It's better if we go back!"

But Puck wanted nothing of turning back. "If someone once has the luck to find this hidden forge, then I think we should look around a little. Come on, Din, we're masters at hiding ourselves. I'll go in front!" Din didn't want to leave Puck all alone so he followed fearfully behind.

No sooner were they around a corner than they saw a strange sight before their eyes. Hundreds of fire gnomes, sooty and without hats, but wearing tiny helmets, were tending the fire with long tongs. Some of them were hammering on anvils. Real

earth fire was smoldering out of a crack in the floor. Soot-covered gnomes put pieces of iron into the fire with their long tongs to get them glowing hot. Then the pieces were turned onto the anvils and hammered. Sparks flew. After that the pieces were put into water. It steamed and sizzled.

Puck couldn't get enough of looking at the strange goings-on. "Din, the fire gnomes are bigger and stronger than we are and they have giant hands. But look, back there one of them is flying around. He has wings like a bat. What's he doing?"

Din answered: "I've been observing him for a while already. It's a winged troll and he cleans the soot from the shining crystals in the cave. Look there behind the water grotto the silver and gold smiths are at work. They have smaller hammers and are filing and forming. Next to them are the crystal smelters who are making beautiful crystals."

Puck snuck up a few steps in order to better see what was going on. He slipped on a loose rock and – oops! – roughly slid downward. Two winged trolls were immediately there and grasped Din and Puck fast in their wing-like hands. They let out a terrifying screeching and hissing. They slapped the prisoners around their heads and ears with their wings until Puck and Din were both very dizzy.

When they heard the screaming, some of the fire-tending gnomes ran up, grabbed the intruders with their tongs and forced them down towards the fiery oven. "One of the fire gnomes growled at them: "Whoeverrrr spies on us, will burrrrn in the firrrre and become a sooty serrrvant and oven cleanerrr!"

“Oh, no,” thought Din and Puck. “Now we’ve done it!” Suddenly Din called out something to Puck. Puck couldn’t quite understand what he said and thought: “What does he mean? If only I could understand him above all this noise! Aha, now it’s clear. He means I should show the shining crystal.”

But tongs were holding Puck’s arms tightly. The fire gnomes went with the two prisoners to their master and stood them before him. One asked gruffly: “In which oven should we let these intruderrrr burrrn till they’rrre sooty?”

Just at that moment Puck was able to reach into his pocket. He quickly brought out the shining crystal and held it before the eyes of the soot master. He looked at it wonderingly and said: “So, so! A rrrreal King’s crrrystal lanterrrn. He good serrrvant to King. Not turrrn to soot!” Then he pointed to Din and said: “He has no shining crrrystal. Sootify him! He become little oven cleanerrr!”

At the last second Puck yelled to Din: “Show the diamond!” Din pulled it from his pocket. Puck shone his crystal lantern on it so that the diamond sparkled beautifully. The soot master spoke: “So, so! This one has also crrrystal lanterrrn. Also good serrrvant of the Crrrown. Both frree!”

The fire gnomes backed away and for happiness Puck and Din grabbed each other by the arms and jumped around in circles much to the amazement of the fire gnomes. Then Puck suggested: “From now on we will carry the shining crystals in our hands where they are visible; otherwise some other fire gnome will grab us with his forceps.” And, sure enough, as they walked around in the forge cave everyone left them in peace. Here and

there they were even greeted or saluted as they wandered by. They both wandered further back where they thought the silver and gold smiths could be found.

When the gold master noticed them, he came up and asked: "What are two rock gnomes doing here shining lanterns around?" His eyes got big and round when he saw Din's precious stone. He took it in his hand, examined it from all sides and asked: "Did the King send you to me with this beautiful stone? Should I make a gold ring and set the stone into it?"

Din looked questioningly over at Puck. Then he nodded and said strongly: "Yes, this stone is fit for a king's ring! Can we wait and watch how you make it?"

The gold master answered: "It will take a while; but we'll get started right away. Such a beautiful diamond!"

Puck and Din were allowed to watch how the gold master and his helpers filled a ring form with liquid gold. Then they filed, hammered and polished. The diamond was placed in a small depression in the ring and gold was carefully chiseled out from around the diamond so it would hold the stone securely.

When the fine work was finished, Din almost couldn't bring himself to take the ring, but the gold master said: "So, now bring it to the King with the honorable greeting of the gold master Kafafuru. Be careful that you don't lose it!"

Thank you, Kafafuru! We will have a care that the ring arrives unharmed and give the King your greeting."

The adventure of the fiery forge was now at an end. If only they didn't fall into the hands of Proll and the Crackzers on the way back! When they had left the cave behind, Puck heard

Din happily singing for the first time and he quickly yodeled something himself. They sang of iron and gold, of crystals and diamonds, of earth fire, of iron tongs and hammers, of soot and cleaning, and of Kafafuru who wore a golden helmet on his head. They totally forgot that there were such things as Proll and the Crackzers in the world.



With the King of the Gnomes

In the meantime, the Crackzers had searched everywhere for Din and Puck but to no avail. Proll was angry and took to asking every gnome he met: “Have you seen Puck and Din?” But no one had seen them. It was as if they had vanished from the Gnome Kingdom.

From then on Proll and the Crackzers did nothing else besides listening around and standing at watch posts. They definitely wanted to catch those two again. Puck’s crystal lantern was what they longed for. One of the Crackzers said: “I’m going way down deep into the warm crevice. If those two are searching for gold again in the blue cliffs, they’ll have to come by there.”

The Crackzers had a secret call. They could stick two of their long fingernails between their teeth in such a way that they could blow a very loud whistle. It was such a high tone that the other gnomes couldn’t hear it, only the Crackzers among themselves because they had very pointed ears. With this whistle they could secretly communicate with each other over long distances under the Earth.

The Crackzer who was hiding in the warm crevice was having trouble staying awake. His head was nodding to and

fro. Suddenly he heard singing and yodeling from down below. That woke him up completely because he recognized the voices of Puck and Din. He quickly crawled to the side and put his fingernails between his teeth. The high sound echoed over and over through the passageways and cracks. The two other Crackzers' ears were ringing: "Our brother is calling! He found them!"

As the two Crackzers ran in the exact direction of the warm crevice, the whistling Crackzer allowed the clueless singers to go by. Then, however, he hopped after them in small, silent jumps like a grasshopper. By this time the other Crackzers had reached the warm crevice. They put a few rocks in the entrance to the larger cave in order to block it off. They mulled it over: "When they both come this way, they'll have to put down the shining crystal in order to clear the rocks away. Then it's ours!"

But before Din and Puck got to the barricade they sat down in a little rock niche. Puck said: "Din, we should talk over now *what* we're going to tell the King before we get there." They didn't notice that a whistling Crackzer had just snuck up behind them to listen in on their conversation. Puck was holding his shining crystal tightly in his hand.

The Crackzer thought: "He'll have to put it down sometime; then I'll grab it!"

Almost as if Puck knew that something was in the air, he told Din: "Hold your hammer tight in your hand because a Crackzer could suddenly appear! Close the pocket with the gold ring inside with your other hand. I won't let go of the shining crystal."

"Aha," thought the Crackzer. "They've become more careful. That makes it more difficult."

Puck went on: "It's good that the Crackzers don't have hammers. They're trolls and not real gnomes. If I see one I'll wrap him one on his noggin."

The whistling Crackzer felt his head getting itchy when he heard that and he thought: "Puck sure has become brave and cheeky since he was down in the Earth. I'm not going to let him near my skull."

Din answered Puck: "Yes, I will also hold on tight and rap those Crackzers' noggins if they try and bother us again. But please, Puck, when we get to the King, then *you* should do the talking and tell him about our adventures. I don't find the words as well as you."

The whistling Crackzer thought he had heard enough so he put his fingernails in his mouth and whistled a signal that meant: "Danger, danger; be careful! They're coming!" From above he heard a return signal: "We're in position! Everything is ready!"

Puck and Din had stood up and were walking upward again towards the place where the passageway was supposed to widen into the cave. The two Crackzers had hidden themselves there in a side crevice. Puck, who was shining the crystal lantern ahead of him, suddenly called out in amazement: "Look, there is a barrier! The passage is blocked. Now I'll have to put down the shining crystal in order to clear it away. Who would do such a thing? Come on, help me clear this!"

Din scratched behind his ear: "I don't like the looks of this. The rocks didn't get here by themselves. The Crackzers could have done it. Hold on tightly to your crystal lantern and keep your hammer ready. *I* will clear this away!" Din hit the rocks

so skillfully with his hammer that they broke into splinters and dust. The exit would be free very shortly. None of the Crackzers dared make a sound. No, their legs started to twitch from fear when they realized how threatening Puck was, keeping watch with his raised hammer.

Just as Din and Puck were ready to go on their way, all three Crackzers stumbled out behind them, holding hands and shivering all together. The first one stuttered: “D-d-din has also become c-c-courageous under the Earth.” And the other Crackzer added: “And Pu-pu-puck held the shining crystal v-v-very tight and is a naughty rascal!” The Crackzer who had listened in announced: “They’re going now to the K-k-king and lodge a complaint. Quick, we have to tell Proll. He has to know everything.” With that they let go of each other and scrambled away like spiders to tell Proll the latest.

Puck and Din agreed that they would first tell the King the story of the gold ring and then actually give it to him. When they arrived at the crystal palace there were two helmeted guards standing at the outer doors with spears in their hands. One of the guards said to them: “They’ve been looking for you and couldn’t find you. Where did you come from? What do you want here?”

Puck answered: “We come from Deep Earth and the Fiery Forge Cave. We are to bring His Royal Highness, the King, something from the master goldsmith Kafafuru.”

The guard replied: “If you weren’t Puck who always tells the truth, I wouldn’t believe you, that you were with Kafafuru. And the other one there; was he with you?”

“This is Din, my friend. He was also there.”

“Do you have any proof? I’m not going to disturb the King for small matters.” Din looked questioningly at Puck and he nodded. Din crammed into his pocket and pulled out the diamond ring. It glittered in the crystal lights of the castle. “Whoo-hoo!” yelled the guard. “That really is a ring fit for a king. That will open the doors for you!” The guards immediately made way for Din and Puck.

Puck said to Din: “Don’t put the ring back in your pocket. Here we can let it shine. Its brilliance is much more beautiful here in the crystal light than it was under the Earth.”

They came to the second gate. As the two of them came nearer with the glittering ring, the guards moved to the side and one of them rang a golden bell. Three light bearers stepped out from behind the last gate and accompanied Din and Puck to the crystal hall, the King’s Hall. Before they entered, Puck whispered: “Put the ring in your pocket!” Din did it.

There sat the King on his throne with his snowy-white beard, holding the jewel-encrusted scepter in his right hand. The twelve Gnome Elders were sitting around him in a half-circle. One of the light bearers announced the visitors. The King waved at them as a signal to come before the throne. He began speaking in a friendly manner:

“Now, Puck, have you been up to some new pranks and come to tell me about them for my amusement? Should I perhaps hire you as my court jester? A little more levity in the crystal palace would do us good!”

Puck was a little confused by the words of the King. He was not here for fun and he hadn't played any pranks for a long time. He answered: "Your Highness, we would like to report to you about two adventures: one sad and one wonderful."

"I'm curious now," remarked the King. "Do tell!"



"My King, after the big Gnome Assembly, I went with the good Din down to Deep Earth so as not to meet up with Proll and the Crackzers anymore. We came to the Blue Cliffs. Din knew that we might find rare gold inside. We were lucky and found a beautiful seam of gold. We carefully worked it out of the rock so that it wasn't marred. As soon as it was almost completely hammered out we became very tired. We lay down for a little

nap. When we woke up the band of gold was gone, ripped out, stolen. We thought at once that the three Crackzers and Proll, who had been following us, had done it.”

Din felt in his pocket and pulled out the end of the gold band together with the little piece of blue rock that was still on it. “See, Your Highness, this is the little bit that was left!”

The King listened to Puck and Din with growing interest and astonishment. He whispered something to a servant and the servant immediately left. He then took the evidence of the gold band from Din’s hand and held it up to a crystal magnifying glass. He could see exactly where the end had been torn. In the meantime, the servant returned and, to the amazement of Din and Puck, put *their* lost gold band in the King’s hand. The King examined the end of the gold band with the magnifying glass and then again the end of the gold band from Din with the piece of blue rock on it. He looked straight ahead, darkly, for a moment. Finally he said:

“Sooner or later, the truth always comes out! This gold band was brought to me a few days ago by Proll, as his gift. He declared that he had artfully hammered it from the Blue Cliffs himself with the greatest of care. I thanked him. But I did notice that the end had been broken off and was somewhat twisted. I thought perhaps his patience had given out at the end. Now, you two have brought me clear evidence of his lie and his shameful act. This Proll character is ripe for the sooty Land of Trolls!”

The King turned to his Council. “Are you not also of the opinion that this rascal should have to start over again at the bottom?” The Gnome Elders all nodded and voices could be

heard: “Sootify; start over at the bottom!” The King now turned to Puck and Din: “Here, take this gold band! It is yours.” With these words he gave a small nod to a servant who put the gold band into Puck’s hand.

However, Puck replied: “Honored King, Din and I hammered out the gold band and freed it from the earthly darkness for *you*. You were to have it for your own as our gift. Maybe Kafafuru, the goldsmith, can glue the lost tail of gold back on so that its form is perfect again. Kafafuru is very talented. I’ve watched him work. He would certainly carry out the task to your satisfaction.”

Puck approached the throne and put the gold band along with the thread of gold and the blue rock onto a crystal step. The King held out his hand as a thank-you, looked at them warmly and spoke: “I thank you, Puck and Din! I am so pleased about every gnome who has an eye for the truth and speaks true words. But now, Din should tell us the second and happier story.”

At the King’s signal, a servant pushed two crystal stools near the throne on which the two were now to take their places. Din began to tell the story, a little hesitatingly and stuttering at first: “Your Highness, we...we descended through...through the warm crevice down...always deeper...always deeper toward the Fiery Forge Cave. Beautiful diamond shining in black rocks. Hammered, freed, stuck in pocket. Further down, tongs trolls, grabbed us, wanted to sootify us. Puck – showed shining crystal, me – diamond. Didn’t sootify us. Kafafuru very happy, made big eyes. Made ring for King out of diamond.”

Din took a deep breath. He had never given such a long speech. As he took the ring out of his pocket and held it out, the King exclaimed brightly, "Aaahh!" He took the work of art in his hand and admired the glittering brilliance of the jewel. He put the treasure on his finger, drew Din to himself, and kissed him on the forehead. All twelve members of the Gnome Council bowed because they knew that with this sign Din had been chosen to be a servant to the King. He was now allowed to sit on a stool very near to the throne.

The King ordered four guards to approach. He spoke to them: "I give you this command. Go find Proll with his three trolls. Lead them down to the Fiery Forge. There they should be apprehended with tongs and sootified. From then on they shall remain sooty gnomes and devote themselves to hard work and service down there. That is where they belong. But tell Proll that this is the thanks of the King for his stolen gold band and for his lying tongue!

The four guards clanged their spears on their shields which meant: Your command will be carried out immediately. And away they went.

The King turned to Puck once again and said: "Dear Puck, I don't yet want to keep you here at my palace. I feel that you must still experience much more in the wide world. Have you a wish that I can fulfill for you?"

Puck almost didn't have the courage to say what his wish was that he had been carrying inside for a long time. But the King encouraged him with a friendly look. So, Puck said: "My King,

I have descended to the depths of the Earth. I would like once to climb above our kingdom to where the people live. I have heard they are remarkable creatures. Their eyes have become so dim that they can't even see us anymore.”

The King was slightly amazed at Puck's request, but he said: “Puck, if you are drawn to the Human Realm then your wish shall come true. You will be free to move about on the Earth for a time. How long, I will leave up to you. Find out how things are with the people up there. However, when you get back, you must tell me everything. I would especially like to learn much about the small children on the Earth, what they do, how they act, because the new generations of humankind will grow from them. But for today, you and Din may tour the castle and the crystal gardens. My cherished servant, Atahata, will guide you.” After these words, the King signaled Atahata forward and, with a wave of his scepter, released Din and Puck.



The Gnome King's Wonder Garden

Atahata was a friendly guide and accompanied Puck and Din to the King's grottos adjacent to the great hall. The palace rooms were really large grotto-caves that were ordered in a circular fashion around the throne room. A blue-red light from countless crystals shimmered, glittered and glimmered as they entered the first of the crystal grottos. Atahata pointed out the large number of crystal gnomes: "Look how they are working! From here they travel to all the large and small crystal caves in the mountains, carrying crystal light so that crystals can grow everywhere in the Earth. Crystals grow so slowly that they are hardly a finger's width bigger in a thousand years. The Earth must be permeated through and through with crystal light; it does her good.

Puck asked: "What do I hear humming so purely?"

Atahata answered: "When there is a lot of crystal light beaming together it sounds like that because it comes from the stars into the Earth."

Atahata, Din and Puck left the crystal grotto and went into the metal caves. There were an iron grotto, a copper, silver and gold grotto, and so forth. Each one had a different sound and

tone. Each one was occupied by different-looking gnomes. Atahata said: “The star rays are captured here from incredible distances and passed on into the Earth to the metal seams. Silver contains the forces of the Moon, gold the power of the Sun, Mars works in iron and Saturn in lead.”

Din added, to Puck’s amazement: “And Jupiter radiates into tin!”

Atahata agreed: “So it does! And the Earth remains active inside so long as she is permeated with the power of the metals.” Puck was awestruck at the amount of work that was done in the Gnome Kingdom. It seemed to him as if before now he had only been strolling through life, very ignorant.

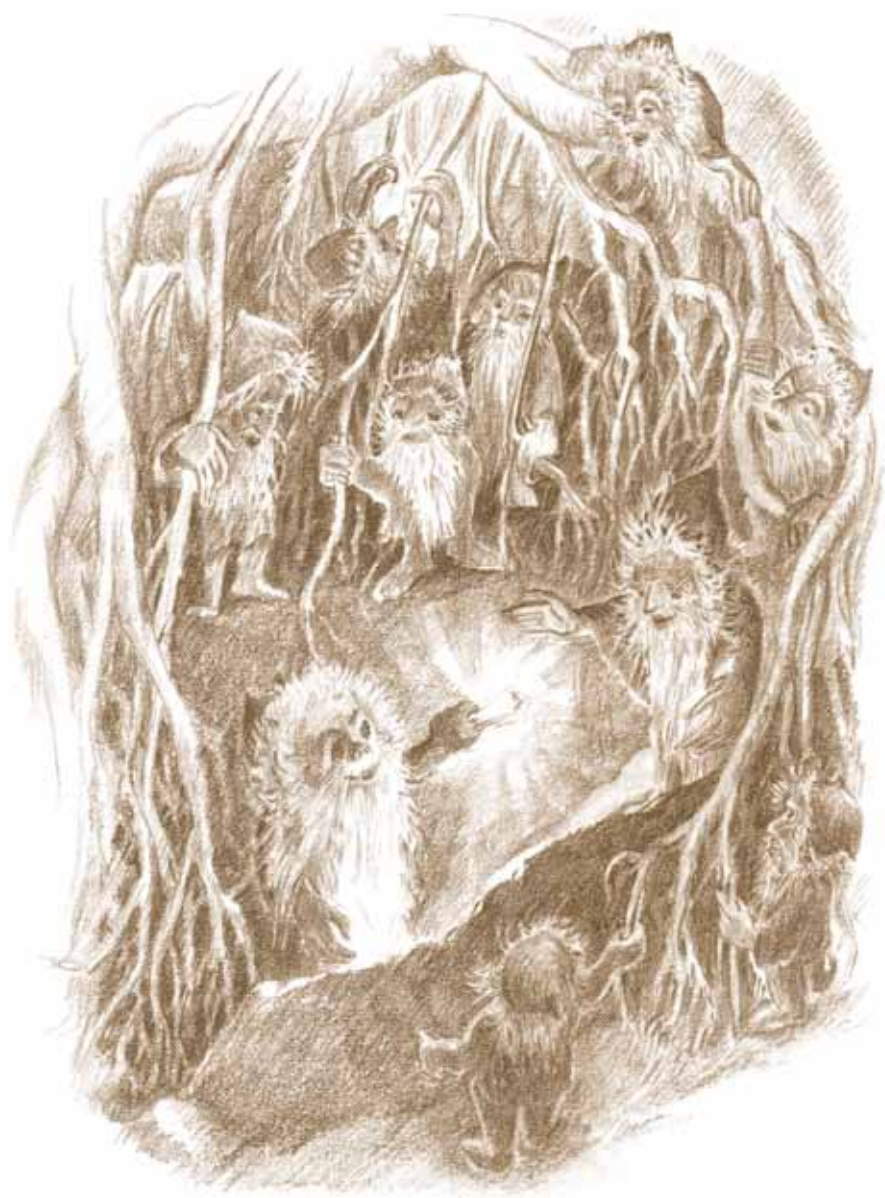
Atahata pointed to the milling throng: “Inside the Earth there are more Gnome Realms than there are Human Realms above the Earth. They enliven the Earth on the inside and guide these life forces up to the plants. That’s what the root gnomes do especially. Without them, no tree, no flower or plant would grow.”

Puck responded: “I’ve heard that people eat plants. Do the gnomes also look after their vegetables?”

“Yes, of course, vegetables also have roots that protrude into the Gnome Kingdom, into the Earth.”

Puck asked further: “Atahata, the King has allowed me to go up to the surface of the Earth. What do you think; can one visit people? Or do they try and hurt us gnomes?”

Atahata replied: “Most people don’t even see us because their eyes have become veiled. Sometimes there are young children who still have a perceptive eye. They can see you but they do nothing to hurt you.”



Puck asked: "Atahata, can you show me the way to people? I'm so curious to meet them."

"See, Puck, if you go outside in front of the King's Garden upwards to the cliffs, you will come to a little hill not far from a lake. People have built houses there. You will be able to go about invisibly among them there and look at what they do. But don't forget to take your shining crystal with you. It can be of good service to you. Leave the hammer with Din. It's best if you go at night. Then people don't make so much noise."

Puck felt strange as he handed his hammer over to Din but he did it without hesitating because no other gnome would care for it and watch over it as well as Din. It was only a pity that Din couldn't come with him to the Human Realm!

He said to Atahata: "Dear Master Gnome, I thank you for your good advice and that you showed me the Wonder Garden and explained them so beautifully."

He gave his friend Din a big hug and said: "Dear Din, we'll see each other again soon. I don't believe that I'll want to be very long without you. I know I still have much to learn before I can be your comrade and perhaps servant to the King." When he had finished speaking, Puck went out to the castle grotto gardens to find a place where he could climb up easily through the cliffs.



Puck in the Human Realm

Once again, Puck hid himself in a niche in the cliff. He wanted to think over when and where he should undertake his journey into the unknown. He was not used to being all alone again. He thought: "If only I knew if it were day or night right now up there? Maybe I'll meet other gnomes along the way who can tell me. Okay, time to go!"

As he was climbing up through the cliffs, Puck felt that the rocks were looser towards the top. When the cliffs came to an end, the Earth Kingdom with many roots began. Tiny root gnomes were crawling everywhere, loosening and crumbling earth, poking here and there, so that Puck got a few thumps. He got caught in a giant ball of roots that smelled strange. It was a good smell!

Suddenly in front of him stepped a root gnome master who was much larger than the others and asked him in a somewhat unfriendly manner: "What are you doing up here, stranger? You are a crystal gnome, aren't you? Are you looking for work? I'm the root master here and I would give you work right away!"

"No," Puck replied, "I'm not looking for work. I want to go up to the people." The root master suddenly grew a head taller

and screamed: “Not up to the people! Your work is *here*. And if you don’t crawl into the roots right now and begin working, I’ll have you tied up!”

Puck was shocked and stared into the root master’s angry eyes. He had already bent down to crawl into the roots when he remembered his shining crystal. He took it out, held it in front of the master who was still standing threateningly close, and said very calmly: “Here is my token from the King. I have a task in the Human Realm and have discussed it with the King.”

The mighty root master became a head shorter again, opened his mouth and let out a very long “Ahaaaaa.” Then he said courteously: “That is something different. Please excuse my anger! I couldn’t have known. I wish you a pleasant journey!”

But Puck asked: “Can you tell me if it is now day or night on the Earth above?”

“Yes, that I can tell you. I can smell it here in this big tree of roots. Up above on the Earth, it is a linden tree. It is still sending down into the Earth sunlight which the blooms above are drinking. Do you smell it also? So, up above it is still daytime; but not for long. The root aroma is already weaker.” Now Puck understood why there was such a wonderful smell in the roots, because bloom-sunlight energy came down into the Earth.

Puck thanked the root master for the information and slowly climbed up along the tree roots. He wanted to see what a linden tree was. When he peeked out of the roots by the tree trunk, he was blinded by the daylight even though he was standing in the shade. He sat down for awhile and listened to the buzzing of the bees. They were gathering the last of the evening honey.

Oh, was that a delicate singing and aroma! Puck nestled down by the tree trunk and closed his eyes. It was so beautiful up here in the world! He stretched out his little feet and lay down on his side. The buzzing tones made him fall asleep. He didn't notice when the Sun went down and evening came. When Puck awakened nighttime was upon the Earth and a cool breeze was blowing. He rubbed his eyes and looked around. Aha, the linden tree! He got up to get a better view. Yes, he was on top of a hill. Overhead, the Moon was in the sky and a few stars were glimmering. He could make out human houses below the hill and illumined windows and further down a large, still body of water; that must be the lake.

But look, two people are coming in the moonlight, hand in hand, right towards the linden tree. Puck couldn't understand their soft words. They must have been lovely words because he could see that a delicate rainbow was shining over the two and that it glistened like flowers inside. "They're nice to each other," thought Puck. "It must be wonderful to be a human being!"

Only now did he notice that there was a little bench under the tree. He quickly withdrew to the side, even though the pair didn't see him, because he wanted to keep going toward the houses with the bright windows. On the way, he stood still once more and listened to the linden tree. He thought he heard a high human voice singing: "That must surely be a Moon song."

Just as he neared the first house, a clattering monster with glowing eyes came out. It rolled on wheels, bellowed and left behind a stinking cloud. Two people were sitting inside. The monster quickly rolled away and disappeared in the distance.

It took Puck a little while to recover from the scare. Would more such stinkers come out of the house? No, everything remained quiet. Inside the house there was one tiny window lighted. Puck easily climbed up the wall and looked inside. A little human boy was lying in a small bed, crying. A bigger person was bent over the crying baby boy and Puck heard the words: "Mother and Father have gone on a visit. They'll be back soon." But the little brother could not be consoled. His older sister sang a song and clapped her hands. The little boy cried louder still. Puck went through the window and sat on the windowsill. Suddenly, the baby was quiet and pointed at Puck. "Aha," thought Puck, "he still has the perceptive eye and can see me."

The girl also looked toward the window but didn't see anything special and was just happy that her brother had finally stopped crying. She said: "Yes, yes, Daniel, outside the Moon is shining and it is happy when little children sleep." Puck waved at little Daniel. Daniel grinned and waved back. But the girl said: "Yes, wave at the Moon. I'll leave the light on for a little while, but I have homework to do now. Good night!"

She left the room and was very satisfied that her little brother had quieted down so quickly. She was just outside the room when she turned around, walked up to the bed and said: "Daniel, we forgot to say the prayer." So Puck saw the little boy and the girl fold their hands and pray:

"When I sleep at even tide,
Angel standing at my side
Guide me with your loving eyes
Through the starry paradise."

Again Puck saw a rainbow over the two that further up widened into a smooth path up to the stars. After his sister left the room, Puck sat by Daniel on the blanket. Daniel softly asked: “Are you the Man in the Moon?”

“No, little Earth man, my name is Puck.”

Daniel invited: “You can sleep next to me; do you want to?”

“Maybe for a little while.”

“Did you say your bedtime prayer?”

“Don’t know any.”

“I’ll say one for you.”

Daniel folded his hands and directed Puck to do the same. So Puck also put his hands together and Daniel began:

“Even...tide,
Angel...side,
Guide...eyes,
Pa-la-mise.”

Then something wonderful happened. Puck saw how shortly after the prayer, which Daniel had said with already half-closed eyes, his eyes shut completely. Something shining lifted itself out of his body and floated upward. The rainbow had disappeared and Puck heard how the peaceful Daniel was quietly breathing. Puck lay down on the blanket and rose up and down a little with every breath. He liked that. Steps came closer. Daniel’s sister looked inside and turned out the light; the Moon was softly glowing into the room.

Puck was happy: “Now I know how little children fall asleep. I’ll tell the King about it. But what happens when a human child awakens? Maybe I can come back tomorrow and be here when

Daniel wakes up. Until then I'll go for a walk in the moonlight.” So Puck disappeared again through the window and climbed down the wall. He saw the flowers in the nighttime garden and how they drank moonlight. Suddenly he heard a dampened human voice from behind a tree. What was that?



Two dark fellows were sneaking along the house. He heard one say: “All the lights in the house are out. We can get to work. You can try to break in the front door, and I’ll be on the lookout in case anyone comes.”

Puck saw that when this rascal spoke, something like a wispy snake seemed to trail from his mouth and the other one, the lookout, seemed to have claws growing from his fingertips. These were rogues who wanted to steal something. A flashlight flickered on by the front door and the would-be-intruder began

trying to break in with a bundle of keys, trying to see if any of them would fit the lock. Puck was very angry with him. He jumped up on his arm and pinched wherever he could. The rascal moaned: "Ouch, ouch, I have a cramp!" He said to his accomplice: "Here, take the keys, try it! My arm is completely lame!" Puck did the same thing with the second one and, cursing, threw the key ring to the ground.

At that moment a motor could be heard in the distance. The lookout called quietly: "Botheration, they're coming back!" They both ran away through the meadow. Puck hurried to follow them. He grabbed one of the fleeing ones by the foot causing him to fall headlong into the wet grass and lose the keys. The flashlight was flickering wildly in front of him so he left the lost keys and ran after his companion. The companion had rashly run into a low-hanging tree branch and was rubbing the bump on his head. The rogues disappeared in the direction of the town. Puck stood still and looked sadly into the night. He thought: "Aha, so there are also such people, human Prolls!"

As Puck was making his way through the meadow by moonlight, he came to a little house. In the middle of the night there was a light shining in one window. He climbed up to the windowsill and looked inside the room where he saw a woman sitting on the bed of a little girl. Was the girl sick? Puck saw that there seemed to be red, restless flames of color rising up from her little head. The mother brushed perspiration from the child's forehead with a damp cloth and gave her something to drink from a glass. She took a fevered hand in hers and wrapped her arm around her child. And then Puck saw again how a beautiful

rainbow formed from the mother to the child. He saw how the mother stroked the child. Puck thought: "This rainbow is the most beautiful thing."

He sat down in a corner of the room to admire the play of colors. Suddenly the little girl called out: "Mother, a little man! Do you see the little man?" The mother was startled because she thought: "Oh, the child has fever and is delirious. I'll go and get Father." She left the room. Puck sat on the blanket and stroked the girl's hands just like her mother had done. She smiled and a reddish-glowing light floated out of her and circled upwards. When her mother and father came in, the little girl was in a deep sleep and her breathing was quiet.

"Thank God!" said her mother, "she could fall asleep. If only she can sleep until morning." She turned off the light and it was soon quiet in the little house.

Puck suddenly thought of his shining crystal. Could it perhaps help the sick child? He took it out of his pocket and made quiet circles above her hot little head: three times to the left, three times to the right, again and again.

Every so often Puck listened to her breathing. It seemed to him that it was slowly becoming easier and more regular. Suddenly Puck noticed that a delicate rainbow was forming between him and the little girl such as he had never experienced before in the Gnome Kingdom. So he continued making the circles and was very peaceful. He felt as if a new sound had come into his heart through the rainbow. He thought: "How wonderful it is to help human children!" And then a stronger light came into the rainbow and Puck suddenly felt as if a wide doorway

had opened up above through which he could gaze at the angels for just a moment. His arm was getting tired so he slowly made smaller and smaller circles and finally fell asleep himself upon the blanket.

When Puck woke up dawn had broken. The girl's hot cheeks were cool and the little fiery flames had disappeared. The fever was gone. Puck left the room and the house. But his heart was full of a golden tone that remained in him from the rainbow. He wandered back over the meadow to be there when Daniel awoke. There was a light fog above the meadow. It sprinkled a web of shiny dew on the grass and flowers. Puck waved at them, but he didn't have time to stay.

Daniel was still sleeping peacefully when Puck entered his room. Puck noticed a shimmer of light that floated up, touched Daniel and immersed itself a little bit into his head. Suddenly Daniel was speaking odd words with his eyes still closed. Oh, he was dreaming. He rubbed his eyes with his fists. Daniel opened his eyes and began to softly sing: "La, la, le...la, la, le." Seeing Puck sitting on the windowsill, he stopped abruptly.

He cheered: "Little man, are you here again? Little man, I want to give you something!" Daniel took his little stuffed bear and brought it to Puck so that he could also pet the bear. And Puck did, even though it seemed strange to pet a stuffed animal. Now Daniel danced around the room with the bear and Puck had to dance along.

The door opened. Mother came inside, picked up the little boy and held him to her heart. The little boy cried: "Little bear is dancing and little man is dancing; Mother, you dance too!"

And Mother also turned around in circles, but she danced out into a small room. Puck followed. A little stream of water was flowing there into a big, white bowl. The woman took a cloth and wiped Daniel's ears and face with water and he shouted with delight.

Puck thought: "Odd customs these people have with the little children." But Daniel seemed to like it and he made a quacking noise. Are people part fish and that's why they like to splash in water so much? I have to tell the King about this also. Strange, first she made the boy all wet and now she was drying him again with a towel. Why was that? Puck couldn't think of an answer.

But look, now she was putting a brush into his mouth that had a red ointment on it. And then Daniel spit out into the white bowl everything that she had smeared in his mouth. Puck didn't understand anything. These strange people! But there was more: The woman took something like a little saw and put it through the boy's hair over and over. But she still wasn't able to saw off his hair. Finally she put a colorful suit of clothing on him.

"Oh, no," thought Puck. "I don't want to be a human child and every morning have to let myself be splashed, brushed and sawed! It's a wonder that Daniel doesn't constantly cry out when he is handled that way. No, thanks! I'm staying a gnome."

Puck left and went out to the meadow again. Should I go to the little house again and look in on the sick little girl? Yes, I'll do it!

She was sitting upright in her little bed and Mother was next to her. She was eating a slice of bread with honey. Father was also

there and Mother said to him: "Rhea is doing so much better today. The fever is gone. A miracle happened last night. Yesterday evening I was so worried about her." Rhea said: "Mother, I dreamed about a little man. He was so nice and he shone a silver light around in circles over my head. Mother, where do such little men come from? I really saw him!"

"Dear Rhea, it was only a dream and dreams can be beautiful."

Puck felt very sad that the mother didn't know anything about him. Rhea also seemed not to see him anymore since she didn't have any fever. "Yes, yes," thought Puck. "People have their special lives and we gnomes have our different lives." All at once Puck had a great longing to go back to the Gnome Kingdom. It was nice to get to know human children, but Puck realized how everything was different here and so he wanted to go back to Din and his own folk.

As he left the little house and returned to the meadow, the linden tree became visible in the distance. He turned back to it. What wonderful buzzing was to be heard there from a thousand bees! Puck crawled into his root niche, looked once more at the beautiful, sunny world and let himself slowly sink into the Earth.

There were all the scrambling root gnomes again. The root master waved at Puck, grinning, and asked: "Have you already had enough of the Human Realm?" Puck waved back and quickly slid past him deeper into the Earth. Close to the Gnome Palace, he came upon the crystal path. He wanted to look for Din to tell him about the people and the kingdom upon the Earth.

He rang the bell at the castle gates and a guard opened to him. "Aha, Puck is back! Din asked me three times already today if you had returned. You see, you're expected!"

"Where can I find Din?"

"He's working in the silver grotto today. Look, back there, he's coming!"

Din came and was carefully carrying a silver bowl with a shining crystal inside. Puck hid behind the guard. He heard Din ask in a sad voice: "Has Puck not yet returned?" The guard sprung aside and Puck stood before Din. He grabbed Din with one hand, the bowl with the other and circled round with him. Din stopped and asked: "Was it nice up there in the Human Realm? You came back so soon, or were you even there? Come on, tell me!"

Din sat with Puck in a small crystal cave. Puck began to tell the story. He told about the root master who wanted to tie him up, about the rainbow and the two moonlight strollers at the linden tree, about Daniel and the sick girl that he was able to help with his shining crystal, about the rogue would-be thieves that he was able to chase away from the house.

Din asked: "So people also have rotten rascals in their midst like we have Proll and the Crackzers? If only there was something that would get rid of all the bad in the world!" Puck answered: "I think if more and more rainbows would shine in the Human Realm and if they could also shine in the Gnome Kingdom, then the darkness would give way and more and more light could shine through the Earth."

Din replied: "Look, there's a little rainbow between us, too!" Puck saw that there really was a delicate rainbow shining over from him to Din, and he said: "Look, Din, maybe I brought it with me from the Human Realm!"

Din took the silver bowl which he had laid down beside him, and said: "Puck, you must tell the King about your experiences with people. Maybe he knows a way that it can also shine more and more in the Gnome Kingdom."

Din reached into his vest. He brought out Puck's hammer that he always carried with him. He put it in Puck's hand and said: "Here Puck, take back your hammer because you can't appear before the King without it!"



At the King's Council

Just as Puck and Din had started on their way to the King's Hall, a fellow gnome who had very wide feet quickly caught up with them. He was about to pass them when Din recognized him and greeted him: "Is that you, brother Wandro? Are you in such a hurry? Look, here is my friend Puck. You haven't met him yet." Wandro stopped and greeted Din and Puck by tickling their feet three times with his wide, right foot. Puck almost had to laugh out loud when he saw how large Wandro's toes were. Wandro said a little hastily: "I can't be late. The King's Assembly is starting soon and I have to report about my trip to the Human Realm."

Din reassured him: "There's no hurry. We're also going there. Puck also wants to tell about *his* journey to the Human Realm."

Now Wandro was amazed: "What can *you* have to tell? Myself, I'm going to talk about how people and animals live together."

Puck, who was still looking at the big toes, answered: "My story will be about something completely different. I visited little children. The King wants to hear about it."

“Good, good,” said Wandro, “but you still haven’t wandered very far upon the Earth; I can tell by looking at your feet. Look at *my* wandering feet, they could tell stories. They got very wide and big because of all the walking!” With these words Wandro smiled so wide and happily that Puck immediately liked him. All at once the wandering gnome was earnest: “Yes, yes, up there with the people is a strange time. Long ago there were only people and animals roaming around and birds circling in the air. Now you have to search out a lonely place if you don’t want to be constantly bothered by the noise and stink of their hupos and now metal birds are flying through the air!”

Puck nodded. He hadn’t noticed the metal birds, but now he knew that the clattering wagons with the fiery eyes were called “hupos” in gnome language. In the meantime the three had come to the entrance to the Gnome Palace. Their talk subsided. A guard took them inside and escorted them through the gate into the inner palace.

All the council members were already present around the King’s throne when Puck, Din and Wandro were led into the hall. A servant asked the wandering gnome to sit nearby and a crystal stool was also offered to Puck. Din withdrew to the back with the rest of the servants.

The King first gave the signal to Wandro to begin as he was seated upon the throne.

“Honored King, honored council members, I would very much like to tell of my experiences and travels in the Human Realm. Today I’m telling the story of the happy and the angry farmers. Our King gave me the assignment of finding out how

it goes with people and animals up on top of the Earth. So, I went to a farm in a quiet valley upon the Earth at the time of the last moon phase. There was no other farm in sight, far and wide. The house had many windows because people don't like to sit in the dark.

“In a garden in front there were many flowers blooming. A woman was in the garden caring for the flowers. She loosened the earth with an iron-claw hand that was attached to a stick. She poured out water over the roots from a container with a long nose. Every so often she would pull a flower up to her nose in order to suck in the smell. People believe that whoever sucks in a lot of flower aroma gets a beautiful soul. In between she would talk to a cat that rubbed up against her legs and arched its back.

“Swallows flew to their nests that they had built under the eaves of the house and fed their young with mosquitoes and flies. Chickens clucked in the yard and scratched in the dirt and the rooster called out a proud ‘cock-a-doodle-doo.’ The woman seemed to like that. She got grain from the house and threw a few handfuls for the feathered animals on the ground. That was a fun game; how quickly the chickens could pick! And always hundreds of bees were flying from a little house close by and visited the flowers in the garden and the meadow and carried honey-nectar back to their hive.

“Suddenly a door opened. A boy drove the cows out onto the pasture with a loud ‘hoo-hooo!’ Some of the cows had bells around their necks. They rang so beautifully that I jumped up onto a cow's back and rode her out to the pasture. The herdsman boy knew every cow by name, strange names like Blush,

Char, Crown, Star, and so on. He would scratch one or the other behind the ears and then he sang quirky little songs again without real words that sounded like ‘Holioduhu’ and so on. The cows lay down on the ground when they had eaten their fill of juicy grass and they chewed their cud. Many gnome brothers came out from among the roots onto the pasture and played games together among the peaceful animals. They sat on the cow’s horns or on their backs or they especially liked to sit on the ends of their tails because they could arch through the air when the cows switched their tails.

“So that’s how the gnome brothers got their recreation in the cow pasture. But I wanted to visit the cow’s houses. That’s where I found the *happy farmers*. I have to say, cows aren’t much for cleaning up. They make a powerful lot of manure and their entire house was full of it. But the farmer didn’t mind and he raked all of it together. He had a one-wheeled cart with two handles that he used to put all the manure into one pile. He layered it carefully up as if he was building a house of manure. He was very happy doing it, whistled a song and a dog was cheerfully barking around him. As soon as the farmer had all the manure outside, he went and got some gold-yellow straw. He used it to make the cows fresh, warm beds. The boy had brought all the cows back from the pasture and I was anxious to see what would happen next. And what do you think; the farmer sat himself down halfway underneath a cow and began rummaging around under her stomach. White water flowed out of the cow and into a bucket that the farmer held between his knees. It must have been herb water because it smelled like the pasture. The boy took

a brush and went from cow to cow brushing and cleaning them. Yes, that's exactly everything I saw. These people were friendly and nice to the animals and served them well. But what they do with all the white herb water, I couldn't say. That could be looked into sometime. Perhaps they bathe in it?

“The next day I traveled further down into the valley. There I came to a large farm, much larger than the first one. But everything was so strangely still there. There was no flower garden in front of the house, no chickens clucking in the yard, no cow to be seen. I thought: Where are all the animals? I slipped into a very long building. There were many hundreds of chickens locked in wire cages. They could hardly move. They had hardly any feathers left. They were so bored that they picked out their own feathers if they had any. They just looked around; bleak and woeful. I went into the cow house. There was no soft straw to be seen. The animals had to stand and lie down on metal bars and no one had given them names. Nobody took them out into the open. Machines were rattling around the pasture. No bees were buzzing. No swallows were flying around. No person sang a song. Instead, there was a human-like voice screeching out of a black box in the cow stall that never stopped. Two or three people were walking around with sour faces as if they didn't like their work. The farmer angrily scolded a helper because one of the machines was broken. There was a pervasive smell of poison everywhere on the land and pastures, especially where a man was spraying yellow water on a tree. I felt ill and slipped down into the ground. There were hardly any worms to be seen. One of them complained: ‘My worm brothers have already moved

away. The ground has become hard and sour. It burns inside our bodies when we eat clumps of dirt!

“Yes, Your Highness, that’s how it was with the *angry farmer*. I ask myself: Are people beginning to forget that the animals have been entrusted to them? Even animals want to enjoy their lives! Why are more and more people becoming enemies of the animals?”

Wandro was silent.

The Gnome King was looking thoughtfully straight ahead. Then he spoke: “It’s becoming clearer that there are two kinds of people: One kind loves the Earth, the animals, the plants, and they take care of them. The other kind often has dark thoughts. Then they forget that animals also experience joy and sorrow, and they abuse the Earth and the Creation. But we gnomes are happy about every human being that loves the Earth, the plants and the animals!”

Once again the King turned to Wandro and spoke: “We thank you, Wandering Gnome, that you brought us such a clear report about the two kinds of people and how they interact with the animals. We would hope that people realize what is right before it is too late! But now, Puck should tell us what he met up with in the Human Realm!”

Puck arose and began to tell his story: “Honored King, honored council members, on my journey to the people I had very good fortune. I went through the roots of a linden tree up to the top of the Earth. At first I rested under the tree so I could get used to the bright daylight. Soon it became night. It was on top of a hill and the Moon was shining over a lake. A

pair of people came hand in hand walking up to the tree. They liked each other very much. I saw a rainbow that had formed above them and it followed along with them. It was bowed from heart to heart something like a rainbow in the sky, only much smaller. Then I knew: that's how human love shines. Then I came to a house with lighted windows. I saw how little children fall asleep. They fold their hands together, say a few good words, and soon their spirits circle upwards to the world of the stars. Their bodies stay in bed and life beats on in their hearts. Their breath moves their chests slowly up and down. I think all people are nice when they're asleep.

“But, I also met some bad people. Two rascals were sneaking around in the night. They wanted to break into the house and rob it. I saw that the darkness went right into their hearts. When they talked, something like snakes twisted out of their mouths and claws came out of their fingers.

“Most people can't see us gnomes. Their eyes are dim. But a few of the small children saw me.

“Then I also visited a child who was sick. Something like red flames was coming from her head. I moved my shining crystal above her head in slow circles. The flickering flames slowly disappeared. The sickness left her and by morning she was well and happy. I noticed that a delicate rainbow formed from me to this child. I felt so blessed within its brilliance, I can hardly put it into words.”

Puck paused in his story. He noticed that the King was listening to him very thoughtfully. Then he had a bold thought. He said: “Honored King, here in the Gnome Kingdom we have so

much beautiful crystal light, jewels and shining gold. Why don't we have rainbows like people do? If many more gnome brothers would go to the Human Realm, wouldn't the rainbow light of love return with them into our Gnome Kingdom?"

The King contemplated that for a while and then he said: "Yes, Puck, you are right. Before, when you were telling your story, there was a shimmering light like a rainbow around you. It was beautiful! Since the dark soul shadows and cold thoughts are becoming ever stronger among people, we should see that the rainbow world becomes stronger both *on* the Earth and *in* the Earth. That is how we gnomes can also remain loyal to people. Then in the Human Realm as well as the Gnome Kingdom the inner Sun can illuminate the Earth. If people again love the plants and animals, then they would also think of us again who invisibly work for them inside the Earth. After all, we are the ones who help the plants grow to be used as food for people, their daily bread, and also food for the animals."

The King thought for a moment, raised his head again and spoke: "A thought has occurred to me. Puck, I would like to name you the first "Servant of the Rainbow" in the Gnome Kingdom! You have experience of how it is formed. Search out a few companions who can accompany you into the Human Realm from time to time so that they get to know the rainbow world of human love and bring something of it back into our kingdom. Will you do it?"

Puck pointed towards Din and asked: "Your Highness, may I take Din along? It already started to shine between us because we have shared joy and sorrow."

The King answered: “Puck, I will grant you that, if Din wants to go with you. I hope that you will soon become a large group that can build rainbow bridges between the Gnome Kingdom and the Human Realm.”

Puck looked over at Din. Din jumped up from the crystal stool, came up to Puck and reached out both his hands. He didn’t say a word, but the King and all the King’s Council could see that a beautiful rainbow floated above them just like a bright, open door. And then something unexpected happened. Wandro had been listening to Puck’s story with open mouth and again and again rubbing his feet on the ground. He did that when something made him very happy or excited. He had already been with people so often and had never noticed a rainbow.



His heart was moved by the last words of the King. He stood up, went to Puck and Din and said: “Brothers, look at my feet! They tell you that I know the ways of the people upon the Earth. May I join you and become the third member of your group? I mean, I fit in pretty well with you: Din has the biggest and finest head, Puck has an open and good heart, and I’ve got the greatest feet and my hands are able.” Wandro spread his arms wide and nodded back and forth to each of his hands.

Puck grabbed him from the left and Din from the right. All three bowed good-bye to the King and, hand-in-hand, they strode out through the crystal gate towards new paths and adventures in the Human Realm.

The End



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