

# **THE SNOW QUEEN**

A fairytale in seven stories

## **First story, which deals with the mirror and the shards of glass.**

Right then! Time to start. When we're at the end of the story we'll know more than we do now, for it has to do with an evil ogre! one of the very worst – it was 'the devil'! One day he was in a really good mood, for he had made a mirror that had the property of reducing everything good and beautiful that was reflected in it into practically nothing, but whatever was fit for nothing and looked bad grew more pronounced and became even worse. The loveliest landscapes looked like boiled spinach in it, and the best of people turned ugly or stood on their heads with no stomach, their faces became so distorted that they were unrecognisable, and if someone had a freckle, you could be sure that it spread out over both nose and mouth. It was most amusing, 'the devil' said. If a good pious thought went through the mind of a person, a grin appeared in the mirror, so that the ogre devil had to laugh at his ingenious invention. Everyone who went to an ogre school – for he ran such a place – said far and wide that a miracle had taken place; now for the first time one could really see, they felt, what the world and people really looked like. They ran around with the mirror, and finally there wasn't a country or a single person that had not been distorted in it. Now they wanted to fly up to Heaven itself to make fun of the angels and the 'Good Lord'. The higher they flew with the mirror, the louder it laughed, they could hardly hold onto it; higher and higher they flew, closer to God and the angels; then the mirror shook so violently as it grinned that it shot out of their hands and crashed down onto the ground, where it shattered into hundreds of millions, billions and even more pieces, and that was precisely what caused even more misfortune than before, for some of the pieces were scarcely as big as a grain of sand, and these flew all over the world, and wherever they got into people's eyes, they stayed put and then those people saw everything wrong, or only had eyes for what was bad about something, for every speck of the mirror had retained the same power as the whole mirror had possessed; some people even got a tiny mirror-shard in their heart, and that was quite horrible – the heart became like a lump of ice. Some pieces of the mirror were so large that they were used for window-panes, but it wasn't worth looking at one's friends through that pane; others were put in spectacles, and things went badly when people put on those glasses so as to see clearly and be just; the evil ogre laughed till his stomach burst, and that tickled him so wonderfully. But there were even more shards of glass flying around everywhere in the air. Listen now!

## **The second story. A little boy and a little girl.**

In the big city, where there are so many houses and people so that there is not enough space for everyone to have a little garden, and where most people for that reason have to make do with flowers in pots, there were two poor children who nevertheless had a garden that was a bit bigger than a flower-pot. They were not brother and sister, but they were as fond of each other as if they had been. Their parents lived close to each other; they lived in two attics; where the roof from one next-door house met that of the other and the gutter followed the eaves, a small window faced outwards from each house; you only needed to step over the gutter to get from the one window to the other.

Outside the windows both their parents had a large wooden box where they grew the vegetables they needed as well as a small rose-tree – there was one in each box and they grew there so beautifully. The parents came to place the boxes across the gutter so that they almost reached from one window to the other and they looked almost exactly like two embankments of flowers. The long pea-stalks hung down over the edges of the boxes, and the rose-trees grew long branches, wound themselves round the windows, bent towards each other: It was almost like a triumphal arch of greenery and flowers. Since the boxes were very high, and the children knew that they were not allowed to clamber up onto them, they were often both allowed to climb out to each other and sit on their small stools under the roses, and there they played so marvellously together.

In the winter, that pleasure was of course denied them. The windows were often completely frozen shut, but they would heat small copper coins on the tiled stove, place a hot coin on the frozen window-pane and it would form so round, perfectly round a fine peephole, behind which a wonderfully mild eye would peer out, one from each window – that of the little boy and the little girl. His name was Kay and hers was Gerda. In the summer they could get together by taking one big step; in the winter they first had to go down many stairs and up many stairs – outside the snow was swirling.

‘They are white bees that are swarming,’ the old grandmother said.

‘Do they also have a bee-queen?’ the little boy asked, for he knew that among real bees there is such a queen.

‘They do indeed!’ the grandmother said. ‘She flies where they are swarming at their thickest! she is the largest of them all, and she never remains still on the ground, she keeps on flying up into the black cloud. On many a winter night she flies through the city streets and looks in through the windows, and then they freeze over so strangely, as if with flowers.’

‘Yes, I’ve seen that!’ both the children said, and so they knew it was true.

‘Can the Snow Queen come in here?’ the little girl asked.

‘Just let her try and come in’ the boy said, ‘and I’ll put her on the hot stove, and then she’ll melt.’

But the grandmother smoothed his hair and told them other stories.

One evening when little Kay was at home and half undressed, he crept up onto the chair by the window and looked out of the small hole; a few snowflakes were drifting down, and one of these, the largest of them, came to lie on the edge of one of the flower-boxes; the snowflake grew and grew, and finally it turned into a whole woman, dressed in the finest, white gauze that was made up of millions of starlike flakes. She was very fine and beautiful, but made of ice, of blinding, twinkling ice, and yet she was alive; her eyes stared like two bright stars, although there was no calmness or rest in them. She nodded at the window and waved with her hand. The little boy took fright and jumped down from the chair, it was as if a large bird flew past the window.

The next day there was a clear frost, – and then it began to thaw, the sun shone, everything turned green, the swallows built their nests, the windows were opened, and the small children sat once more in their tiny garden high up in the gutter above all the storeys of the houses.

The roses bloomed so marvellously that summer; the little girl had learnt a hymn and it talked of roses, and when she read that she thought about her own roses; and she sang it for the little boy, and he joined in:

The roses are in blossom in the vale;

There the Christ child too speaks without fail.

And they held each other by the hand, kissed the roses and gazed into God's bright sunshine and spoke to it as if the Christ child was there. What delightful summer days they were, how wonderful it was to be out there with the fresh rose-trees that never seemed as if they would stop blooming.

It was when Kay and Gerda sat there looking at a picture book with animals and birds – the clock was just striking five on the great church steeple – that Kay said: 'Ow, something's stuck me in the heart! and now I've got something in my eye!' The little girl held him by the neck; he blinked his eyes; no, there was nothing to be seen.

'I think it's out again!' he said – but it wasn't. For it was one of the specks of glass that came from the mirror, the magic mirror – remember – the horrid glass that made everything large and good that was reflected in it become tiny and horrible, but what was evil and nasty became more obvious, and everything wrong with something was immediately noticeable. A tiny shard had also gone right into poor Kay's heart. Soon his heart would be like a lump of ice. It no longer hurt, but it was still there.

'What are you crying for?' he asked 'It makes you look ugly! There's nothing the matter with me! Ugh!' he suddenly cried out: 'That rose over there's all worm-eaten! and look, that one's all crooked! they really are such ugly roses – they look like the boxes they're standing in!' and he gave the box a hard shove with his foot and broke off the two roses.

'Kay, what are you doing!' the little girl shouted; and when he saw how shocked she was, he pulled another rose off and then rushed inside from his window, away from sweet little Gerda.

When she later came with the picture book, he said that it was only for babies, and if the grandmother told them stories, he always came up with some objection – and if he could, he would follow after her, put a pair of glasses on and speak exactly the way she did – so convincingly that it made people laugh at him. He was soon able to follow everyone in the whole street and mimic them. Everything that was a bit odd about them and not very fetching Kay was able to imitate, and then people said: 'That boy's certainly got a clever head on his shoulders!' but it was the piece of glass he had got in his eye, the glass that was lodged in his heart, that was why he teased even little Gerda, who loved him with all her soul.

The games he played were so different from before – they were so dictated by reason: – One winter's day, when the snowflakes came swirling down, he came with a large burning-glass, held out the corner of his blue coat and let the snowflakes fall on it.

'Just look in the glass, Gerda!' he said, and every snowflake became much larger and looked like a magnificent flower or a ten-pointed star – it was lovely to look at.

'See, how ingenious!' Kay said, 'it's much more interesting than real flowers are! and there isn't a single fault in them anywhere, they are perfectly accurate – as long as they don't melt!'

Shortly afterwards, Kay came along with big gloves and his sledge on his back; he shouted right into Gerda's ear: 'I've been given permission to go sledging on the great square where the others play!' and off he rushed.

On the square the boldest boys often fastened their sledges to the farmer's cart and were pulled a really long way. That was great fun. Right in the middle of their game, a large sleigh came along; it was painted completely white and in it sat someone wrapped in a thick white fur with a thick furry cape; the sleigh went round the square twice, and Kay quickly fastened his small sledge to it, and now he got a ride too. It went faster and faster into the next street; the person driving it looked backwards and nodded to Kay in a friendly way, almost as if they knew each other; each time Kay wanted to unfasten his small sledge, the person nodded once more, and Kay stayed where he was; they drove straight out of the city gate. Then the snow started to fall so thick and fast that the little boy couldn't see a hand in front of his face, while he hurtled along – then he quickly let go of the string to free

himself from the big sleigh, but that didn't help him a bit, his little sledge was still attached and he was travelling as fast as the wind. Then he shouted very loudly, but no one heard him, and the snow whirled past and the sledge flew along; from time to time it gave a leap – it was as if he was travelling over ditches and fences. He was quite frightened, wanted to say his Lord's Prayer, but all he could remember was his multiplication table from ten to twenty.

The snowflakes grew larger and larger, finally they looked like large white hens; suddenly they leapt to one side, the large sleigh came to a halt, and the person driving it stood up, the great fur and cape were completely of snow; it was a lady, so tall and straight, so gleamingly white: it was the Snow Queen.

'We've arrived safely!' she said, 'but do you call that freezing! creep into my bear-fur coat!' and she placed him in the sleigh with her, wrapped the fur round him, it felt like sinking into a snowdrift.

'Are you still freezing cold!' she asked, and then kissed him on the forehead. Uh! it was colder than ice, it went right to his heart, which had already half-turned into a lump of ice; it was as if he was going to die; – but only for a moment, then it felt fine; he could no longer notice the cold around him.

'My sledge, don't forget my sledge!' he only remembered that now; and it was attached to one of the white hens, and it flew behind with the sledge on its back. The Snow Queen kissed Kay once more, and then he had forgotten little Gerda and grandmother and all of them back home.

'That's all the kisses you're getting!' she said, 'for otherwise I would kiss you to death!'

Kay looked at her, she was so beautiful, he couldn't imagine a cleverer, lovelier face, now she didn't seem to be of ice, as she did when she sat outside his window and waved to him; in his eyes she was perfect, he didn't feel the slightest bit afraid, he told her that he could do mental arithmetic, and fractions, knew the area of countries and 'how many inhabitants', and she smiled the whole time; then he felt that what he knew wasn't enough, and he looked up into the vast, vast realms of the air and she flew with him, flew high up onto the black cloud, and the storm roared and raged, it was as if it was singing old songs. They flew over forests and lakes, over seas and lands; beneath them the cold wind roared, the wolves howled, the snow glittered, with black screeching crows flying above it, but above everything the moon shone so large and bright, and Kay gazed at it the long, long wintry night; during the day he slept at the Snow Queen's feet.

### **Third story.**

#### **The flower-garden of the woman who knew the art of sorcery**

But how were things with little Gerda, now that Kay no longer came? Where could he be? – No one knew, no one had anything to tell. The boys could only say that they had seen him tie his small sledge to a magnificent large sleigh that drove off into the street and out at the city gate. No one knew where he was, many tears were shed, little Gerda wept profoundly and a long time; – then they said that he was dead, had drowned in the river that ran close to the city; oh, these were drawn-out, dismal winter days.

Then spring came and the sun grew warmer.

'Kay is dead and gone!' little Gerda said.

'I don't believe it!' the sunshine said.

'He's dead and gone!' she said to the swallows.

'I don't believe it!' they answered, and finally little Gerda didn't either.

'I'll put on my new, red shoes,' she said one morning, 'Kay's never seen them, and I'll go down to the river and ask it!'

And it was quite early; she kissed the old grandmother, who was asleep, put on the red shoes and went all on her own out of the city gate to the river.

‘Is it true that you have taken my little playmate? I will give you my red shoes if you will return him to me!’

And the waves, she thought, nodded so strangely; then she took off her red shoes – her most precious possession – and flung both of them out into the river, but they fell close to the shore, and the small waves bore them back to her on the land, it was as if the river did not want to take the most precious thing she owned because it did not have little Kay; but she now thought that she hadn’t thrown the shoes far enough out, and so she crept up into a boat that lay in the reeds, went right out to the farthest end and threw the shoes out; but the boat wasn’t fixed to anything, and this movement of hers made it start to glide away from the land; she noticed this and hurried to get off, but before she could escape from the boat it was a couple of feet out and now slipping faster away.

Then little Gerda felt quite scared and started to cry, but no one heard her except the house sparrows, and they could not carry her back to the shore, but they flew alongside it and sang, as if to comfort her: ‘Here we are! here we are!’ The boat drifted with the current; little Gerda sat quite still in her stockinged feet; her small red shoes floated behind, but they couldn’t reach the boat, it started to move faster.

It was beautiful on both the shores – lovely flowers, old trees and slopes with sheep and cows, but not a single person in sight.

‘Perhaps the river will carry me to where little Kay is,’ Gerda thought and that put her in a better mood, she sat up and gazed for many hours at the beautiful green shores; then she came to a large cherry orchard where there was a small house with strange red and blue windows, not to mention a thatched roof and outside two wooden soldiers that presented arms to anyone sailing past.

Gerda called out to them, she thought they were alive, but they didn’t answer of course; she came quite close to them, the current brought the boat straight in towards the land.

Gerda called out even louder, and then an old, old woman came out of the house, leaning on a stick curved at one end; she was wearing a large sun-bonnet, and on it the loveliest of flowers had been painted.

‘You poor little child!’ the old woman said; ‘how on earth have you ended up on the swift-flowing river, carried far out into the great, wide world!’ and the old woman went right out into the water, caught hold of the boat with the curved end of her stick, pulled it ashore and lifted little Gerda out.

And Gerda was glad to get back onto dry land, though a bit afraid of the strange, old woman.

‘Come and tell me who you are, and how you come to be here!’ she said.

And Gerda told her everything; and the old woman shook her head and said ‘Hm! hm!’ and when Gerda had said everything to her and asked her if she hadn’t seen little Kay, the woman said that he had not passed by, but that he was sure to do so, and that she was not to be sad but to taste her cherries, look at her flowers – they were more beautiful than any picture book, and each of them could tell an entire story. Then she took Gerda by the hand, they went into the small house, and the old woman shut the door behind them.

The windows were high up and their panes were red, blue and yellow; the daylight shone so strangely inside there with every colour, but on the table were the loveliest cherries, and Gerda ate as many as she wished, for she dared to do so. And while she was eating, the old woman combed her hair with a golden comb, and her hair curled and shone so beautifully round the small, friendly face that was so round and resembled a rose.

‘I’ve so longed to have such a sweet little girl,’ the old woman said. ‘Now you shall see how well the two of us are going to get on with each other!’ and while she combed little Gerda’s hair, Gerda forgot more and more her playmate Kay; for the old woman was a sorceress, but not an evil one, she only did magic for her own pleasure, and now she wanted to keep little Gerda. That was why she went out into the garden, stretched her curved stick out towards all the rose-trees, and, no matter how beautifully they were blooming, they all sank down into the black earth and no one could see where they had once stood. The old woman was afraid that when Gerda saw the roses, she would think of her own and then remember little Kay and run away.

She now led Gerda out into the flower-garden. – Oh! what fragrance and what loveliness! every conceivable flower, and for every season of the year, stood here in all its glory; no picture book could be more many-coloured and lovely. Gerda jumped for joy, and played until the sun set behind the tall cherry trees, then she was given a lovely bed with red silk duvets that were filled with blue violets, and she slept and dreamt in it as sweetly as any queen on her wedding day.

The next day she could play again with the flowers in the warm sunshine – and many days passed like this. Gerda knew every kind of flower, but no matter how many there were, she felt that one was missing, but which one she was unable to say. Then one day she was sitting looking at the old woman’s sun-bonnet with the flowers painted on it, and the most beautiful of them all happened to be a rose. The old woman had forgotten to take it off her bonnet when she spirited all the others down into the ground. But that’s how it goes, when one hasn’t collected all one’s thoughts!

‘What’s this!’ Gerda said, ‘There aren’t any roses here!’ and she sprang in between the flower-beds, searching and searching, but there were none to be found; then she sat down and cried, but her warm tears fell precisely where a rose-tree had sunk into the ground, and when the warm tears watered the soil, the tree shot up again, as much in flower as when it had sunk down, and Gerda embraced it, kissed the roses and thought of the lovely roses back home – and when she did so, she also thought of little Kay.

‘Oh, how long I’ve been delayed!’ the little girl said. ‘I was on my way to try to find Kay? – Don’t you know where he is?’ she asked the roses. ‘Do you think he is dead and gone?’

‘He’s not dead,’ the roses said. ‘We’ve been in the ground where all the dead are, but Kay wasn’t there!’

‘Thank you, all of you!’ little Gerda said and she went over to the other flowers and looked into their calyces and asked: ‘Don’t you know where little Kay is?’

But every flower stood there in the sun and dreamt its own fairytale or story, Gerda got so very many of them, but not one knew anything about Kay.

And what then did the orange lily say?

‘Can you hear the drum: boom! boom! there are only two notes, always boom! boom! listen to the women’s dirge! listen to the priests’ cries! – In her long, red sari the Hindu wife stands on the pyre, the flames rise up around her and her dead husband; but the Hindu woman thinks of the living one here in the circle, of him whose eyes burn more fiercely than the flames, of him whose eyes’ fire reach her heart more than the flames that soon will turn her body into ashes. Can the heart’s flame die in the flames of the funeral pyre?’

‘I don’t understand that at all!’ little Gerda said.

‘That is my fairytale!’ the orange lily said.

What does the convolvulus say?

‘Out over the narrow mountain road hangs an old baronial castle; dense periwinkles grow up round its old red walls, leaf by leaf, up around the balcony where a lovely girl stands; she leans out over the balustrade and gazes down the road. No rose hangs fresher from its branches than she does, no apple blossom, when the wind carries it from the tree, floats more lightly than she does; how magnificently her silken dress rustles. “Isn’t he on his way yet!”’

‘Do you mean Kay?’ little Gerda asked.

‘I’m only talking about my fairytale, my dream,’ the convolvulus answered.

What does the tiny snowdrop say?

‘Between the trees on a rope hangs the long board, it is a swing; two delightful young girls – their dresses are as white as snow, long green silk ribbons flutter from their hats – are swinging; their brother, who is taller than they are, is standing up on the swing, his arm round the rope to keep his balance, for in one hand he is holding a small bowl, in the other a clay pipe, he is blowing soap-bubbles; the swing swings, and the soap-bubbles fly out in lovely, changing colours; the last one is still hanging on the pipe stem and bending in the breeze – the swing swings. The little black dog, as light as the bubbles, gets up on its hind legs and wants to join them on the swing, it flies; the dog tumbles down, barks and is angry; it’s been duped, the bubbles burst – my song is a swinging board, a bursting picture of foam!’

‘What you tell me may well be beautiful, but you say things in such a mournful way and don’t mention Kay at all. What do the hyacinths say?’

‘There were three lovely sisters, so transparent and fine; the first one’s dress was red, the second one’s blue and the third one’s completely white; hand in hand they danced by the still lake in the bright moonlight. They were not elves, they were human children. There was such a sweet scent, and the girls went off into the forest; the scent grew stronger – three coffins, in which the lovely girls lay down, glided out from the thicket out across the lake; glow-worms flew round them, glimmering like small floating lights. Are the dancing girls asleep, or are they dead? – The flower scent says they are corpses; the angelus rings out over the dead!’

‘You make me feel quite sad,’ little Gerda said. ‘You have such a strong scent; I have to think of the dead girls! ah, is little Kay really dead? The roses have been down in the ground, and they say no!’

‘Ding, dong!’ the bells of the hyacinth rang. ‘We do not toll for Kay, him we do not know! we are just singing our song, the only one we know!’

And Gerda went over to the buttercup, which could be seen gleaming among the shiny, green leaves.

‘You are a bright little sun!’ Gerda said. ‘Tell me if you know where I can find my playmate?’

And the buttercup shone so beautifully and looked at Gerda once more. What song could the buttercup perhaps sing? It was not about Kay either.

‘Down into a small yard God’s sun shone so warmly on the first day of spring; its rays slid down the neighbour’s white wall, close by the first yellow flowers were growing – gleaming gold in the warm rays of the sun – old grandmother was outside in her chair, her granddaughter – the poor, lovely maid servant – came home on a short visit; she kissed her grandmother. It was gold, the heart’s gold, in that

delightful kiss. Lips touched with gold, heart made of gold, gold on high ere the day is old! Now that was my little story!’ the buttercup said.

‘My poor old grandmother!’ Gerda sighed. ‘Yes, she’s sure to be longing for me, worried about me as she was for little Kay. But I’ll soon be back, and I’ll have Kay with me. – Asking the flowers isn’t any help, all they know is their own song, they can’t tell me anything!’ And so she tied up her little skirt, so that she could run faster; but the narcissus struck her over the leg as she jumped over it; then she stopped up, looked at the tall yellow flower and asked: ‘Do you know something, perhaps?’ and bent down to it. And what did it say?

‘I can see myself! I can see myself!’ the narcissus said. ‘Oh, oh, what a fragrance I have! – Up in the small attic room, half-dressed, a little dancer is standing, now she’s standing on one leg, now on two, and kicks her heels at the whole world, she is merely an optical illusion. She pours water from the tea-pot onto a piece of clothing she is holding, it is her bodice; – cleanliness is next to godliness! her white dress is hanging on its hook, it has also been washed in the tea-pot and dried on the roof; she puts it on, the saffron-yellow scarf round her neck, then her dress gleams even whiter. Leg in the air! see how she struts on one stem! I can see myself! I can see myself!’

‘I don’t care about that!’ Gerda said. ‘That’s nothing to tell me about!’ and then she ran to the edge of the garden.

The door was shut, but she wriggled the rusty hasp till it came loose, and the door sprung open, and then little Gerda ran off on her bare feet into the great wide world. She look behind her three times, but no one followed her; finally she couldn’t run any longer and she sat down on a large stone, and when she looked around her the summer was over, it was late in the autumn – that she had not been able to notice in the lovely garden, where there was always sunshine and flowers of every season.

‘Good lord, how delayed I am!’ little Gerda said: ‘It’s autumn already! I daren’t rest for a moment!’ and she got up so as to continue.

Oh, how her small feet were sore and tired, and everything around her seemed to be cold and raw; the long willow leaves had turned quite yellow and mist dripped from them in drops of water, one leaf after the other was falling, only the blackthorn still had fruit on it that was so sour it made one purse one’s lips. Oh, how grey and heavy it was in the great wide world.

#### **Fourth story.**

##### **The prince and princess.**

Gerda had to take another rest; then a large crow hopped over the snow opposite where she sat, after sitting there for a long while, looking at her and wagging its head it said: ‘Caw! caw! Goodday! goodday!’ That was the best it could manage, but it was so well-meaning with the little girl and it asked her where she was heading alone in the great wide world. The word ‘alone’ Gerda understood perfectly well and was well aware how much meaning lay in it, and so she told the crow about herself and her entire life and asked it if it hadn’t seen Kay.

And the crow nodded very thoughtfully and say: ‘Could well be! could well be!’

‘What, do you really think so!’ the little girl shouted and almost squeezed the crow to death, so fervently did she kiss it.



‘Steady now, steady now!’ the crow said. ‘I think I know, – I think it might just be little Kay! but now he’s probably forgotten you for the princess!’

‘Does he live with a princess?’ Gerda asked.

‘Yes, listen!’ the crow said, ‘but it’s hard for me to talk your language. If you understand crow language, I can tell you better!’

‘No, I’ve not learnt it!’ Gerda said, ‘but grandmother knew it, and she knew P-language too. If only I had learnt it!’

‘No matter,’ the crow said, ‘I’ll tell you as best I can, but it won’t be all that good even so,’ and then he told her what he knew.

‘In the kingdom we are now sitting in there lives a princess who is so immensely clever, but then she has also read all the newspapers that exist in the world, and forgotten them again – she is that clever. The other day she’s sitting on the throne, and that is not all that much fun, people say, when she happens to start humming a tune that is precisely this one: ‘Why shouldn’t I get married!’ ‘Hey, that’s not a bad idea,’ she says, and was so eager to get married, but she wanted to have a husband that knew how to answer back when talked to, one that didn’t just stand there looking fine – for that’s so boring. So she had all her ladies-in-waiting drummed together, and when they heard what she wanted, they were so pleased, “I like this!” they said, “I was thinking something similar only the other day!” – Believe you me, every word I’m telling you is the truth!’ the crow said. ‘I have a tame sweetheart who is free to walk around the palace, and she’s told me everything!’

His sweetheart was a crow too, of course, for birds of a feather flock together, which in this case always means a crow.

‘The newspapers immediately came out edged with hearts and the princess’s monogram; there people could read that any young man who was handsome was free to come up to the palace and speak with the princess, and the one who spoke in such a way that one could hear he belonged there, and who spoke best, the princess would take as her husband! – Yes, yes!’ the crow said, ‘believe you me, it is certain as I’m sitting here, people flocked to the palace, there was such a hustle and bustle, but there was no success on either the first or the second day. All of them were well able to speak when they were out in the street, but the moment they entered the palace gate and saw the lifeguards all clad in silver, and on the staircase the footmen clad in gold and the huge, illuminated halls, they were taken aback; and as soon as they were before the throne where the princess was sitting, all they could manage was to repeat the last word she had said, and she wasn’t interested in hearing that again. It was as if people in there had taken snuff and it had fallen onto their stomachs and they had fallen into a trance until they were back in the street – yes, then they could talk all right. There was a long line right from the city gate to the palace. I was in there to have a look myself!’ the crow said. ‘They grew both hungry and thirsty, but they didn’t get so much as a glass of lukewarm water from the palace. The wisest of them had admittedly taken some sandwiches with them, but they didn’t share them with the man next to them, for they thought: Just let him look hungry, then the princess won’t take him!’

‘But Kay, little Kay!’ Gerda asked. ‘When did he come? Was he among all those many people?’

‘Be patient! be patient! we’re just coming to him! it was on the third day when a little fellow turned up, without horse or carriage, marching quite unperturbed right up to the palace; his eyes shone like yours, he had lovely long hair, but apart from that poor clothes!’

‘That was Kay!’ Gerda shouted with joy. ‘Oh, so now I’ve found him!’ and she clapped her hands.

‘He had a small knapsack on his back!’ the crow said.

‘No, that must have been his sledge!’ Gerda said, ‘for he had a sledge with him when he left!’

‘That may well be!’ the crow said, ‘I didn’t look all that closely! but I know from my tame sweetheart that when he came in at the palace gate and saw the lifeguards all in silver and on the staircase the footmen all in gold, he wasn’t the slightest bit overawed, he nodded and said to them: “It must be boring standing on the stairs, I think I’d rather go inside!” There he came to halls glittering with light; privy councillors and excellencies walked around on their bare feet and carried gold dishes – the more ceremony the better! his boots creaked so terribly loudly, but he wasn’t the slightest bit afraid!’

‘That’s Kay all right!’ Gerda said, ‘I know he had new boots, I’ve heard them creaking in grandmother’s room!’

‘Well, they certainly did creak!’ the crow said, and he walked as calm as you please right up to the princess, who was sitting on a pearl as large as a spinning wheel; and all the ladies-in-waiting with their maids, and maid’s maids, and all the lords-in-waiting with their servants and servant’s servants with their pages stood lined up around her; and the closer they stood by the door, the prouder they looked. The servant’s servant’s page, who always wears slippers, is almost impossible to look at, so proudly does he stand at the door!’

‘That must be horrible!’ little Gerda said. ‘And Kay won the princess even so then!’

‘If I hadn’t been a crow, I’d have taken her myself, despite the fact that I’m engaged. He must have spoken as well as I’m able to when I speak crow’s language – I have it from my tame sweetheart. He was unperturbed and dashing; he hadn’t come at all to propose, only to hear the princess’s cleverness, which he liked, and she liked him in return!’

‘Oh yes! It’s Kay all right!’ Gerda said, ‘he was so clever he could do mental arithmetic with fractions! – Oh, won’t you take me in where the palace lies!’

‘Yes, that’s easily said!’ the crow replied. ‘But how do we set about it? I’ll have a word with my tame sweetheart; she can surely advise us; for I must tell you that you, such a little girl as yourself, will never be allowed to get properly inside!’

‘Oh yes, I will!’ Gerda said. ‘When Kay hears that I am here, he will come out immediately and fetch me!’

‘Wait for me at the stile over there!’ the crow said, waggled its head and flew off.

The crow didn’t return until darkness had fallen: ‘Rah! rah!’ it said. ‘I’m to give you her many greetings! and here’s a small piece of bread for you, she took it from the kitchen, where there’s plenty of bread, and you must be hungry! – It’s not possible for you to get inside the palace, for you are barefoot; the lifeguards in silver and footmen in gold wouldn’t allow it; but don’t cry, we’ll get you up there even so. My sweetheart knows of some backstairs that lead up to the bedroom, and she knows where to get hold of the key!’

And they went into the garden, into the avenue where one leaf fell after the other, and when the palace lights were put out, one after the other, the crow led Gerda to a backdoor that was ajar.

Oh, how Gerda’s heart pounded with fear and longing! it was as if she was about to do something bad, and in fact all she wanted to do was find out if it really was little Kay; yes, it had to be him; she thought so intensely of his intelligent eyes, his long hair; she could clearly see how he smiled, like he did when they sat back home under the roses. He would of course be glad to see her, hear about the long way she had come for his sake, know how sorrowful everyone at home had been when he didn’t return. Oh, she felt both joy and fear.

Now they were on the staircase; a little lamp was burning on a cupboard; in the middle of the floor stood the tame crow and it turned its head in all directions and observed Gerda, who curtsied, as her grandmother had taught her.

‘My fiancé has said such nice things about you, little miss,’ the tame crow said, ‘your *Vita*, as it is called, is also extremely moving! – If you will take the lamp, I will lead the way. We will take the direct route, for we will not encounter anyone there!’

‘I think I can hear someone right behind us!’ Gerda said, and it swished past her; it was like shadows along the wall, horses with flowing manes and thin legs, hunting lads, gentlemen and ladies on horseback.

‘It’s only dreams!’ the crow said, ‘they’ve come to fetch the thoughts of the royal household out hunting, a good thing as you can then more easily observe them in bed. But let me see, if you gain glory and honour, that you then display a grateful heart!’

‘That’s nothing to talk about!’ said the crow from the forest.

They now entered the first hall, it was of rose-pink satin with imitation flowers up the walls; here the dreams already shot past them, but at such a pace that Gerda did not catch a glimpse of the royal household. Each hall was finer than the previous one, yes, it really took one’s breath away, and now they were in the bedroom. Here the ceiling was like a tall palm tree with leaves of glass, precious glass, and in the middle of the floor on a golden stalk hung two beds, each of which looked like a lily: The one was white, in it the princess lay; the other was red, and it was here that Gerda was going to look for little Kay; she turned aside one of the red leaves and then she saw a brown nape of a neck. – Oh, it was Kay! – She called his name out quite loud, held the lamp closer to him – the dreams swished on horseback back into the room – he woke up, turned his head and – – it wasn’t little Kay.

It was only the back of the prince’s neck that resembled him, although he was young and handsome. And the princess looked out from the white lily-bed and asked what was happening. Then little Gerda cried and told them her entire story and everything that the crows had done for her.

‘You poor little thing!’ the prince and princess said, and they praised the crows and said they weren’t the slightest bit angry with them, but they shouldn’t make a habit of it. They were, though, to have a reward.

‘Do you wish to fly freely?’ the princess asked, ‘or would you like a permanent position as court crows, with everything left over in the kitchen?’

And both the crows bowed and asked for a permanent position; for they thought of the future and said, ‘it’s a good idea to have something for one’s old age’, as they put it.

And the prince got out of bed and let Gerda sleep in it – he could not do more. She folded her small hands and thought: ‘How good creatures humans and animals are,’ and then she closed her eyes and slept profoundly. All the dreams came flying in once more, and then they looked like God’s angels, and they pulled a small sledge, and on it sat Kay and nodded – but all of this was merely dreaming, which is why it had all disappeared again when she woke up.

The next day she was dressed from top to toe in silk and velvet; she was invited to stay at the palace and have a pleasant time, but all she asked for was to have a small carriage with a horse in front and a pair of small boots, and then she would be off again into the great wide world to find Kay.

And she was given both boots and a muff; she was so finely clothed, and when she wanted to set off, a new coach of pure gold was standing at the door; the arms of the prince and princess shone from it like a star; coachman, servants and postilions – for there were also postilions – sat dressed in golden crowns. The prince and princess helped her into the carriage themselves and wished her every success. The forest crow, which had now got married, accompanied them the first twenty miles or so; it sat next to her, for it couldn’t travel backwards; the other crow stood at the gate and flapped its wings, it didn’t accompany them, for it had a headache, since it now had a permanent position and had eaten too much.

Inside, the coach was lined with sugared pretzels, and there were various types of fruit and small spicy biscuits in the seats.

‘Goodbye! goodbye!’ the prince and princess cried out, and little Gerda cried, and the crow cried; – that is how the first many miles passed; then the crow also said goodbye, and that was the hardest farewell; it flew up into a tree and flapped its black wings as long as it could still see the carriage, which gleamed just like bright sunshine.

### **Fifth story.**

#### **The little robber girl.**

They drove through the dark forest, but the coach shone like a torch, it dazzled the robbers, and that they couldn’t stomach.

‘It’s gold! it’s gold!’ they shouted, rushed forwards, seized the horses, killed the small jockeys, the coachman and the servants and then pulled little Gerda out of the carriage.

‘She’s plump, she’s fine, she’s fattened with nut kernels!’ said the old robber woman, who had a long, wiry whiskers and eyebrows that hung down over her eyes. ‘She’s as good as a little fattened lamb! oh, how delicious she’ll taste!’ and she drew out her shiny knife and it gleamed in a horrible way.

‘Ow!’ the old woman suddenly cried out, she had been bitten in the ear by her own little daughter, who hung on her back and was so wild and unkempt it was a joy to see.

‘You nasty little brat!’ her mother said and forgot about slaughtering Gerda.

‘She’s to play with me!’ the little robber girl said. ‘She’s to give me her muff, her beautiful dress, sleep with me in my bed!’ and she bit her mother again, so the robber woman leapt into the air and turned round, and all the robbers laughed and said: ‘See, how she dances with her young brat!’

‘I want to go inside the coach!’ the little robber girl said and simply had to have her will, for she was so spoilt and so stubborn. She and Gerda sat down in it, and then they drove over tree-stumps and thorn bushes deeper into the forest. The little robber girl was as big as Gerda, but stronger, more broad-shouldered and dark-skinned; her eyes were quite black, so they almost looked sad. She took Gerda by the waist and said: ‘They’re not going to kill you, as long as I don’t get angry with you! Are you really a princess?’

‘No,’ little Gerda said and told her everything she had experienced, and how fond she was of little Kay. The robber girl looked at her very seriously, nodded slightly and said: ‘They are not going to kill you, and if I nevertheless should happen to get angry with you, I’d rather do it myself!’ and then she dried Gerda’s eyes and stuffed both her hands in the lovely muff, which was so soft and so warm.

Now the coach came to a stop; there in the middle of the courtyard of a robber’s castle; there were great cracks in it from top to bottom, ravens and crows flew out of the open holes, and the huge fierce dogs, each of which looked as if it could swallow a whole human being, leapt high into the air, but they didn’t bark, for that was forbidden.

In the large, old, sooty hall a large fire was burning in the middle of the stone floor; the smoke gathered up under the roof and had to find its own way out; a large cauldron of soup was stewing, and both hares and rabbits were being turned on a spit.

‘You’re to sleep with me here along with all my small animals!’ the robber girl said. They were given food and drink and then they went over into a corner where straw and blankets lay. Above them,

on lathes and perches, sat almost a hundred pigeons, all of which seemed to be asleep, although they turned slightly when the young girls came.

‘They are all mine!’ the little robber girl said and swiftly grabbed one of those closest, held it by its legs and shook it, so that it flapped its wings. ‘Kiss it!’ she cried out and slapped Gerda in the face with it. ‘There the forest rascals are sitting!’ she continued and further back showed a host of bars that had been fixed in front of a hole high up in the wall. ‘They’re forest rascals, those two! they’ll fly off at once if one doesn’t have them securely behind bars; and here’s my dear old Pooh!’ and she pulled out by the antlers a reindeer that had a shiny copper ring round its neck and was bound. ‘We also have to have him tied up, otherwise he too would run away from us. Every single evening I tickle his throat with my sharp knife – he’s so afraid of that!’ and the little girl pulled a long knife out of a cleft in the wall and let it glide over the reindeer’s neck; the poor animal kicked out with its legs, and the robber girl laughed and pulled down Gerda with her onto the bed.

‘Are you going to have the knife with you when you sleep?’ Gerda said and gave it a rather scared look.

‘I always sleep with a knife!’ the little robber girl said. ‘You never know what might happen. But say again what you told me about little Kay, and why you set out into the great wide world.’ And Gerda told her from the beginning, and the pigeons cooed up there in their cage – the other pigeons slept. The little robber girl placed her arm round Gerda’s neck, held the knife in the other hand and fell noisily asleep; but Gerda simply couldn’t close her eyes, she didn’t know if she was going to live or die. The robbers were sitting round the fire, singing and drinking, and the old robber woman was doing somersaults. Oh! it was quite terrible for the little girl to watch.

Then the woodpigeons said ‘Coo, coo! we’ve seen little Kay. A white hen bore his sledge, he sat in the Snow Queen’s carriage, which streaked down low above the forest where we lay in our nest; she blew on us young birds, and all of them died except the two of us two; coo! coo!’

‘What are you saying up there?’ Gerda called out, ‘where was the Snow Queen heading? Do you know anything about that?’

‘She’s sure to have been on her way to Lapland, for there is always snow and ice there! just ask the reindeer who’s bound on the rope.’

‘There’s ice and snow there, it’s wonderful and marvellous there!’ the reindeer said; ‘there you can run around freely in the vast gleaming valleys! there the snow queen has her summer tent, but her permanent palace is up near the North Pole, on the island they call Spitsbergen!’

‘Oh Kay, little Kay!’ Gerda sighed.

‘Lie still, now!’ the robber girl said, ‘otherwise I’ll stick my knife in your stomach!’

In the morning Gerda told her everything the woodpigeons had said, and the little robber girl looked quite serious, but nodded and said: ‘It’s all the same! it’s all the same. – Do you know where Lapland is?’ she asked the reindeer.

‘Who could know better than I can,’ the animal said, and its eyes rolled in its head. ‘That is where I was born and bred, where I have cavorted on the fields of snow!’

‘Listen!’ the robber girl said to Gerda, ‘you can see that all our men are away at the moment, but the old woman’s still here, and she stays put, but during the morning she drinks from her big bottle and then takes a little nap; – now I’m going to do something for you!’ She leapt out of bed, went over to her mother’s neck, pulled her by the whiskers and said: ‘good morning, my fine little nanny-goat!’ And her mother flicked her under the nose so it turned red and blue, but it was all out of pure affection.

And when her mother had drunk from her bottle and was taking a little nap, the robber girl went over to the reindeer and said: ‘I really have this peculiar urge to tickle you many more times with the

sharp knife, for you are such fun then, but no matter – I will loosen your rope and help you outside, so you can run off to Lapland, but you must go as fast as ever you can and take this little girl for me to the Snow Queen’s palace, where her playmate is. You’ve heard what she told me, for she spoke loudly enough and you were eavesdropping!’

The reindeer leapt into the air with joy. The robber girl lifted little Gerda up and took the precaution of binding her, even of giving her a cushion to sit on. ‘It’s all the same,’ she said, ‘here are your furry boots, for it will be cold, but I’ll keep the muff myself, it’s too delightful! But I won’t let you freeze even so. Here are my mother’s big mittens, they’ll reach right up to your elbows – stick your hands in! Now your hands look just like those of my hideous mother!’

And Gerda cried with joy.

‘I can’t stand you blubbering like that!’ the little robber girl said. ‘You should be looking very pleased instead right now! and here are two loaves and a ham for you, so you won’t go hungry.’ Both were fixed behind her on the reindeer; the little robber girl opened the door, enticed all the big dogs inside, and then she cut through the rope and said to the reindeer: ‘Off you run! but take good care of the little girl!’

And Gerda stretched out her hands, with the large mittens on, out towards the robber girl and said goodbye, and the reindeer shot off over shrubs and tree-stumps through the great forest, over bogs and steppes, as fast as it could. The wolves howled, and the ravens cawed. ‘Whoosh! whoosh!’ it said up in the sky. It was as if it sneezed red.

‘Those are my old northern lights!’ the reindeer said, ‘just look at how they gleam!’ and it shot off even faster, night and day; the loaves were eaten, the ham too and then they were in Lapland.

## **Sixth story.**

### **The Lapp woman and the Finnmark woman.**

They stopped at a tiny house; it was so pitiful; the roof went right down to the ground, and the door was so low that the family had to creep on their stomachs when they wanted to go in or out. There was no one at home here except an old Lapp woman, who was frying fish in the light of a train-oil lamp; and the reindeer told her Gerda’s entire story, but first its own, for it felt that it was much more important, and Gerda was so perishing with cold that she couldn’t speak.

‘Oh, you poor things!’ the Lapp woman said, ‘in that case you still have a long way to go! You have to cover 600 miles or so into Finnmark, for there the Snow Queen is out in the country, burning blue lights every single evening. I’ll write a few words on some split cod, I haven’t any paper, I’ll give it to you for the Finnmark woman up there, she can give you better directions than I can!’

And when Gerda had been warmed up and had something to eat and drink, the Lapp woman wrote a few words on some split cod, told Gerda to take good care of it, bound her to the reindeer once more and off it leapt. ‘Whoosh! whoosh!’ it said up in the sky, all night long the loveliest blue northern lights gleamed; – and then they came to Finnmark and knocked on the chimney of the Finnmark woman, for she didn’t even have a door.

It was so hot inside that the Finnmark woman went around practically naked; she was tiny and her complexion muddy; she immediately loosened little Gerda’s clothes, took off her mittens and boots, for otherwise she would have been too hot, placed a piece of ice on the reindeer’s head and then read what had been written on the split cod; she read it three times and then she knew it by heart and she then put the fish in the cooking pot, for she never wasted anything.

First the reindeer told its story, then little Gerda's, and the Finnmark woman blinked her wise eyes, but didn't say anything.

'You are so wise,' the reindeer said; 'I know you can tie up all the winds in the world on a piece of sewing thread; if the skipper undoes the one knot, he gets a fair wind, if he undoes the other, it blows hard, and if he undoes the third and fourth, there is such a gale that the forests blow down. Won't you give the little girl a potion, so she can have the strength of twelve men and overpower the Snow Queen.'

'The strength of twelve men!' the Finnmark woman said; 'yes, that should do the trick!' and she went over to a shelf, took out a large rolled-up hide and unrolled it; on it strange letters were written, and the Finnmark woman read away till the sweat poured down her forehead.

But the reindeer entreated the woman on Gerda's behalf yet again, and Gerda looked at the Finnmark woman with such imploring, tear-filled eyes that the woman blinked her own once more and drew the reindeer over into a corner, where she whispered to it, while giving it a fresh piece of ice on its head:

'It's true that little Kay is with the Snow Queen, and finds everything perfect there and believes it is the best place in the world, but that is because he has got a shard of glass in his heart and a small speck of glass in his eye; they must be removed, otherwise he can never become a human being again and the Snow Queen will retain her power over him!'

'But can't you find something for little Gerda that will give her power over everything?'

'I can't give her greater power than she already has! can't you see how great that is? Can't you see how humans and animals have to serve her, how she has managed to get so far in the world on her own bare feet. She must not be told of her power by us, it resides in her heart, it exists because she is a sweet innocent child. If she is unable of her own accord to get to the Snow Queen and remove the glass from little Kay, we cannot help her to do so! A dozen miles from here the Snow Queen's garden starts, you can carry the little girl up to that point; set her down by the large bush that stands in the snow with its red berries, don't stand there chatting away and hurry back here!' And then the Finnmark woman lifted little Gerda up onto the reindeer, who sped off as swiftly as it could.

'Oh, I've forgotten my boots! I've forgotten my mittens!' little Gerda cried out, she could feel this in the biting cold, but the reindeer didn't dare stop, it ran until it came to the large bush with the red berries; there it set Gerda down, kissed her on the lips, and large, glistening tears ran down its cheeks, and it ran back, as swiftly as it could, back again. There stood poor Gerda, without any shoes, without any mittens, in the middle of the frightful cold of Finnmark.

She ran forward as fast as she could and was met by a whole regiment of snowflakes, but they did not fall from the sky, which was perfectly clear and gleaming with northern lights; the snowflakes followed the ground, and the closer they came, the larger they became; Gerda recalled how large and odd they had looked when she had looked at them through the burning-glass, but here they were really large and frightening in a completely different way – they were alive, they were the Snow Queen's outposts; they had the strangest shapes; some looked like large, ugly hedgehogs, others like whole coils of snakes that stuck out their heads; and yet other like small fat bears with bristling hairs – all of them gleaming white, all of them were live snowflakes.

Then little Gerda said her Lord's Prayer, and the cold was so severe that she could see her own breath; it stood out from her mouth like a great cloud of smoke; her breath became increasingly dense and formed itself into small bright angels that grew larger and larger when they touched the ground; and all of them were wearing helmets on their heads and were holding spears and shields in their hands; they grew in number, and when Gerda had finished her Lord's Prayer, there was a whole legion around

her; they jabbed at the horrible snowflakes with their spears and the snowflakes broke into a hundred pieces, and little Gerda was able to move on safe and undaunted. The angels patted her feet and hands, so she should feel less how cold they were, and walked briskly on towards the Snow Queen's palace.

But now we must first have a look at how Kay is getting on. It is true that wasn't thinking of little Gerda, least of all that she was standing outside the palace.

### **Seventh story.**

#### **What happened in the Snow Queen's palace, and what happened afterwards.**

The walls of the palace were of whirling snow and its windows and doors of biting winds; there were more than a hundred halls, formed as the snow drifted, the largest stretching many miles, all of them lit by the brightest northern lights, and they were so large, so empty, so icy cold and so gleaming. There was never any form of gaiety here, not even a little bear-ball where the gale could blow and the polar bears walk on their hind legs and put on airs and graces; never a small card party with slaps and blows to the mouth; never the slightest signs of a coffee party of the young white-fox ladies – everything was empty, large and cold in the halls of the Snow Queen. The northern lights gleamed so precisely that one could tell when they were turned right up and when they were screwed right down. In the very middle of the empty endless snow-hall there was a frozen lake; it had cracked into a thousand pieces, but each piece resembled the next one completely, so that it was nothing less than a feat; and in the middle of it the Snow Queen sat when at home, and then she said that she sat in the mirror of reason, and that this was the only and best thing in the world.

Little Kay was quite blue with cold, yes, almost black, but he didn't notice it even so, for – remember – she had kissed the shiver of cold off him, and his heart was practically a lump of ice. He was dragging some sharp flat pieces of ice around with him, which he combined in all sorts of ways, for he wanted to make something out of them; it was just like when we have small slabs of wood and make figures out of them, which we call the Chinese Game. Kay was also trying to make figures, the most ingenious of all, it was *the ice-game of reason*; to his eyes, the figures were quite excellent and of the utmost importance – it was the speck of glass in his eye that made him see things like that! he composed whole figures, which were a written word, but he never succeeded in forming the exact word that he wanted, the word *Eternity*, and the Snow Queen had said: 'If you can make that word out for me, you shall be your own master, and I will make you a present of the entire world and a pair of new skates.' But he was unable to.

'Now I'm going to swish off to the warm countries!' the Snow Queen said, 'I want to look down into the black cauldrons!' – These were the fire-spewing mountains of Etna and Vesuvius, as they are called. – I'm going to whitewash them a bit! that's all part of it; it's good on top of lemons and grapes!' and off flew the Snow Queen, and Kay sat all on his own in the many-mile-long empty ice-hall and looked at the pieces of ice and racked his brains till they creaked, he sat there stiff and still, he looked as if he had frozen to death.

It was at this moment that little Gerda entered the palace through the great gate made of biting winds; but she said an evening prayer and the winds lay down as if they wanted to sleep, and she entered the large, empty, cold halls – then she caught sight of Kay, knew him, threw her arms round his neck, held him tight and called out. 'Kay! dear little Kay! at last I've found you!'

But he sat there quite still, stiff and cold; – then little Gerda cried hot tears, they fell on his chest, they managed to enter his heart, they thawed out the lump of ice and consumed the tiny fragment of mirror inside; he looked at her and she sang the hymn:



The roses are in blossom in the vale;  
There the Christ child too speaks without fail.

Then Kay burst into tears; he wept so hard that the speck from the mirror rolled out of his eyes, he knew her and cried out joyously: ‘Gerda! dear little Gerda! – where have you been all this time? And where have I been?’ And he looked around him. ‘How cold it is here! how empty and huge it is here!’ and he held on tight to Gerda, and she laughed and cried with joy; it was so wonderful that even the pieces of ice danced around with joy and when they were tired and lay down, they formed precisely the combination of letters the Snow Queen had said he was to try to find, so now he was his own master, and she would have to make him a present of the entire world and a pair of new skates.

And Gerda kissed his cheeks, and they started to bloom; she kissed his eyes, and they shone like hers, she kissed his hands and feet, and he was strong and healthy. It made no difference if the Snow Queen returned home: his charter of freedom stood written there in gleaming pieces of ice.

And they took each other by the hand and walked out of the large palace; they talked about grandmother and about the roses up on the roof; and wherever they walked, the winds died down and sun came out; and when they reached the bush with the red berries, the reindeer was standing there waiting for them; it had another young reindeer with it with a full udder, and it gave the young ones its warm milk and kissed them on the lips. Then they carried Kay and Gerda first to the Finnmark woman, where they warmed themselves in her hot living room and were given directions for their home journey, then on to the Lapp woman, who had sewn new clothes for them and got her sleigh ready.

And the reindeer and the young reindeer ran alongside and followed them, right to the border of the country, where the first green signs of spring could be seen, where they said goodbye to the reindeer and the Lapp woman. ‘Goodbye’ they all said to each other. And the first small birds started to chirp, the forest had light-green buds, and out of it on a magnificent horse, which Gerda knew (it had been hitched to the gold carriage), came a young girl with a shining red cap on her head and holding pistols in front of her – it was the little robber girl, who was bored with being at home and wanted to head northwards first and then in a different direction if that didn’t please her. She knew Gerda immediately and Gerda knew her – and there was great happiness.

‘You’re a fine fellow to go traipsing around!’ she said to little Kay; ‘I wonder if you’re worth running to the ends of the world for!’

But Gerda patted her on the cheek, and asked about the prince and princess.

‘They’ve left for abroad!’ the robber girl said.

‘But the crow?’ little Gerda asked.

‘Well, the crow’s dead!’ she answered. ‘The tame sweetheart is now a widow and goes around with a small piece of black wool round her leg; she complains so pitifully and it’s nonsense, all of it! – But tell me how things have gone for you, and how you managed to get hold of him!’

And both Gerda and Kay told her.

And snip-snap-clover-song-is-over!’ the robber girl said, took them both by the hand and promised that if she ever happened to pass by their city, she would come up and pay them a visit, then she rode off into the great wide world, but Kay and Gerda walked hand in hand, and as they walked along, it was a wonderful spring with flowers and greenness everywhere; the church bells rang, and they knew the tall towers, the great city, that was where they lived, and they entered it and went to grandmother’s door, up the stairs, into the living room, where everything stood just as before, and the clock said: ‘tick, tock’ and the hands turned round; but as they went through the door, they noticed that they had become adults. The roses from the gutter bloomed in at the open windows, and there were the small children’s

chairs, and Kay and Gerda sat down on them and held each other's hands – they had forgotten like some heavy dream the cold empty magnificence of the Snow Queen's palace. Grandmother was sitting in God's bright sunshine and was reading out loud from the Bible: 'Unless you become as little children, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven!'

And Kay and Gerda looked into each other's eyes, and suddenly they understood the old hymn:

The roses are in blossom in the vale;  
There the Christ child too speaks without fail.

There they sat, two grown-ups and yet children, children at heart, and it was summer, warm, wonderful summer.

*A fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. Translated into English by John Irons in 2014 for the Hans Christian Andersen Centre at the University of Southern Denmark.*



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