

with carried lobster? Well, how goes it in the land of Merf?"

"So so," replied Matilda; "all my folks are tolerably well, thank you. I have come to ask you about a private matter," and she told of Specks and his song, ending with, "And now, dear Brother Pipes, who was the Koboldclatterman? Only tell me and I will give you one of my polished scales as a reward!" Pipes' eyes glistened. He said: "Not at all; surely 'virtue is its own reward.' Still, 'tis a fair offer, and I accept it in the spirit in which it is made. Let us rest awhile on yonder reef whilst the process of digestion proceeds, and I will endeavour to arouse Memory, the warder of the brain!"

Upon reaching the reef the bird closed his eyes, folded his wings, meditated profoundly for a few moments, and then began: "Perhaps you think that it was 'once upon a time'? Well, then it wasn't! It was 150 years before then! In those far-off days, of course, there was a lot more water about than now. And there were Dwarfs and Dwarfesses and Ogres and Ogresses, and Griffins and Flying Dragons, and suck-like creatures. There were no Mermen and no Mermaids, for as yet the land of Mer was not. The dwarfs had to walk upon stilts, and they had to take great care how they moved over the wishy-washy ground, for a slip might have been attended with dismal consequences. 'Tis true that 'he who is down need fear no fall,' but a dwarf on stilts was likely to be drowned; so you see they needs must be careful.

"Now ogres and ogresses dearly loved a nice plump dwarf; boiled, roast or fried, it was all one to them. And they laid their heads together and bit on a pun for filling their larders with dwarf meat. They ate oranges wholesale and scattered the peel broadcast, and the dwarfs slipped on the peel and fell down like ninepins on the wishy-washy ground, and there they were on their backs and sprawling, an easy prey withal to their ferocious foes.

"And herein the dwarfs ran a chance of being exterminated, but for the griffins. Griffins are uncommonly partial to cake—cake with plenty of peel in it. And these griffins became diligent searchers after peel. What the ogres threw down the griffins picked up, and took it home right joyfully, saying to their respective wives, the griffinesses: 'Hurry up, my love, and make it into cake.'

"Now, just as dwarfs were a savoury morsel for ogres and ogresses, so griffins were a savoury morsel for the great flying dragons. And while the griffins were particularly busy picking up peel, the flying dragons took a mean advantage of them; they used such unguarded moments to swoop down and carry them off. And as more and more griffins got eaten up, peel accumulated on the wishy-washy ground; and dwarfs fell victims in increasing numbers to the greedy ogres and ogresses. What wonder that the dwarfs at their wits' end exclaimed: 'Unless we can manage to circumvent our foes we shall be as extinct as old brother Dodo in less than no time!'

"A meeting was called at which suggestions were invited.

"Grease the stairs!" said one.

"It was objected that there wasn't enough grease.

"Give them a cup of cold poison!" suggested another. This was voted an excellent notion, but unfortunately impossible.

"At length someone put forward the idea: 'Comrades, let us seek counsel of the Koboldclatterman!'

"Now the story begins to be interesting!" said Matilda the Mermaid; "pray hurry up, Brother Pipes!"

"Well, Miss, this Koboldclatterman was reputed the cleverest of the whole race of dwarfs; a kind of hermit he was, and he lived in a twisty-twisty cave all by himself, near Doubledam, in Hokland.

"And a committee of seven of the most influential dwarfs and dwarfesses waited upon him and said: 'Look you, Mynheer, we are continually upon the jump, our lives have become a burden unto us, owing to a paucity or lack of griffins; daily in ever-increasing numbers we glide into the silent tomb. The great flying dragons consume the griffins, and the ogre and ogresses consume us, and verily as grass is grass and hay is hay, we're here to-morrow and gone to-day!'

"And the Committee lifted up their voice and woe, and their tears mingled in one common stream.

"The Koboldclatterman rose up in

wrath, and strode up and down the twisty-twisty cave. Said he: 'Donnerblitz! now dash my wig! Not another dwarf need hop the twig. If he or she will list to me! The land is dangerous — then try the sea. My notion's this — to build and launch a vessel with timbers stout and staunch; I myself will her captain be. And our home henceforth is the sounding sea!'

"'It is indeed very kind of you,' said the Committee; 'we will consider your valuable suggestion and communicate with you again!'

"Then they withdrew, doubtful as to what their wives, the dwarfesses, would say about it."

"My! and what did they say?" asked Matilda.

"Well, there, the proposition made a fine to-do, I can tell you! You see many of the dwarfs were bad sailors, and those who had never been to sea were shy as to tempting the perils of the deep. They said: 'It might be out of the frying pan into the fire!' which was true enough.

"So the Committee again waited upon the Koboldclatterman. He heard them patiently, and said:

'Let those who can't abide the ocean, Live underground — that is my notion!'

"And so it came to pass that most of the dwarfs made their homes underground, and these are known to this day as Trolls.

"The rest enlisted the help of the fairies, and built a big ship that could not sink; she could sail with or against the wind. Then, with the Koboldclatterman as their captain, they sailed away, faring to and fro on the face of the waters. Perhaps because the ship was built by fairy hands her crew were able to do without food or drink; this was convenient. And as the years went by they got thinner and thinner, until you could have seen right through them! In this manner they escaped the ogres and ogresses. Well, for hundreds of years they have been sailing, the ship never puts into any port, and calm or storm makes no difference to her progress!"

"Oh, I should dearly love to see her!" cried Matilda, in her enthusiasm splashing the water with her tail.

"Would you indeed, Miss?" replied Pipes; "then let us see if we can find her!"

Then he and the Mermaid directed their course southward, until they reached the Pole at the end of the earth. There, where the ocean falls bodily over the edge of the world, they pulled up on a little island. Bless you, they were in no danger of falling over, for they were not quite so near as all that! But where they waited the sea was oil-up-and-downy, and the whirlpools were all curly-whorly. And by-and-by, Brother Pipes suddenly flapped his wings and screamed: "Hurrah! here she comes!"

And sure enough the magic ship came in sight, moving against the wind with all sail set. As she neared the rock, Matilda made a trumpet of her hands and shouted: "Ship ahoy!"

At the words a dwarf made his appearance on the high poop of the vessel.

He was dressed in the fashion of long ago. Seeing Matilda, he politely raised his three-cornered hat and waved it thrice. In another minute the vessel reached the end of the world, and disappeared from view.

The Mermaid turned to her companion:

"Could your sharp eyes read the name of the ship, which was painted on the stern?"

"Aye, aye," replied the bird; "The Flying Dutchman!"

"And the dwarf who raised his three-cornered hat?"

"Was the captain, of course!"

Now, though the last mermaid has long since disappeared, owing to the so-called "march of civilisation," the Flying Dutchman is still said to sail the ocean. But at sight of the phantom ship with her shadowy crew the boldest mariner stands aghast, and his fate is doomed who has aught to do with her skipper, the Koboldclatterman!

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