

Jack, who had reappeared on the outskirts of the group with his hat on—a desperately ill-used hat—added,

“A Lithuanian or Hungarian orchestra could not play like that, eh?”

“No, truly,” said the Polish lady with a little shrug. “I do not think they could.”

“You flatter us,” said Manlius bowing. Jack began to laugh. The Polish lady hastily made her adieux, and went out into Piccadilly, where a cab was brought for her. Her mother got in; and she was about to follow when she heard Jack’s voice again, at her elbow.

“May I send you some music?”

“If you will be so gracious, Monsieur.”

“Good. What direction shall I give your driver?”

“F—f—you call it Feetzroysquerre?”

“Fitzroy Square,” shouted Jack to the cabman. The hansom went off; and he, running recklessly through the mud to a passing Hammersmith omnibus, which was full inside, climbed to the roof, and was borne away in the rain.

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## **The Cake King;**

A RUSSIAN FAIRY TALE,

BY N. P. VAGNER.

*Translated from the Russian by N. Tchaykovsky.*

*(Concluded from page 363.)*

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HIS name was “merry Toll”. His head was thickly covered with pretty little curls, his cheeks were chubby and rosy. His bluish grey eyes smiled on all so kindly, that everybody could not help saying: Ah, what a good boy he is!

And indeed Toll was a very good boy. He lived in a small room at the top of a house with his old granny. Just above the window, under the roof there lived many doves. They all knew Toll, because he fed them with crumbs. Whenever he was crossing the yard, they flew down to him, perched on his shoulders and kissed him, while Toll used to say:

“Goolly, goolly, bluewinged darlings, how many are you?”

“Coo, coo, coo”, said an old dove.

“Well, that means—many! Live a little longer and you will be still more! Sh . . . to your perch, into your warm nest!” And the doves flew away to their home.



When Toll was at the Cake King's feast he also received a piece of cake, for he attended school diligently and got on there very well. He brought the cake to his Granny.

"Eat it thyself, my pretty one", said she, "eat it, my love."

"Oh no, Granny, you must taste just a little bit." Granny ate a small bit of the cake and said it was very nice. Then Toll went to his little friends, of whom he had very many. Jan, the boatman, alone had four little ones, who all loved Toll dearly.

"Now, chicks," said he, entering Jan's room at the very top of the house—"though you were not present at the Cake King's feast, you shall have a feast of your own to-day anyhow". He opened the parcel and showed them the cake with golden letters.

"What is that?" shouted the chicks, surrounding Toll.

"Is it not a box of sweets?" asked little Paul.

"Oh no", said Masha, "I know what it is, it is a golden work box." The younger ones said nothing but merely crept round Toll's feet, trying to climb upon him.

He took a knife, cut the cake in two halves, and divided one of them amongst all four children.

"I don't care about your nasty cake", said Masha, with an offended air, "for you have not kissed me to-day".

Toll took Masha's curly head between his hands, and kissed her very affectionately. Meanwhile all the others took the opportunity to swallow their pieces at one gulp, and smacking their lips, began to ask Toll for more.

"Give us a bit, just a little bit more, just one crumb!"

"Give it to them, Toll", said Jan, who was sitting all this time in a corner, supporting his head on his hands, and looking very gloomy—"give them some more; they have eaten nothing for three days, you know".

"What!" exclaimed Toll. "And you did not tell me anything about it? Was that kind of you?"

"What are you thinking of? Am I to run after you, and ask you to bring them a piece of bread?"

But Toll did not listen to him. He ran down stairs, or rather, he sat on the handrail and slid down in an instant. Almost out of breath he entered the door of a baker's shop.

—"Mr. Baker", said he, "here is a piece of cake, will you kindly give me a loaf of the black bread instead? I need it very much."

"Take this largest loaf, my boy", said the baker, "and keep your



cake; eat it yourself if you like; but why do you need this bread, Toll?"

"Oh, I need it very, very much; thank you, Mr. Baker, thank you." And he ran back to Jan, the boatman.

"Wait a bit", said Jan, when Toll came in with the bread, "don't give them much at once; after being hungry for such a long time, they might die of repletion".

He cut a small piece for each of his chicks, and one for himself also, as he, too, was very hungry.

The children ate the bread almost ravenously, for they were nearly famished.

Then Toll went with the other half of his cake to some other friends and divided it amongst them. They all kissed him and said: "Ah, what a nice cake it is! Thank you dear, kind, curly-haired Toll!"

Not until all the cake was gone, did Toll remember that he had not tasted it yet himself, but there was not a crumb left.

"Never mind", said he, sucking his fingers, on which there was a little jam, "the jam was the nicest part of the cake, and I know now how it tastes. Besides I have a jolly life without this cake." Then he went on singing:

"A mouse lived a life of joyous ease—  
Her bed was of downy stuff;  
She feasted on butter, tallow, and cheese;  
But these were not good enough.  
'I want something nicer than these', said she;  
Tra la la, tra la la—  
'Some nicer food must be found for me'.  
"Perhaps she was greedy, as most mice are;  
Her life had no pleasure in it,  
Till she found some cream in a stony jar,  
And licked it up in a minute.  
They caught her: they cut off the tail she wore,  
Tra la la, tra la la,  
And now she is tailless for evermore!"

Poor Mousy! But why did they cut off her tail? Because she wished to taste cream? There was plenty of cream, why could she not have a little? Yes, why? Now who were greedier, mousy or the people who cut off her tail? She had only to ask. But she could not ask. That was the trouble, she could not ask for what she wanted, otherwise of course she would have had some cream.

Thinking thus, Toll went home to his granny, and the doves flew down to his feet and perched on his shoulders. And now he goes upstairs—one—two—one—two—goes up thinking: "What sort of



really good deed could I do? Granny says I am kindhearted, and whoever is kindhearted is not likely to do anything wicked, but a really good deed can only be done by one, who has a really good heart, in short by one who is better than I. We shall see who he is." One—two—one—two. "Good day, Granny!" and he threw his arms round her neck.

Meanwhile Jan, the poor boatman, was still sitting in the same place in his dark corner, and with him was sitting a black and heavy thought. It sat upon his shoulders and whispered into his ear: "Now thou hast no work, nor any chance to get it, for thy arm has been hurt, and thou hast quarreled with thy master, because he wished thee to work in spite of thy injured arm. What canst thou do now? Thy little children will starve and die, as thy dear, kind, gentle Anna died, three months ago. Thou hast buried her in the grave, and spent all thy money. Oh, how difficult for a poor man it is to live with no work, no money. Everything in the world seems to thee dark and dreary. Go and kill thy chicks, if thou wishest them well, and afterwards kill thyself, for the dead know no remorse, no care, no sorrow. They merely sleep in their graves."

The longer Jan sat, the louder he heard the voice of his black thought, whispering again and again into his ear. In vain he tried to shake it off, but it clung ever closer upon his shoulders.

At last Jan gets up, goes to a neighbor, borrows from him an iron pan full of burning charcoal, brings it home and puts it in the middle of the room.

"This is the last treat your poor father will ever give you, my darling chicks," thinks he, "sleep sound and quietly and wake not, when you are carried to your cold graves."

"Are you not going to cook us some supper, father?" asked little Paul.

"Yes, yes, a supper. Such a supper as you have never tasted before, nor shall ever taste again. Only go to bed now; the soup can't be ready very soon." Then he put them all to bed, kissed them, closed up all the cracks and clinks in the broken window, went out and bolted the door. Ah, what a horrible deed the black thought whispered to him. A kind of stifling bluish smoke rose from the burning charcoal, and gradually filled the whole room. There was no opening to let the smoke go out or the fresh air come in, and the children were enveloped in the curling vapor. They had been left to suffocate and die.



Meanwhile Jan went down the stairs, and his black thought followed him. It guided him into a filthy cellar, so full of tobacco smoke that hardly any light could be seen. There were many drunken people, and bottles containing different liquors, besides plenty of noise and shouting. Jan entered this place for the first time in his life, for it was his black thought which brought him there.

He took off his hat, and looked at it . . . "Good bye, old friend", thought he, "thou hast protected my unfortunate head from rain and sun for many a day. But now I am going to my cold grave, and I do not need thee any longer. Good bye!" And he exchanged his hat for a whole bottle of whisky, very strong whisky. Then he sat at the table, and his black thought sat by him. He drank a glassful of whiskey, and the black thought overpowered his head, and bent it over the empty glass.

Now Jan looks into the glass and sees a thousand lights reflected in its crystal facets. And then it seems to him as if those lights were in a white church; he stands there before the high altar, then he falls on his knees trembling and joyful, hand in hand with his dear, gentle Anna, while the priest says to him:

"Take her and call her thine, and be your life one of joy." Meanwhile a white dove flits above their heads, and the people round them say: "Good luck to them; may they be happy!"

Yes, all this had once been real, but it had vanished as a dream! With hatred in his heart Jan seizes the bottle, fills another glass, and drinks it at one draught. But the black thought clutches his head still tighter, and bends it again over the empty glass. This time it seems to Jan that he sees there a dim light, glimmering through the fog. It falls upon a pretty baby boy lying in a cot, and his dear Anna turns to him with a warm embrace, saying:

"Some time he will grow up brave and kind like you, my dear Jan." And the boy smiles and stretches his little arms towards Jan.

Jan pushes the glass from him, shakes his head and goes away. But he could not shake off his black thought. "I have drunk the last glass", thinks he, "the way is long and the night is cold—I was forced to drink it".

Now the black thought guides him through the misty night. Cold rain scourges his bare head and beats in his face, and the wind tosses his wet locks. And like one in a dream he is conscious of some one calling him, as if a child's voice were overtaking him through the wind and rain.



"'Tis my chicks calling to me", thinks he. "The soup was too smoky and bitter for them, poor things. I am coming, coming to you, my darlings; wait a while, we shall soon be together again." He hastens his steps through the rain and mist, and the black thought whispers into his ear: "Faster! faster!" He walks through narrow streets towards a wide river, which flows deep in the darkness and draws him with its cold eyes. "My foster mother", says Jan, "thou hast borne me on thy mighty waves since my infancy and to thee I come now, in my last hour; take me, mother, to thy deep dark bosom, take me and give peace to an unfortunate wretch, the murderer of his own children, who has no home, no bread in this cold world!" and he goes down to the river by wet slippery steps.

"Jan! Jan!" Louder and louder behind him echoes the childish voice. . . . Jan turns his head for a moment to mark who it can be that can remember him in his last moment, when he is stepping into his grave. "Jan!" shouts the voice, almost choked in the mist, and little Toll, quite out of breath, crying, wet and tired, falls down at his feet and grasps them firmly.

"Jan!" says he with difficulty, "I have followed you for a long time, I saw you leave that dirty den".

"Why art thou here?" mutters Jan. "What wouldst thou have? Let me be and go home!"

"I need you, dear Jan, don't push me away, don't hurry down into the water; bright days are still at hand; the sun will shine once more upon you, and you will be joyful and happy. I will help you like a friend, like a brother."

"Let me go," whispers Jan, endeavoring to tear off the clasp of Toll's little fingers. "Let me go, I do not want anyone's bread, there is no room here for me."

"Dear Jan, it will be my bread, your friend's, you shall give it to me when I am hungry; we must help each other, Jan, dearest Jan; do you not remember what Anna said in her last hour? I was there, and remember every word of hers. She said: 'Never despair, Jan, be always good and we shall meet once more'. Moreover, she said: 'I am sure you will never, never leave our little ones, for you love them so much'. . . ."

"Let me go, let me go!" whispers Jan desperately, trying with all his might to free himself from Toll's little hands, clinging round his feet; but the wounded arm was scarcely under his control.



"Let me go", moans he, "they never, never will come again, they are all sound asleep . . . ."

"They are all alive, Jan, they are only sleeping in their bed, for I have thrown away the horrible brasier. I have let in the fresh air; they are all alive, merry and safe, they are waiting for you, their dear father, the little doves . . . ." and he released Jan's feet, for he could not hold them longer, and fell down upon the wet, slippery steps, murmuring some unintelligible words, senseless, motionless, and pale, with closed eyes like one dead, and rolled down towards the water. But Jan caught him up in his arms and sat down on the wet steps trembling from head to foot, for his black thought had now left him to himself. He held poor Toll on his lap, kissed him tenderly, and pressed him to his heart. "My sweet dove, pure, kind dove!" said he, "thou savedst them and hast saved me". Then he got up and carried Toll home in his arms with tottering steps.

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Now at last we are actually going to learn which of the three has done a really good deed. For the time of the next feast is close at hand and all the children have been bidden by the Cake King. Little and big, wise and foolish, good and naughty, all are longing to know who will have the largest cake. And is it not indeed very interesting?

Keen alone did not care to come to the feast, as he had no desire either to get the cake himself, or to see who got it. He even said that the cake itself was a nasty thing.

Except Keen all the children went merrily and willingly, but the way was by no means short, for, as everybody knows, the Cake King lives neither here, nor there, but just at the world's end, in that far away kingdom, which is spoken of in fairy tales.

They all arrived at last, as might have been expected, and every one was present at the very beginning of the feast, which may be called punctuality.

The Cake King was seated upon his gilt throne as before, surrounded by his courtiers and the rest. In a word everything was going on as it had been for a long, long time, for everyone was accustomed to do everything always in the same way and the Cake King more than anyone else.

He knew very well everything that had happened; he knew what all the children had done, little Loop and naughty Keen and merry Toll. But how could it be otherwise? The courtiers told him all



about it, and the courtiers knew everything, for they were told by the sugar-sweet dames, who heard it from all those tiny sweet crumbs, which are scattered by winds all over the world. Oh, do not throw away sweet crumbs, never do that, because even the crumbs might be of use to poor children !

"Well", said the Cake King, who was very merry, for it is always pleasant to reward people, especially for a really good deed, "now fetch in the largest cake. Let everyone see what a splendid prize it is ; there is no need to keep it a secret."

No sooner were these words spoken than the door flew wide open, and a procession entered. In front of the rest marched the Chief Master of the Ceremonies in the most gorgeous robes of state he had in his wardrobes ; then followed the Under-Master of the Ceremonies without any state at all, for he was clad simply in a dressing-gown ; then came the chief-cook with a golden knife, then the under-cook with a silver fork, then all the people in the kingdom who had the most power, followed by all the people who had the least power, and these last carried the huge cake, for it was very heavy.

When the cake was brought and placed where it could be seen by everybody, and when the red velvet cover with golden tassels was taken off, all present could clearly perceive that it was a real cake, only to be obtained by one who had done a really good deed.

"Here is the prize!" said the King. "Now as to the deeds, they are here." And the King's secretary, who always kept strictly secret what everybody knew long before, read what we also already know.

"Little Loop", said the Cake King, "come here".

"There now, you see", said Loop, "what it means to do a good deed with calculation; it always brings a profit". And he approached the King's throne.

"Thou hast made", said the king, "a bad bargain, for thou hast spent six silver pieces but shalt have nothing from us. Go whence thou camest."

Then Loop turned round and went away muttering between his teeth, that the Cake King was nothing but a clever trickster, with whom it is not worth while to do business, for he may cheat one any time. And all the while he was biting his little finger nail, and he did it so cleverly that he left none to bite next time.

"As to little Keen", said the Cake King, "he was a wicked boy. It was a very easy task to lift up kind old grandfather Vlass, to help



him home and to fetch a pail of water from the fountain, but even this he did not do without hesitation. Besides he is not here, nor has he any desire himself to get the largest cake.

"Come here, merry Toll, this cake is thine. It is thine, because thou hast a really kind heart, which does every good deed freely and without an effort, without even knowing what it does; it is thine, because thou hast done a really good deed; thou hast not only saved Jan and his children from a dreadful death, but thou hast saved what is the best in man—man himself."

No sooner were these words spoken, than all rose from their seats and shouted loudly: "Long live justice and our kind sovereign, the Cake King, greatest and best of cakes!" All the dames waved their handkerchiefs while the sweetness of their emotion brought sugar-water to their eyes. All the confectioners began to drum on their copper saucepans, which produced perfect music. To this music Toll came out of the crowd and approached the king's throne.

"Be still, all of you!" shouted he, and all became silent. "Now listen to me, Cake King. Before rewarding me wilt thou explain what I cannot at all understand? Only then will I accept thy cake, for I do not want to do anything without meaning, like a monkey does. If it was so easy for me to do a really good deed, if I have done it almost without knowing or even noticing it, why am I to be rewarded? If I have done a really good deed it was born with me, and thou shouldst reward my kind mother for this, if she were not dead. Only consider this, Cake King. I love Jan; how should I not run to his rescue, or not implore him to spare his life? Oh, if he were to drown himself, even thy largest cake could never console me. For what then art thou about to reward me? Explain this, Cake King."

But the Cake King kept silence, he merely flung up his hands.

"Only imagine, Cake King", went on Toll, "if the black thought had not overpowered Jan, and he had not decided to drown himself, I should have had no chance to rescue him and thou wouldst have no reason to reward me. Is it possible that the black thought ought to be rewarded for giving me a chance to do what I have done? Tell me, tell me, Cake King, how it is?"

But the Cake King had nothing to say. He merely muttered something that sounded like "we", smiled, and took off his crown.

"To my mind", continued the irrepressible Toll, "it would be good deal better to give the cake to Keen, for he was malicious, but



conquered himself, and has done a really good deed, and in such a way that he can never forget it. But still would it be better, O Cake King, if instead of this one huge cake thou gavest a large piece of plain bread to each poor child every day. O Cake King, thou art very kind indeed, but surely thou dost not know what a horrible thing it is to have nothing to eat."

When at last Toll became silent, the Cake King was silent for a few minutes also. Then he winked his left eye, and said aloud and distinctly so that every one could hear him :

"Thou art a very kind-hearted and clever boy, Toll, but thou hast not understood one thing—that I offer a prize for a really good deed in order to induce people to do such deeds, and to encourage those who would otherwise never do anything of the kind."

"That's it!" grumbled Loop, maliciously, through his teeth. "Did not I tell you that he was a mere trickster . . . ."

But merry Toll interrupted him. "Oh yes," he said, "I have thought of that too. Tell me, Cake King, dost thou not think, that while giving a prize to one, thou excitest envy in many others? How kind those others must be not to envy the lucky one!"

Then the Cake King leaped from his throne, ran up to Toll, and kissed him so loudly that everyone became merry. "Oh, what a good and clever boy thou art! Take this cake at any rate, and do with it whatever thou desirest."

And now all the courtiers and dames also began to perceive that Toll had really a good heart, and they all attempted to kiss him, but he stepped aside and bowed to the king, then bowed to the chief-cook, and took the golden knife from him; again bowed to the under-cook and took the silver fork from him, and finally began to cut the cake.

All the children surrounded him.

He arranged them in rows, and gave an equal piece of cake to each, so that all shared alike, and none had any reason to be envious or offended, which, of course, was the most important thing in the end.

Though all this happened very long ago, it may happen again to-day or to-morrow, in short, when it so falls out, for there is no fixed time for it.