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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Rubezahl

And now I will tell you a beautiful fairy tale about Rubezahl.

Rubezahl, the Spirit of the Giant Mountains, was large, powerful, strong, and mighty. He was a wonderful being, now this way, then that way. Today good and kind, and tomorrow angry and mischievous. But most of the time he was good. He did not like bad and evil people and sometimes he really got hold of them. However, he never harmed good and honest people. Long, long ago, when no cities or villages had been built yet, but there were wild forests and fields everywhere, and nowhere could people be seen, this Spirit lived deep in the mountains. He was Lord and Prince over the Dwarfs and Earth Sprites who were working and digging there and making all sorts of wonderful and artistic things. Only rarely did the Spirit appear on the surface of the earth, for example, to hunt bears and wild bulls and to drive the shy game. When he appeared in daylight again, I do not know after how many hundred years, he saw a great wonder. The dark and impenetrable forests had been cut down and turned into fertile farmland, where rich harvests ripened. Between the flowering fruit trees, the pointed roofs of the houses in the villages could be seen, while on the green pastures horses, sheep, and other livestock grazed.

He was so pleased with all these new things that he became very curious and wanted to get to know the owner of all this. He therefore took on the guise of a strong young man and hired himself out as a servant to the first farmer he came across. Everything he undertook went well for him. He worked quickly and hard,



and his master had to be satisfied with him.... But his boss was a drunkard who left all the hard work to his servants and did not even thank them for it. So the Spirit ran away from this boss and went to herd a flock for another boss.

Here too, he worked faithfully and diligently. But his new employer was a grumbler and a miser. He did not even want to give his good servant enough to eat. So he did not stay there long either and hired himself out as a constable to a judge. However, the judge was an unjust person who could be bribed with money and made fun of the law. The Spirit did not want to stay here either. He had seen more than enough of people and preferred to wander around the forests again, free as a spirit. He was invisible but lurked, now here, then there, behind bushes and hedges.

One day, he saw a wonderfully beautiful girl in the distance. It was Emma, the daughter of the King who ruled the land around the Giant Mountains. She often went there with her maidservants to pick beautiful flowers, fragrant herbs, cherries, and sweet strawberries for her father.

When the Mountain Spirit saw her, he loved her so much that he decided to kidnap her. With his magic, he lured her into the water to bathe, and then let her sink into the depths before the eyes of her maidservants. The frightened girls cried, screamed, and wrung their hands, but didn't know what to do to save the poor princess. When the King heard about the death of his daughter, he was desperate and tore his hair out. He covered his face and could find no consolation.

His lost daughter had in the meantime been brought by the Mountain Spirit, through an underground path, to a magnificent castle. Here he tried to entertain and cheer her up in every way possible. He assigned her the finest rooms as her dwelling and gave her all kinds of jewels and treasures. But Emma remained just as quiet, sad, and melancholic as ever.

"The reason she is not happy is that she has no company," thought the Spirit. He immediately went to the field, pulled a dozen turnips and bulbs out of the ground on a plot, and brought them to the beautiful Emma. He also gave her a small, brightly colored magic wand and told her that she could use it to transform the turnips into anything she wished with a touch of the wand.

Emma immediately made use of the wand. She conjured up her dearest friends and spent a few pleasant weeks with them. However, as time passed, her friends began to wither away. They paled like wilting flowers from day to day, losing all their strength, freshness, and life. Eventually, they could no longer even stand up straight and had to lean on sticks.

Emma became very angry about this and called the Mountain Spirit to her. He behaved very submissively. "You wicked creature," she exclaimed. "Why won't you let me have the only pleasure I have in my sad life? If you don't restore my friends' youth and freshness right now, I will hate and despise you from now on."

The Spirit replied, "Oh, don't be angry, my dear. I will do everything within my power for you. But you must not ask the impossible of me. I cannot change the laws of nature. When the sap from the turnips disappears, all the forms must also dry up. But don't be sad about that. I will bring you new turnips, and then you can create as many new friends as you like."

Emma laughed again and skipped happily through the garden. She waited and waited, but the Mountain Spirit stayed away with the turnips for a long time. Finally, he returned empty-handed and declared that he could not bring her



turnips at the moment. He had searched the whole country for turnips, but they were either already harvested or spoiled in the ground.

He begged her to have three more months of patience. After that, she would never be without friends again. But before he could finish speaking, Emma turned her back on him stubbornly and refused to hear anything more from him. So he left, saddened, and dressed as a peasant, headed for the nearest market town. There he bought a sturdy donkey, loaded it with turnip seeds, and drove it home. He then sowed the entire field with the seeds and had his dwarves set up an underground fire to keep it warm. This way, the seeds would be heated from below and grow quickly, just like with pineapple plants.

The turnip seeds grew quickly and promised a rich harvest within a short time. Emma went to check on the field daily and seemed satisfied. The Mountain Spirit thought he had won her love again. However, her heart belonged to another. At home, she was engaged to a neighboring prince, the Prince of Ratibor. His castle was located on the banks of the Oder. The wedding day had already been set, but then the bride suddenly disappeared unnoticed. The prince had immediately left his capital and was now wandering, deeply saddened, in the lonely forests around, lamenting his grief.

Meanwhile, Emma had long been thinking quietly about how she could deceive the Mountain Spirit and put an end to her captivity. After much thinking, she finally came up with a plan. And hopefully, the outcome would be favorable...

Meanwhile, the turnips were growing prosperously and became ripe. Then she pulled one out of the ground and transformed it into a magpie. She sent the bird to her Beloved with a message, telling him to wait by the border with his horses on the third day to take her away and protect her. The magpie obeyed and fluttered from tree to tree. The worried Princess followed the bird with her eyes as far as she could see.

Prince Ratibor happened to be in the forest when the bird brought him the message about Emma's captivity and her plan to escape. He immediately returned to his palace, armed himself and his riders, and marched with them to the designated location. Meanwhile, Emma had prepared everything for the escape. The next morning, she put on her finest clothes and asked the Mountain Spirit to count all the turnips in the field as proof of his love. Then she would know how many friends she could conjure from them. "But be careful not to make a mistake in counting, as that is the test of your faith and love," she added. Rubezahl went straight to the field and began counting hastily. He had already counted the turnips once, but to be sure, he counted them again, and this time he did not get the same number as before! He counted for the third time, but it went wrong again. As soon as Emma lost sight



of the Mountain Spirit, she got ready to escape. She turned one well-grown turnip into a brave horse with a saddle. She jumped on it and rode at full speed to the place where her Beloved was waiting. There he received her with open arms and took her to safety.

The diligent Mountain Spirit was so absorbed in counting that he did not notice anything that was happening. After much pondering and struggling, he finally managed to find out the correct number of turnips growing in the field. He quickly went home to tell his beautiful Princess the joyful news, but he couldn't find Emma anywhere. Not in the garden lanes or in the halls of the palace. He searched every corner and called her name a thousand times, but he heard or saw nothing of her.

This was very strange and made him angry. He rose high in the sky and fiercely grabbed a few peacefully passing clouds. Then he hurled a fiery lightning bolt from the clouds, which even shattered a thousand-year-old oak tree into splinters. But the fleeing couple was out of danger as they had already crossed the border, where the Mountain Spirit had no power over them.

He stamped his foot on the ground three times, and the entire palace with all its grandeur disappeared. The Mountain Spirit himself descended into the deep abyss, carrying with him a great hatred for humans.

Meanwhile, Prince Ratibor brought Emma back to her father's court. The wedding was celebrated soon after, with much splendor and pomp. They lived a very happy life. The strange adventure of the Princess became

known everywhere. As a result, the inhabitants of the surrounding area who did not know the Mountain Spirit's real name began to call him Rubezahl, which means "turnip counter." And that nickname he has held to this day.