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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Horn The Knight Errant

When Horn had saddled his great black horse, and put on his armour, he rode forth to adventure, singing gaily. Scarce had he gone a mile when he spied by the seashore a ship, beached, and filled with heathen Saracens. "What do you bring hither?" asked Horn. "Whence do you come?" The pagans saw that he was but one man, and they were many, and answered boldly, "We are come to win this land, and slay all its folk." At that Horn gripped his sword, and his blood ran hot. He sprang upon the Saracen chief and smote him with all his strength, so that he cleft the man's head from off his shoulders. Then he looked at the ring which Rimenhild had given him; and immediately such might came upon him that in a trice he slew full five score of the pagans. They fled in terror before him, and few of those whom he did not slay at the first onset escaped. Horn set the head of the Saracen leader on the point of his sword, and rode back to Aylmer's court. When he had come to the king's palace, he went into the great hall, where the king and all his knights sat. "King Aylmer," he cried, "and you, his knights, hear me. To-day, after I was dubbed knight, I rode forth and found a ship by the shore, filled with outlandish knaves, fierce Saracens, who were for slaying you all. I set upon them;

my sword failed not, and I smote them to the ground. Lo, here is the head of their chief."

Men marvelled at Horn's prowess, and the king gave him words of praise. But not yet did Horn dare speak of his love for Rimenhild. On the morrow, at dawn, King Aylmer went a-hunting in the forest, and Horn's twelve companions rode with him. But Horn himself did not go to the chase; he sought instead to tell his lady Rimenhild of his deeds, and went to her bower secretly, thinking to hear her joy in the feats he had done. But he found her weeping bitterly. "Dear love," he said, "why do you weep?"

"Alas, Horn, I have had an evil dream," she answered. "I dreamed that I went fishing, and saw my net burst. A great fish was taken in it, and I thought to have drawn him out safely; but he broke from my hands, and rent the meshes of the net. It is in my mind that this dream is of ill omen for us, Horn, and that the great fish signifies you yourself, whereby I know that I am to lose you."

"Heaven keep this ill hap from us, dear princess," said Horn. "Nought shall harm you, I vow; I take you for my own for ever, and plight my troth to you here and now." But though he seemed to be of good cheer, he too was stirred by this strange dream, and had evil forebodings.

Meanwhile Fikenhild, riding with King Aylmer by the river Stour, was filled with envy of Horn's great deeds against the Saracens; and at last he said to the king, "King Aylmer, hear me. This Horn, whom you knighted

yesterday for his valour in slaying the Saracens, would fain undo you. I have heard him plotting to kill you and take Rimenhild to wife. Even now, as we ride here by the river, he is in her bower—he, Horn, the foundling, is with your daughter, the Princess Rimenhild. Go now, and take him, and drive him out of your land for his presumption." For Fikenhild had set a watch on Horn, and found out the secret of his love for Rimenhild. Thereupon King Aylmer turned his horse, and rode home again, and found Horn with Rimenhild, even as Fikenhild had said. "Get you hence, Horn," he cried in anger, "you base foundling; forth out of my daughter's bower, away with you altogether! See that you leave this land of Westernness right speedily; here is no place nor work for you. If you flee not soon, your life is forfeit."

Horn, flushed with rage, went to the stable, and set saddle on his steed, and took his arms; so fierce was his mien that none dared withstand him. When all was ready for his going, he sought out Rimenhild. "Your dream was true, dear love," he said. "The fish has torn your net, and I go from you. But I will put a new ending to the dream; fear not. Now fare you well; the king your father has cast me out of his realm, and I must needs seek adventure in other lands. Seven years will I wander, and it may be that I shall win such fortune as shall bring me back to sue honourably for you. But if at the end of seven years I have not come again to Westernness, nor sent word to you, then do you, if you so will, take another man for husband in my

stead, and put me out of your heart. Now for the last time hold me in your arms and kiss me good-bye."

So Horn took his leave. But before he went away from Aylmer's court, he charged Athulf his friend to watch over Rimenhild and guard her from harm. Then he set forth on his horse, and rode down to the sea, and took ship to sail away alone from Westernness.

