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The ice king and his wonderful grandchild

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A long, long time ago, when all the lands of northern Europe were one. Our forefathers thought that fairies were gods. They built temples in their honor, and prayed to them. There in the place where is now the little town of Ulrum in Friesland was the home of the spirit in the ice, Uller. That is what Ulrum means, the home of the good fairy Uller.

Uller was the patron of boys and girls. They liked him, because he invented skates and sleds and sleighs. He had charge of things in winter and enjoyed the cold. Dressed in thick furs, he loved to roam the hills and through the forests, seeking out the wolf, the bear and deer. His bow and arrows were terrible, for they were very big and he was a sure shot. Being the patron of archery, hunters always sought his favor. The yew tree was sacred to Uller, because the best bows were made from its wood. No one could cut down a yew tree without angering Uller.

He didn't give many blessings to people; yet thousands of people used to come to Ulrum every year to ask for his help and ask him to send heavy snow fall to cover the ground. That meant good crops of food for the next year. The white snow, lying thick upon the ground, kept back the frost giants from biting the earth too hard. Because of deep winter snows, the ground was soft the next summer. So the seed sprouted more easily and there was plenty to eat.

When Uller travelled over the winter snow he strapped snow-shoes on his feet. Because these were shaped like a warrior's shield, Uller was often called the shield-god. His protection was especially asked by men who fought duels with sword or spear, which were very common in early days; or by soldiers or hunters, who wished to be very brave, or had engaged in dangerous ventures.

Now when Uller got married, he choose the strong Skadi, because she was a huntress and liked the things which he liked. So they never fought. She was very strong, fond of sports, and of chasing wild animals. She ran over the hills and valleys with wonderful swiftness. So rapid were her movements that many people likened her to the cold mountain stream, that leaps down from the high peaks and over the rocks, foaming and dashing to the lowlands. They gave the same name to both this fairy woman and the water, because they were so much

alike.

Indeed Skadi was very lovely to look at. It was no wonder that many of the gods, fairies and men fell in love with her. When you look at her pictures, you will see that she was as pretty as bright winter itself, when Jack Frost clothes the trees with white and makes the cheeks of the girls so rosy. She wore armor of shining steel, a silver helmet and white fur leggings. Her snow-shoes were of the hue of winter. Besides a glittering spear, she had a bow and sharp arrows. These were held in a silver quiver slung over her shoulders. Altogether, she looked like winter alive. She loved to live in the mountains, and hear the thunders, the crash of avalanches and the moaning of the winds in the pine forests. Even the howling of wolves was music in her ears. She was afraid of nothing.

Now from such a father and mother one would expect wonderful children. It turned out that the offspring of Uller and Skadi were all daughters. They were all given winter names, Glacier, Cold, Snow, Drift, Snow Whirl, and Snow Dust. They all looked alike, so that some people called them the Six White Sisters.



They were all so great and powerful that many considered them giantesses. No one could stop their doings or drive them away, except Woden, who was the god of the sun. Yet in winter, even he left the world and went away. During that time, that is, during seven months, Uller took Woden's throne and governed the affairs of the world. When summer came, Uller went with his wife up to the North Pole. There they could roam on their snow-shoes. And their daughters would visit and they all loved spending time in the mountains and snow.

When the daughters were young everything was pleasant, for then the girls found enough to delight in at their daily play. But when grown up and their heads began to be filled with notions about the young giants, who paid visits to them, the family troubles began.

There was one young giant fairy named Vuur, who often came to see all six of Uller's daughters, from the youngest to the oldest. Yet no one could tell which of them he was in love with, or could name the girl he liked best; no, not even the daughters themselves. His character and his qualities were not well known, for he put on many disguises and appeared in many places. It was believed, however, that he had already done a good deal of mischief and was likely to do more, for he loved destruction. Yet he often helped the dwarfs do great things; so that showed he was of some use. In fact he was the fire fairy. He kept visiting the sisters, long after May day came, and he lengthened his visits until the heat turned the entire half dozen of them into water. So they became one.

At this, Uller was so angry at Vuur's having delayed so long before popping the question, and at his daughters' losing their shapes, that he made Vuur marry them all and at once, they taking the name of Regen.

Now when the child of Vuur and Regen was born, it turned out to be, in body and in character, just what people expected from such a father and mother. It was named in Dutch, Stoom. It grew fast and soon showed that it was as powerful as its parents had been; yet it was much worse, when shut up, than when allowed to go free in the air. Stoom loved to do all sorts of tricks. In the kitchen, it would make the iron kettle lid flop up and down with a lively noise. If it were confined in a vessel, whether of iron or earthenware, when set over the fire, it would blow the pot or kettle all to pieces, in order to get out. Thinking itself a great singer, it would make rather a pleasant sound, when its mother let it come out of a spout. Yet it never obeyed either of its parents. When they tried to shut up Stoom inside of anything, it always escaped with a terrible sound. In fact, nothing could long hold it in, without an explosion.

Sometimes Stoom would go down into the bowels of the earth. Then there would come an awful earthquake, because Stoom wanted to get out, and the earth crust would not let him, but tried to hold him down. Sometimes Stoom slipped down into a volcano's mouth. Then the mountain, in order to save itself from being choked, had to spit Stoom out, and this always made a terrible mess on the ground, and men called it lava. Or, Stoom might stay down in the crater as a guest, and quietly come out, occasionally, in jets and puffs.

Even when Jack Frost was around and froze the pipes in the house, or turned the water of the pots, pans, kettles and bottles into solid ice, Stoom behaved very badly. If the frozen kettles, or any other closed vessel were put over the stove, or near the fire, and the ice melted at the bottom too fast, Stoom would blow the whole thing up. In this way, he often put men's lives in danger and made them lose their property.

No one seemed to know how to handle this mischievous fairy. So they let him have his own way. Yet all the time, though he was enjoying his own tricks and lively fun, he was, with his own voice, calling on human beings to use him properly, and harness him to wheels; for he was willing to be useful to them, and was all ready to pull or drive, lift or lower, grind or pump, as the need might be.

As long as men did not treat him properly and give him the right to get out into the air, after he had done his work, Stoom would explode, blow up and destroy everything. He could be made to sing, hiss, squeal, whistle, and make all kinds of sounds, but, unless the bands that held him in were strong enough, or if Vuur got too hot, or his mother would not give him drink enough, when the iron pipes were red with heat, he would lose his temper and explode. He had no respect for bad or neglected boilers, or for lazy or careless firemen and engineers.

Yet properly harnessed and treated well, and fed with the food such as his mother can give, Stoom is greater than any giant or fairy that ever was. He can drive a ship, a locomotive, a submarine, or an aeroplane. Everybody today is glad that Stoom is such a good servant and friend all over the world.

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