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## The Winter Spirit and His Visitor

*Cornelius Mathews*

An old man sat alone in his cottage on the bank of a frozen stream. It was the end of winter and his campfire was almost out. He appeared very old and alone, his locks were white with age and all his limbs trembled. Day after day passed in solitude, and he heard nothing but the sounds of the storm sweeping the freshly fallen snow before it.

One day, when his fire had just gone out, a handsome young man came by. His cheeks had a healthy color, his eyes sparkled with life, and he had a smile on his lips. He walked with light and quick steps. A wreath of fresh young grass was around his forehead and he carried a bunch of flowers in his hand. "Ah! my son," said the old man, "I am glad to see you. Come in. Come, tell me about your adventures and the strange lands you have seen. Let us spend the night together. I will then tell you about my heroic deeds."

Then he pulled out an antique pipe and, after filling it with tobacco, gave it to his guest. Then they began to speak: "I blow my breath around," said the old man, "and the streams stand still. The water becomes hard as clear stone."

"I blow my breath," said the young man, "and everywhere the flowers bloom."

"I shake my locks," replied the old man, "and snow covers the land. The leaves fall, at my command, from the trees and my breath blows them away. The birds rise up from the water and fly to a distant land. The animals hide from the gaze of my eye, and the ground on which I walk becomes as hard as flint."

"I shake my locks," replied the young man, "and warm, soft rains fall on the earth. The plants joyfully come up from the ground. My voice reminds one of the birds. The warmth of my breath makes the streams flow. Music fills the forests and wherever I walk, all nature welcomes me."

Finally, the sun began to rise. A gentle warmth spread. The voice of the old man grew silent. A robin began to sing on the roof of the cottage. The stream began to murmur and the scent of growing herbs and flowers came softly, like a spring breeze.

Daylight revealed the face of the old man. When his guest looked at him, he saw the face of the icy old Winter Spirit. Streams began to flow from his eyes. As the sun rose higher, he became less and less substantial until he eventually melted away completely. There was nothing left in the place of the campfire except a small white flower with a pink edge that the young visitor put in his head wreath as his first trophy from the north.



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