

Ulečka and the White Lizard

Old Hungarian Fairy Tales, #1

by Baroness Emmuska Orczy, 1865-1947

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Old Hungarian Fairy Tales was translated and edited by Orczy and published by Dean and Son Ltd in 1895 in London. The illustrations for the work were provided by her then new husband, Montague Barstow. He was a young artist and son of a clergyman with whom Orczy enjoyed a long and happy marriage. It was a relationship of shared interests and passions, and one the author described as a

perfect friendship, where they could communicate freely with each other. Although Orczy left Hungary as a young child and moved across Europe, before settling in London as a teenager, she retained vivid and highly romantic memories of her life in her birth country, where she had lived in an enormous farmhouse which had belonged to her family for generations.

Orczy translated a handful of Hungarian Tales, including *The Twin Hunchbacks* and *Forget-Me-Not*, before she started to write her own stories and then novels. One fairy tale is *The Enchanted Cat*, which begins by detailing the sadness of a great and kind noble sultan, Abu Hafiz, who is in mourning for the loss of his beloved wife. He is soon persuaded that for the good of his kingdom he must marry again and a beautiful Princess is found for him. However, while the sultan is charmed by his new wife, she is jealous of the love and respect that her husband and son receive from the people. She begins to consider ways to kill her stepson so her own offspring can be the future ruler. There are similar tropes and themes in these stories to those in Western European/North American fairy tales, such as: the wicked stepmother or Queen; magical potions; a lust for wealth and power; wishes that lead to undesirable consequences and physical transformations.

Preface

THERE lies before me, as I write, a quaint old book; from this little book—torn and soiled, its edges all gone—nearly all the stories in this volume are drawn.

In their earliest childhood Hungarian children hear the story of *Forget-me-Not* (*Nfelejts*), the history of the *Twin Hunchbacks* (*A Rét Törpe*), and the doings of the wicked Sultana in the *Magic Cat* (*A Bűvos Macska*).

In my little book is the shell of these stories told simply and in few words. Who was the originator of them? I do not think any one knows, for I have found in many instances the same incidents occurring in the fairy tales of most nations. A modified form of the vain fairy Narcissa is revived in *Little Snow White*, and *Riquet with the Tuft* has, if I mistake not, an incident similar to that in *The Twin Hunchbacks*. But then again, who has ever traced the origin of all the proverbs and jokes that exist, and have existed for generations, in two score or more Eastern and Western, Latin, Teutonic, or Slavonic languages?

Old Hungarian legends, just like old Hungarian music, have to the national mind no palpable origin, though Jókay or Gaal have rewritten the former and Liszt or Brahms have familiarized the world with the latter. The following little collection has helped me in my childhood to pass many pleasant hours, so I now give them to my little English readers—embellished by many drawings—in the hope that they may derive as much pleasure from this little volume of magic and adventure as I did from my old torn copy of *Népmesék*.

EMMUSKA ORCZY.

Uletka and the White Lizard

IN a certain country there dwelt a prince whose name was Elkàbo. He had a dear little daughter called Uletka, who was a most sweet child. She and her father lived quite alone in an old castle with four towers, that stood in a beautiful glade in the centre of a great forest.

Uletka was a most dainty and lovely little maid, her wings—she had wings, being related to a fairy—had grown quite strong, and glistened in the sunshine, reflecting all the colours of the rainbow. So sweet and graceful was little Uletka, that perhaps you would imagine she had no faults. Unfortunately she had one, which a wicked and revengeful fairy, who was offended with Nastia, her mother, had endowed her with, and this was the dreadful fault of Curiosity.

This wicked fairy, whose name was Mutà, had done even worse than this. She it was who had lured poor Nastia to destruction. In the forest was a great lake, overshadowed by trees, and covered over with water-lilies and lotus, while round its edge grew tall rushes. One day, when Nastia was walking by the shore of this lake, Mutà hid herself in the water, and calling out for help, pretended she was in danger of drowning. Nastia crept out on the great leaves of the water-lilies and grasped Mutà's hands, whereupon the spiteful fairy dragged her down to the bottom. Poor Nastia could not swim, besides which, Mutà held both her hands. She tried to struggle and to call for help, but it was useless, and thus she drowned. Prince Elkàbo, her husband, and all the neighbours, searched for her everywhere, and when they reached the edge of the lake they saw her body floating far off among the lotus flowers. As they watched she slowly changed into a most beautiful snow-white water-lily.

Elkàbo wept bitterly, and even the birds ceased to sing. A kingfisher, who was sitting on a flag-leaf, cried out to him that it was the work of the wicked fairy, Mutà. Then Elkàbo mounted his horse and quickly sought audience of the Queen of the Fairies, who lived at the furthest end of the country in a palace of crystal that had been erected among the mountains. He told her and all her courtiers, wise men and magicians, what misfortune had befallen him. Mutà's evil deed excited general indignation throughout the court, and the Queen ordered that the fairy should be transformed into a white lizard, which her head magician immediately proceeded to do. Then Her Majesty decreed that if Elkàbo could catch the lizard, he might be allowed to retain it captive until his little daughter, Uletka, who was then a baby, should release it with her own hands. In the event of this happening not even the Fairy Queen herself could prevent Mutà from resuming her natural form, together with her evil powers.

So Elkàbo returned home and searched day and night, travelling far and wide, until, at last, far away in Japan, he found the white lizard, hidden away under a cluster of orchids. He captured it and fastened it in a little cage made of silver wire, and every day he fed it himself, and would let no one else come near it. But as time went on Elkàbo grew afraid that Uletka might open the cage, as she was such a very inquisitive little girl. So he built a small tower near the edge of the lake, and there hung the cage, and every day he went down to the tower and fed

the lizard with his own hands. The key of the tower he always wore suspended from his neck by a little gold chain, and no one but himself knew the secret of the tower by the lake.

Now Uletka was excessively curious, and often she would wander round the tower and turn the handle of the door, and fret because she always found it locked. She dared not ask her father any more about it, for she had done so once, and then she thought that she never had seen her dear, kind father so angry before.

At last, one day, Elkàbo was obliged to go on a journey, and as Uletka was getting quite a big girl, he felt he could safely entrust her with the key of the tower. He was going to be away two or three days, and told her that in the meanwhile she must go up every day to the tower and take with her a small bowl of bread. Uletka promised to obey her father implicitly, and really meant to keep her promise. Nevertheless, no sooner had Elkàbo departed than Uletka, unable to check her curiosity, started off to see the wonderful lizard in the tower by the lake. She opened the door with a trembling hand, and there, in a cage made entirely of silver wire, was the loveliest lizard she had ever seen. It ran up and down the cage and played with a straw that Uletka held out. She was quite enchanted, and remained a long time watching it play.

„What a lovely fairy you are,” the lizard said suddenly.

Uletka was not at all astonished at hearing the lizard talk. It was so very pretty, that she at once knew it must be a fairy in disguise.

„Oh! I am not a fairy,” said Uletka, modestly. „I am only a little girl, and am living with my father, Prince Elkàbo, at the palace yonder.”

„How funny,” said the lizard, „I made sure you were a fairy, you had such pretty wings; I am a fairy you know, my name is Mutà. What is yours?”

„My name is Uletka.”

„What a pretty name,” said the wily lizard. „I am sure I could easily make you into a fairy if I only had my magic cloak here. I would throw it over your shoulders, and you would become one immediately, and have the power to appear or disappear at will, turn into a tiny mouse, or a monstrous giant, and, in fact, go anywhere, and see everything just as you chose.”

„Oh!” said Uletka, excitedly, „tell me where our magic cloak is, I will fetch it for you. I do so long to be a fairy. Do you really think I could become one?”

„There is no doubt about it,” said the lizard; „my cloak would soon turn a pretty little girl like you into a fairy. Dear me, dear me, if I only could get out, I know exactly where to find it, together with the necessary wand. Hobo, the king of the gnomes, once hid it in a rose-bush, out of spite, and changed me into a lizard, and locked me up in a cage, so that I should not be able to get at it. But I know where it is, and if you will help me to get out you shall become a great and powerful fairy.”

In one moment Uletka quite forgot her promise to her father, and only thought of the delights of becoming a real fairy, and being able to go where she liked, and see and know everything. She opened the cage, and the lizard jumped out. In an instant it changed into a fairy, with raven hair, and great flashing eyes, dressed in a garment of black gauze, all covered over with golden stars. She

turned on Uletka, tore her pretty clothes, and broke her dainty wings. Laughing at her for her vanity and curiosity in thinking she could ever become a fairy, she drove her along into the forest, right to the other side of the lake, all among the dark trees, where she had never been before; then the wicked fairy vanished, and left her lying on the ground, weeping bitterly.

After poor little Uletka had been there some time she thought she heard her name softly whispered by the wind; then it sounded more distinctly, breathed in a sweet, sad voice, like a flower sighing. Uletka stalked gently towards the sound, and it grew louder and louder, until it seemed as if the trees murmured her name, one to another, and as she reached again the enchanted lake the voice rose from the waters, calling „Uletka! Uletka!”

As she stood listening, spellbound, the petals of a magnificent water-lily unfolded, and disclosed a fairy form of exquisite beauty, the spirit of her mother—Nastia. She beckoned to Uletka to approach, which the little girl did, stepping on the great flat leaves of the lilies. Nastia then told her to go into the forest, past the silver poplars and the enchanted palm-tree, till she found a great beech standing all alone. There she would find friends, and be safe from the power of the cruel Mutà, who otherwise would be certain to pursue her.

Uletka then knelt on the lily-leaves, and kissed her mother among the silver petals, then slowly saw them fold, hiding her mother from her view.

Away she sped, quickly past the poplars and the enchanted palm tree, till she was so tired and her feet so sore that she could hardly walk, but at last she came up to the tall solitary beech, standing towering above all the other trees of the forest. She went round it, and there in the very centre of the trunk, she discovered a little door. She knocked, but no one came; only the squirrels chattered together and called, „Who is that knocking at the Gnomes’ door? whilst a blackbird echoing, said, „Yes; who can that be knocking at the Gnomes’ door?”

At last, Uletka, tired of knocking, turned the little handle and went in. There, right in the very heart of the tree was a room with nine little chairs, and a table carved out of the wood of the tree, and on the table were dishes and spoons of wood, and a great feast of nuts, berries and other kinds of fruit, and large bowls full of delicious honey.

So, as Uletka was very hungry, she sat down and ate some honey and nuts, after which, feeling much better, she lay down on the floor and fell asleep...

When she awoke she was surrounded by a number of little men, with funny faces all laughing and looking at her; some of them were pulling her hair and saying, „Yes, yes, we know you; you are Uletka, you have let the wicked fairy, Mutà, escape. If she finds you she will kill you, but you are quite safe with us, therefore with us you must stay.”

And the birds outside sang in chorus, „Yes, yes; it is little Uletka, Prince Elkàbo’s child!” and then twittered all the more to show their gratification at her safety.

Uletka stayed with the Gnomes in the tree. Mutà could not hurt her there, for it belonged to Hobo, the King of the Gnomes, who reigned supreme in the forest. Every day the little Gnomes gathered nuts and acorns for their dinner. The shells of these they cut into cups and goblets. Sometimes the grass-elves would come

and dine with them, and after dinner they all danced round the tree in the moonlight, while the white owl on the tree-top called „*te-whit, te-who!* *te-whit, te-who!*”

The little Gnomes manufactured a chair for Uletka, and carved a plate for her out of the shell of a hazelnut. They made her a spoon of white fir-wood, and wove garments for her out of cobwebs. She lived in the tree with the good little fellows, and made their garments from the fibres of dead leaves, which looked like the finest lace, using the thorn of a wild rose for a needle. Every day she laid the table for their dinner, and did all the house-work. She was kept busy all the day, though sometimes she would lie in the grass and talk to the violets, who smiled and nodded their dainty heads. She was good friends with every one in the forest; even the tall fox-glove nodded to her as she ran past him. The squirrel who lived at the top of the tree would crack nuts for her. A green and gold beetle was her particular friend. He would carry her on his back as he flew about the wood. But the blackbird loved her most of all, and sat and sang to her all day.

The good little Gnomes were continually trying to invent new games and pastimes in order to distract her thoughts. They composed new music, which they played on their funny little instruments made of wood, with fibres for strings, and danced new dances for her all day long. They also built her a most beautiful little summer house, thatched with rose leaves, where she could rest after having seen to the wants of her kind protectors. But poor little Uletka was not happy, for she could not help thinking of her poor mother and father, who would no doubt be so anxious and lonely without her, and she bitterly repented her curiosity which had placed her in this fearful position. She also thought of the wicked old fairy Mutà, who had been so cruel to her and caused her all this pain; and then she would cry bitterly, and wonder whether she would ever see her beautiful home with the four towers.

As her kind protectors did everything they could to make her feel contented, she did not let them see that she was pining for her home, as she knew that if they thought she was not happy, they would be quite miserable.

One day King Hobo called together a lot of his subjects and told them that early in the morning he intended starting on a grand beechnut hunting expedition in a distant part of the wood, where he had never been before, and commanded them to get ready so as to make an early start. Uletka was up betimes to see her little friends start, and promised to have a nice supper ready for them on their return.

King Hobo led his little army deep into the forest, and soon all were busy looking for the nuts. Suddenly one of them called out: „Oh, I have found such a beautiful stone, but it is so large I cannot move it, come and help me!” Some friends ran up to help him and after much digging, puffing and blowing they managed to dig it up. When Hobo saw it he exclaimed, „Why, that is a Diamond, and the largest I have ever seen. We will carry it home and give it to Uletka.”—But the diamond was so heavy that it took two of the strongest gnomes to carry it.

As it was the largest diamond ever discovered they held a great feast in honour of the event. The tables, covered with the good things prepared by Uletka, were spread all round the pine trees, and invitations were at once sent out to all their friends.

Among the guests who came were the frogs from the pond by the willows, who were accompanied by their fat cousins, old Mr. and Mrs. Toad, a lot of grass-elves and little wood goblins; then there also came the large family of mice and the squirrels, all the birds and beetles, to say nothing of all the moths, the butterflies, the bees and the ants.

After every one had satisfied their hunger (and very little was left on the tables) a great concert was held, at which all the birds sang, but Uletka's friend, the blackbird, sang louder than any of the others to try and cheer her up, for he saw she did not feel quite happy. Then King Hobo asked Uletka to dance with him, the Gnomes keeping time by clapping their wooden cymbals. And so they kept up the gaiety until the bats and the white owl came out, when every one hurried off home, especially the mouse family, who were afraid that the owl might take a liking to one of them for supper. So soon everything was quiet in the forest and no one could guess that just before there had been such goings on under the pine trees.

Yet, in spite of all this gaiety, Uletka's sadness daily increased. She seemed to long more intently than ever for her home. At last her friend the blackbird, could not help noticing this, and determined, if possible, to help the little girl to whom he was so attached; so, one day, he flew to the palace of the Fairy Queen, far away beyond the great mountains.

And as her Majesty was sitting at supper with all her court the blackbird arrived, and humbly begged she would graciously hear his request. Then he told her that he had a very dear little friend, Uletka, the daughter of Prince Elkâbo. She was so sweet, so loving, and so winning that all the birds and beasts in the forest were in love with her, and entirely devoted themselves to making her happy. But Uletka was a dear affectionate little girl, and although she was made so much of, as the guest of Hobo, King of the Gnomes, and was worshipped there almost like a queen, yet she could not manage to be happy, for she loved her father dearly, and knew he was longing for her company again. He (the blackbird) could not bear to see his little friend pining away like this, and had come to beg Her Majesty, the Queen of the Fairies, to help him.

Prince Repto, the Queen's son, heard the blackbird's story with wonder and delight, he thought he never heard anything so beautifully romantic. Immediately he begged his royal mother to allow him to go off with the blackbird, and bring little Uletka home with him, and make her his wife. The queen, who was very kind-hearted, and quite genuinely interested in Uletka, and in frustrating the wicked Mutâ's plans, readily gave her consent, and Prince Repto, accompanied by the blackbird, started off for the kingdom of Hobo and his gnomes.

When he arrived it was late at night, the moon was shining brightly, and there, at the foot of the pine-tree he suddenly caught sight of Uletka. She was sitting on a large toadstool, while all the little gnomes were dancing round her, to the tune of harps played by the grass-elves, and the tinkling of the blue bells. Prince Repto had never seen such a beautiful princess before, and at once fell in love with her. Just at that moment Uletka looked up and saw the Prince, she gave a little cry in which fear and admiration were mingled at seeing such a handsome stranger. „Do not be alarmed, Princess,” said Prince Repto, advancing and doffing his cap, „I have come to your aid,” and then seating himself on a little toadstool at her feet he told her who he was, and how if she would consent he would marry her, when she

would be one of the highest in Fairyland, and live with him in a palace of gold, where the wicked Mutà would be powerless to harm her.

This was rather premature for the first meeting, and Uletka was a little startled; but the Prince looked so very handsome, and was dressed so charmingly, the prospect also was so dazzling, that she did not hesitate long, more especially as it was so natural for her to love him, when, in addition to all these good qualities, he had taken so much trouble to win her. She therefore soon consented, much to the delight of the Prince and all the gnomes.

Prince Repto gave Hobo a crown of gold, and made him king of all the woods in the world, to reward him for his kindness to Uletka; all the gnomes clapped their hands, which sounded like twigs crackling, and the elves played a tune of joy, and sang a love-song. There never was such rejoicing in the forest. And although it was long after their usual bedtime, all the birds stayed up and sang the most beautiful songs, so glad were they that dear little Uletka would at last be free from trouble; the nightingale and lark had a special duet together, which was the most beautiful music that is possible. But the sweetest song of all and the one that Uletka enjoyed the most, was the one that was sung by her little friend the blackbird, who had been the happy means of bringing her this good fortune. And in after years the blackbird was always a welcome guest in Uletka's home.

The next morning when the sun was shining brightly, the prince brought a beautiful coach made of a sea-shell; it was drawn by six white doves; he placed Uletka in it, then sat beside her, and all the gnomes gave a loud cheer as the coach rose high in the air, bearing the happy pair to the fairy kingdom beyond the trees. On the way they stopped, so that Uletka might kiss her dear father, who still dwelt in the castle with the four towers. They took him with them to Fairyland, where there were more festivities and rejoicings in honour of the wedding, and Repto and Uletka have lived happily together ever since. Hobo and the gnomes, and the frogs, and the squirrels, and the blackbird often go to see them, but nothing more has been heard of the wicked fairy Mutà.

