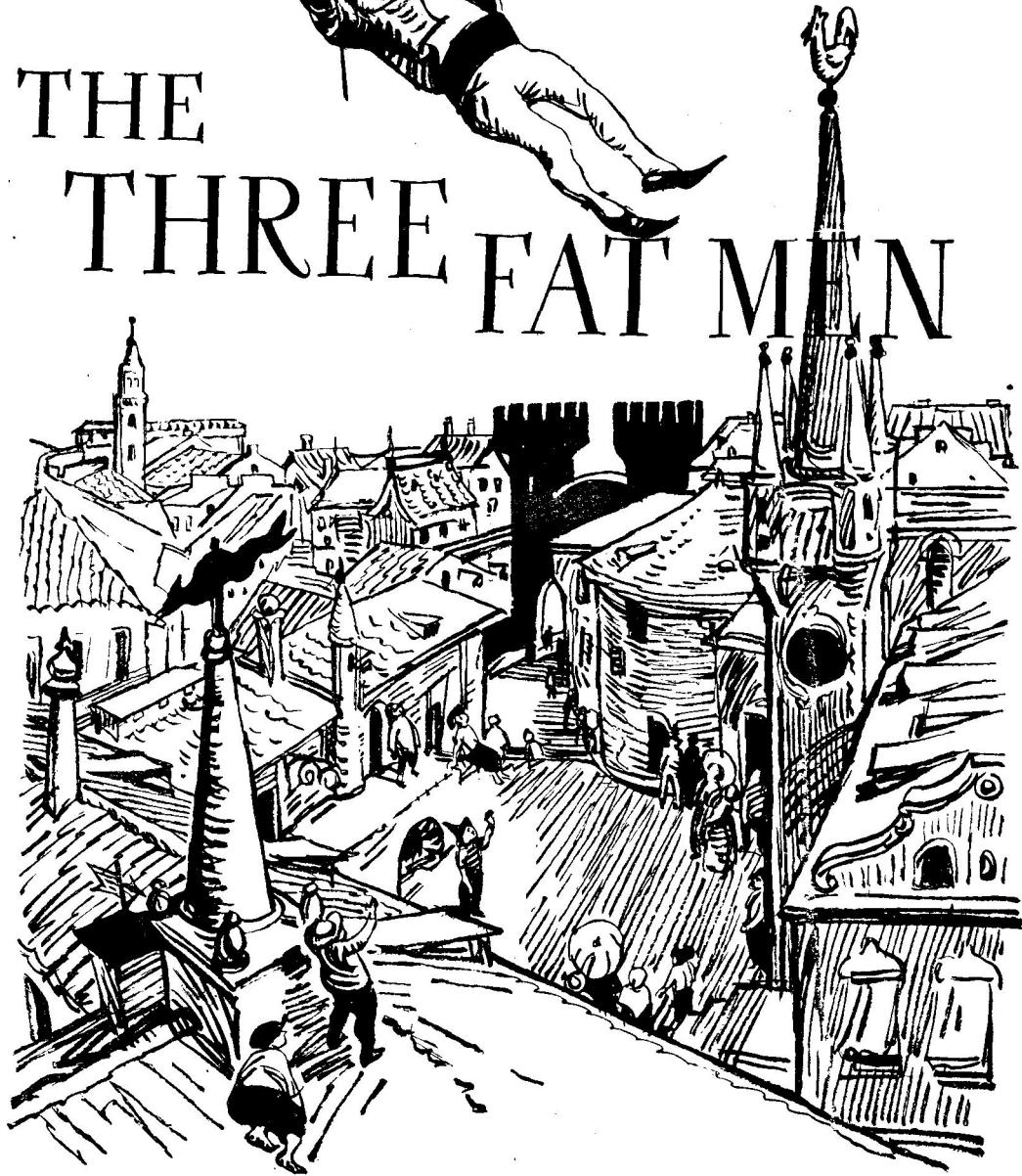




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THE
THREE FAT MEN



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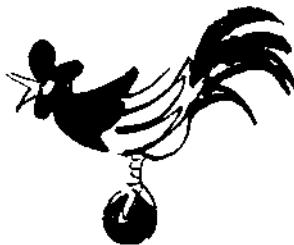
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EPILOGUE

Part One



TIBUL

CHAPTER ONE

DOCTOR CASPAR ARNERY HAS A BUSY DAY

The time of magicians has past. And there probably never were any, to begin with. They must have been made up to fool very little children. But there really were very smart and nimble jugglers who could trick the crowd watching them, and that is why people believed there were wizards and magicians.

Once upon a time, there was a doctor whose name was Caspar Arnery. A simple-minded person, or an idler at a country fair, or a half-baked student might think he was a magician, for the doctor could do wonderful and unusual things that really looked just

like magic. But he was nothing at all like the fakes and magicians who fooled the trusting, simple people.

Doctor Caspar Arnery was a scientist. He had studied a hundred different sciences, and there was not another person in all the land as wise and educated as he.

Everyone knew how wise he was: the miller, the soldiers, all the ladies, even the Palace ministers. This is the song the schoolboys sang about him:

*Doctor Caspar Arnery—
What a clever man is he!
He can trap the sliest fox,
He can crack the hardest rocks,
He can fly from here to Mars,
He can reach the farthest stars!*



One lovely day in June, Doctor Caspar Arnery decided to set off on a long walk to gather some grasses and beetles for his collection.

Doctor Caspar was not young any more, and so he was afraid of the wind and the rain. Whenever he left the house he would tie a warm scarf round his neck, put on a pair of spectacles to keep the dust out of his eyes, and take along his walking-stick to lean on and keep him from stumbling. When he started out he always took a lot of trouble to have everything just so.

It was a beautiful day. The sun did nothing but shine, the grass was so green it made your mouth water just to look at it, the air was full of dandelion fuzz, birds chirped, and there was a light breeze.

"Ah, how lovely," said the doctor. "But I'd better take my cape, just in case. Summer days are so changeable. It might begin to rain."

When he had made sure that everything was in order at home, he wiped his spectacles clean, picked up his green leather bag and set off.

The best places for gathering grasses and beetles were out in the country beyond the town, near the Palace of the Three Fat Men. This was where the doctor usually went. The Palace of the Three Fat Men stood in the middle of a huge park. The park was surrounded by deep trenches. There were black iron bridges across them. And the bridges were guarded by Palace Guards in black oilskin hats with yellow feathers. All around the park, as far as the eye could see, were meadows full of flowers, little groves of

trees, and ponds. It was a wonderful place for walks. The most interesting kinds of grasses grew here, the prettiest beetles buzzed here and the birds always sang most sweetly.

"It's too far to walk," the doctor thought. "I'll only go to the end of town, and then I'll take a cab to the Palace park."

There was a big crowd in the square near the town gates.

"Is it Sunday today?" the doctor wondered. "No, I don't think so. It's Tuesday."

He came a little closer.

The entire square was full of people. There were workers in grey jackets with green cuffs, sailors with weather-beaten faces, rich merchants in coloured vests whose wives wore great pink skirts, there were traders with pitchers, trays, cans of ice-cream and braziers, there were skinny street actors dressed in green, yellow and other bright colours, looking just like patchwork quilts, there were very little boys pulling shaggy brown dogs by the tails.

Everyone was pushing towards the town gates which were as tall as a house and made of iron. The gates were shut tight.

"Why are the gates shut?" the doctor wondered.

The crowd was noisy, people were shouting and arguing, but it was impossible to understand what it was all about. The doctor went over to a young woman holding a big grey cat and asked:

"Would you kindly tell me what's going on? Why are there so many people here? Why is everyone so angry? And why are the town gates shut?"

"The guards won't let anyone out of town."

"Why not?"

"So they won't be able to help those who left before and are now on their way to the Palace of the Three Fat Men."

"I'm sorry, Miss, but I don't understand what you mean."

"My goodness! Don't you know that Prospero the Gunsmith and Tibul the Acrobat led the people to storm the Palace of the Three Fat Men?"

"Prospero the Gunsmith?"

"Yes. There are Guards on the other side of the gates. No one can leave town. And the Palace Guards will kill off everyone who has gone with Prospero."

Just then they heard several faint shots.

The young woman dropped her fat cat. It plopped to the ground like a piece of raw dough. The crowd roared.

"I seem to have missed a very important event," the doctor thought. "That's because I stayed at home this past month, working day and night, and my door was locked. I simply had no idea of what was going on."

In the distance a cannon boomed several times. The sound bounced like a ball and rolled along on the wind. Doctor Caspar was not the only one to get frightened and stumble backwards. The crowd scattered. Children began to cry, pigeons flew up

flapping their wings loudly, and the brown dogs began to howl.

The cannon boomed again and again. Then the crowd began to push towards the gates, shouting:

"Prospero! Prospero!"

"Down with the Three Fat Men!"

Doctor Caspar didn't know what to do. He was well known, and now many people recognised him. Some rushed towards him, as if he could protect them. But the doctor himself was close to tears.

"What's going on there? How can we find out? Maybe the people are winning, but then again, maybe they've all been killed?"

A dozen people ran towards the corner of the square where three narrow streets met. An old house with a high tower stood there. The doctor decided to climb the tower, too. The ground floor was occupied by a laundry. It was as dark as a cellar inside. A winding staircase led up to the tower. Some light came through the tiny windows, but it was hardly enough to see by. Everyone climbed slowly and with difficulty, because the stairs were rickety and there was no railing. Imagine how hard it was for Doctor Caspar to reach the top! When he had climbed only twenty steps the others heard him shout in the darkness:

"Help! My heart's bursting! And I've lost the heel of my shoe!"

As for his cape, the good doctor had lost it back on the square, after the cannon had boomed for the tenth time.

There was a platform at the top of the tower with a stone railing all around it. Here one could see for at least thirty miles away. But there was no time to admire the view, though it was really pretty. Everyone was looking towards the scene of battle.

"I have a pair of binoculars. I always take along a pair of binoculars with eight lenses," Doctor Caspar said. "Here, have a look," he added and unhooked the strap.

The binoculars were passed round.

Doctor Caspar saw a great many people in the fields. They were running towards the town. They were fleeing. From afar they looked like coloured flags. Palace Guards on horseback were chasing them.

The doctor thought it all looked like a picture in a magic lantern. The sun was shining brightly, the grass glittered, cannon balls burst like puffs of cotton. The powder flames shot up just as if someone were catching sun-beams in a mirror. The horses pranced, reared up and spun around. A white smoke veiled the park and the Palace of the Three Fat Men.

"They're running away!"

"They're running away! The people have been beaten!"

The running men were getting closer and closer. Many of them fell on the way. From the top of the tower they looked like coloured rags falling on the grass.

A cannon ball whizzed over the square.

Someone dropped the binoculars.

The cannon ball burst, and everyone standing on the platform at the top of the tower rushed back down the stairs.

The locksmith caught his leather apron on a hook. He turned round, saw something terrible and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Run for your lives! They've captured Prospero the Gunsmith! They'll be inside the gates any minute!"

There was a mad scramble in the square.

The crowd rushed away from the gates and ran down the little streets leading off the square. The noise of the shooting was deafening.

Doctor Caspar and two other men stopped on the third floor landing. They looked through the narrow window built in the thick wall.

There was just room for one of them to have a good look. The other two could only get a peep from behind his head.

Doctor Caspar was one of the two who could only peep. But even that was more than enough to see the horrible things that were going on.

The great iron gates flew open. About three hundred people rushed through them. These were workers in grey cloth jackets with green cuffs. They fell to the ground bleeding.

The Guards galloped right over them, swinging their swords and shooting. The yellow feathers in their shiny black oilskin hats fluttered in the wind. The horses opened their foaming red mouths and rolled their eyes.

"Look! Look! There's Prospero!" the doctor cried.
They were dragging him along at the end of a rope.
He stumbled, fell and rose again. His red hair was
matted with blood, and there was a big noose tied
round his neck.

"Prospero has been captured!" the doctor cried
again.



Just then a cannon ball hit the laundry. The tower leaned, swayed, steadied for a moment, and then came crashing to the ground.

The doctor tumbled downstairs, losing his other heel, his walking-stick, his bag and his spectacles on the way.

CHAPTER TWO

TEN SCAFFOLDS

It was a lucky fall: Doctor Caspar did not crack his head, nor broke his bones.

But no matter how luckily one may fall from a toppling tower, it's far from pleasant, especially if you are not young (or, rather, are old), as Doctor Caspar Arnery was. The good doctor fainted from fright.

When he came to, it was evening. He looked about.

"Oh, dear! My spectacles are broken. When I look round without them, I see things just as poorly as someone with good eyes does when he puts on spectacles. It's most distressing."

Then he began to grumble about his lost heels.

"I'm short enough as it is, and now I'll be at least an inch shorter. Perhaps even two inches shorter, since I lost both heels. I guess I'll only be one inch shorter after all."

He was lying on top of a pile of broken bricks. The tower had crumbled, all but a narrow piece of wall

that stuck up out of the ground like a bone. He could hear the sound of music coming from afar. It was a lively waltz, carried on the wind. The doctor raised his head. Black broken beams hung above him. Stars were shining in the blue-green evening sky.



"I wonder where the music's coming from?" The doctor was beginning to feel chilly without his cape. There was not a sound to be heard in the square. He groaned as he picked himself up from among the fallen stones. Then he stumbled on someone's large boot. The locksmith was lying across a beam, gazing up at the sky. The doctor shook him. But the locksmith did not move. He was dead.

The doctor raised his hand to take off his hat. "I've lost my hat, too," he said. "Now, where shall I go?" He left the square. There were people lying in the road. The doctor bent over each one and saw the stars reflected in their eyes. He touched their foreheads. They were dead.

"So that's how it is!" he whispered. "That means the people have been beaten. What will become of us?"

Half an hour later he reached a crowded, brightly lit street. He was very tired. He was hungry and thirsty, too. Here the town looked as it always did.

The doctor stood at a crossing, resting from his long walk. "How strange," he thought. "There are coloured lights shining in the windows, carriages roll by, glass doors open and shut. People are dancing in that house. They're probably having a party. There are Chinese lanterns swinging over the dark waters. It's just as if it were yesterday here. Don't they know what happened this morning? Didn't they hear the shooting and the cries of the wounded? Don't they know that the people's leader, Prospero the Gunsmith, has been

captured? But perhaps nothing really happened, perhaps it was all a bad dream?"

There was a street lamp on the corner and carriages were lined up along the sidewalk. Flower girls were selling roses, and coachmen were talking to them.



"He was dragged through the town with a rope round his neck. Poor man!"

"They've put him in an iron cage. And the cage is in the Palace of the Three Fat Men," said a fat driver in a light-blue top hat with a ribbon on it.

Just then a fine lady and a little girl came up to buy some roses.

"Who have they put in a cage?" the fine lady asked.

"Prospero the Gunsmith. The Guards captured him."

"Thank goodness!" she said.

Her daughter began to sniffle.

"Why are you crying, silly?" the fine lady said. "Are you sorry for the gunsmith? You shouldn't be. He's a very bad man. Now, just look at these lovely roses."

There, in bowls that were full of water and leaves, the large roses floated as slowly as swans.

"Take these three. And stop crying. They're all rebels. If you don't put such people in iron cages, they'll take away our houses, our fine clothes and our roses. And then they'll kill us."

A boy ran by. First, he pulled at the lady's embroidered cape, then he tugged the girl's pigtail.

"Hey, Countess!" he shouted. "Prospero the Gunsmith is locked up in a cage, but Tibul the Acrobat is free!"

"You dreadful boy!"

The lady stamped her foot and dropped her bag. The flower girls laughed. A fat coachman lost no time in asking the fine lady if she would care to get in his carriage and drive away.

The fine lady and her daughter drove off.

"Hey, you! Wait a minute!" one of the flower girls shouted to the boy. "Come back here and tell us what you know."

Two drivers climbed down from their boxes. Shuffling forward in their long coats with five small

capes attached to the collars they came up to the flower girls.

"That's some whip! It sure is a beauty!" the boy thought as he looked at the coachman's long whip. He would have loved to have one like it, but he knew he never would.

"What did you say?" the coachman asked in a deep voice. "Did you say Tibul the Acrobat is free?"

"So I heard. I was down at the docks...."

"Didn't the Guards kill him?" the other coachman asked in an equally deep voice.

"No, they didn't. Pretty miss, will you give me a rose?"

"Wait, stupid! Tell us what happened."

"Well, it was like this. At first, everyone thought he'd been killed. So they looked for him among the dead, but couldn't find him."

"Perhaps they tossed him into the river?" one of the coachmen said.

At that point a beggar joined them.

"Who was tossed into the river?" he asked. "Tibul the Acrobat's not a kitten to be tossed into the river! He's alive! He escaped!"

"You're lying!" the coachman said.

"Tibul is alive!" the flower girls cried joyfully.

The boy stole a rose from one of the bowls and dashed off. Several drops from the wet flower landed on the doctor. He wiped them off his face. They were as bitter as tears. Then he came closer to hear what else the beggar would say.

But something happened then that stopped the conversation. A strange procession was coming down the street. At the head of it were two men on horseback carrying lighted torches which flowed in the wind like fiery beards. Rolling slowly behind them was a black carriage with a coat of arms painted on the door.



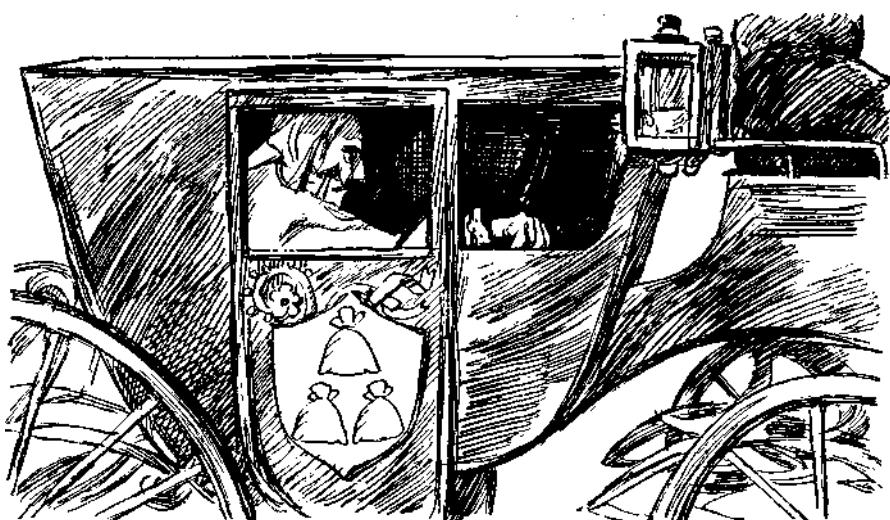
Behind the carriage came the carpenters. There were a hundred carpenters in all.

Their sleeves were rolled up, they were ready for work. They wore aprons and carried their saws, planes and tool boxes. Guards rode along both sides of the procession. They had to keep reining in their horses, for the animals wanted to gallop off.

"What's going on? What's all this about?" people in the street asked each other anxiously.

Sitting in the black carriage with the coat of arms on the door was an official of the Council of the Three

Fat Men. The flower girls were frightened. They pressed their hands to their cheeks as they looked at his head. It could be seen through the carriage window. The street was brightly lit. The black-wigged head bobbed up and down. It looked as if a big bird was inside the carriage.



"Move along! Get moving!" the Guards shouted.

"Where are the carpenters going?" a little flower girl asked the Captain of the Guards.

"The carpenters are going to build scaffolds! Now do you understand? The carpenters are going to build ten scaffolds!" he shouted right in her face and so fiercely that her hair blew in all directions.

"Oh!"

The flower girl dropped her bowl. The water with the floating roses poured out on the pavement.

"They're going to build scaffolds!" the doctor repeated in terror.

"Yes, scaffolds!" the Guard shouted, turning back and baring his teeth. Above them were moustaches that looked like boots. "Scaffolds for all the rebels! They'll all have their heads chopped off! All who dare rise up against the Three Fat Men!"

The doctor felt dizzy. He thought he might faint. "It's been too much for one day," he thought. "Besides, I'm awfully hungry and tired. I'd better hurry back home."

Yes, it was about time the doctor got some rest. He was so overcome by all that had happened, by all he had seen and heard, that he didn't even think his flight together with the tower earlier in the day was very unusual. He was not even bothered by the loss of his hat, cape, walking-stick, and the heels of his shoes. Worst of all, though, was that he had lost his spectacles. So he hired a cab and headed for home.

CHAPTER THREE

STAR SQUARE

As the doctor drove along the broad paved streets that were brighter than parlours, a chain of street lights rushed past the carriage. The lights were like glass balls filled with bright boiling milk. Clouds of tiny insects buzzed, fluttered and died round the glass balls. The carnage rolled along embankments, past high stone walls on which bronze lions holding shields in their paws stuck out their long tongues. Below the water flowed sluggishly, black and shiny as tar. The town was reflected upside-down in the water, it was trying to float away, but it couldn't get loose and dissolved in soft golden spots instead. He rode over bridges that were curved like arches. From below or from the opposite bank they looked like cats arching their iron backs before springing. There were sentries at the approach to every bridge. They sat around on their drums, smoking their pipes, playing cards and yawning as they stared at the stars. Doctor Caspar looked about and listened as he drove on.

From the streets, from the houses, from the open tavern windows and from behind the park fences he could hear snatches of a song:

*They've caught the horrid Prospero
And caged him like an ape,
With an iron collar round his neck—
To see he won't escape!*

A drunken fop was singing it, too. The fop's aunt had just died. She had a lot of money, still more ugly freckles and not a single other relative. The fop had just inherited all his aunt's money. That is why he was angry at the people for rising up against the rule of the rich.

There was a big act on at the animal show. Three fat and hairy monkeys on a wooden stage were supposed to be the Three Fat Men. A terrier was playing the mandolin. A clown dressed in a bright red suit with a golden sun on his back and a golden star on his stomach was reciting a poem to the music:

*These Three Fat Men—
so fat are they,
They drink and gobble
night and day.
The only pastime that
they know
Is to watch their bellies
grow.
Beware, fat pigs, the time
will come
When you will pay for
what you've done.*

"The time will come!" bearded parrots screeched from all sides.

There was a terrible din. The animals in the cages began to bark, growl, chatter and whistle.



The monkeys dashed to and fro on the stage. It was hard to tell their arms from their legs. Finally, they jumped down, scrambling over the heads and shoulders of the screeching audience. The fattest men there were making the most noise. Their faces red with anger, they threw their hats and canes at the

clown. A fat lady shook her umbrella at him and caught another fat lady's hat instead.



"Oh! Ah!" the other fat lady screamed and waved her arms, because her wig had come off together with her hat.

One of the monkeys clapped its hand on the lady's bald head as it rushed by. She fainted straight away.

"Ha-ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" the rest of the crowd laughed. These people were much thinner and were more shabbily dressed.

"Bravo! Bravo!"

"Get'em!"

"Down with the Three Fat Men!"
"Long live Prospero! Long live Tibul! Long live,
the people!"

Just then someone shouted still louder:
"Fire! The town's on fire!"

Everyone made a rush for the exits, pushing and shoving and turning over the benches. The animal keepers were trying to catch the monkeys.

The driver of the doctor's carriage turned round and said, pointing with his whip:

"The Guards are setting fire to the workers' quarters.
They want to find Tibul the Acrobat."

The pink glow of fire was spreading over the town and lighting up the dark houses.

When the doctor's carriage reached the main square, which was called Star Square, it could go no further, for there were many other carriages, men on horseback and people crowding them from all sides.

"What's going on here?" the doctor asked.

But no one answered, because they were all busy craning their necks, trying to see what was going on in the square. The doctor's driver stood up on his box and also looked in that direction.

This is how Star Square got its name. It was surrounded by tall houses and covered with a glass top, somewhat like a huge circus. In the middle of the glass top, so high that it took your breath away, was the largest lamp in the world. It was a tremendous round glass ball hung on heavy cables with an iron band around it that made it look like the planet Saturn.

The light it cast was so beautiful and so unlike anything else in the world that people had named the wonderful lamp "Star". And that is how the square came to be known as Star Square.

No other light was needed in the square, nor in the houses, nor in any of the nearby streets. The Star lit every nook and cranny in every house, and the people who lived there never used lamps or candles.

The driver was looking over the carriages and over the tops of the coachmen's hats.

"What can you see? What's going on there?" the doctor asked anxiously, peering over his driver's back. But Doctor Caspar was short and couldn't see a thing, especially since he was nearsighted and had lost his spectacles.

The driver told him all he saw. And this is what he saw.

There was great excitement in the square. People were running to and fro across the round space. It seemed as if the whole place were spinning like a merry-go-round. People rushed about to get a better view of what was happening above.

The great lamp was as bright as the sun. It blinded them. People threw back their heads and shielded their eyes with their hands.

"There he is! There he is!" they cried.

"There! Over there!"

"Where? Where?"

"Higher up!" "Tibul! Tibul!"

Hundreds of fingers pointed to the left. They were pointing at a very ordinary-looking house. All the windows on all six floors of the house had been thrown wide open. Heads stuck out of every window. The heads looked very colourful: some had on tasselled nightcaps, some had on pink bonnets with red curls sticking out, some had on kerchiefs. Higher up, in the rooms where poor young poets, artists and actors lived, there were happy-looking beardless faces lost in clouds of tobacco smoke and lovely young women whose golden hair lay like a cloud on their shoulders. The house, with its open windows and brightly-coloured heads poking out, was just like a large cage of goldfinches. The owners of all these heads were trying to see something very important that was happening on the roof. This was just as impossible as trying to see your own ears without a mirror. These people who wanted to see the roof of their own house used the crowd below as a mirror. Those on the ground could see everything, they were shouting and waving their arms. Some were overjoyed, others were terribly angry.

A tiny figure was moving along the roof. It was slowly and carefully climbing down the steep incline. The iron roofing clattered under its feet.

The little figure waved its cape for balance, just as a tight rope-walker in the circus uses a yellow Chinese umbrella.

It was Tibul the Acrobat.

The people shouted:

"Bravo, Tibul! Bravo, Tibul!"

"Hang on! Remember how you walked a rope at the fair!"

"He won't fall down! He's the best acrobat in the land!"

"This isn't the first time we've seen him walk up and down a rope."



"Bravo, Tibul!"

"Run! Save yourself! Free Prospero!"

Others were angry. They shook their fists and bellowed:

"You won't escape, you stupid clown!"

"Faker!"

"Rebel! They'll shoot you like a hare!"

"Watch out! We'll pull you off that roof and drag you to the scaffold! Ten scaffolds will be ready tomorrow!"

Tibul continued his dangerous journey.

"Where did he come from?" the people wondered.
"How did he get to the square? How did he get to the roof?"

"He escaped from the Guards," others said. "He escaped and disappeared. Then he was seen in different parts of the town, he climbed from roof to roof. He's as quick as a cat. And his skill came in handy. That's why he's so famous."

Guards appeared in the square. People were now running to the side streets to get a better view. Tibul stepped over the railing and stood at the very edge of the roof. He stretched out his arm. His green cape was wound around it and fluttered like a flag.

People were used to seeing him with this cape and dressed in yellow and black harlequin tights at the fairs and market places. Now, high up under the glass top, his small, thin striped body looked like a wasp crawling up the wall of a house. Every time the cape flapped in the wind, it seemed as if the wasp were opening its shiny green wings.

"I hope you fall and break your neck! They'll shoot you, wait and see!" shouted the drunken fop who had inherited a fortune from his freckled aunt.

The Guards took up their positions. Their officer ran up and down frowning. He had a large pistol. His spurs were as long as runners.

Suddenly, it became very quiet. The doctor clapped his hand to his heart, for it was jumping like an egg in boiling water.

Tibul stopped for a second at the edge of the roof. He had to get to the other side of the square—then he could escape to the workers' quarters.

The officer stood in the middle of the square, in a bed of blue and yellow flowers. Beside him was a pool and a fountain spouting from a round stone bowl.

"Wait!" the officer said to the soldiers. "I'll shoot him down myself. I'm the best shot in the regiment. I'll show you how it's done. Look!"

Nine steel cables stretched from the nine houses surrounding the square to the centre of the glass top. They supported the Star. It was just as if nine long black rays had spread over the square from the Star's wonderful flame.

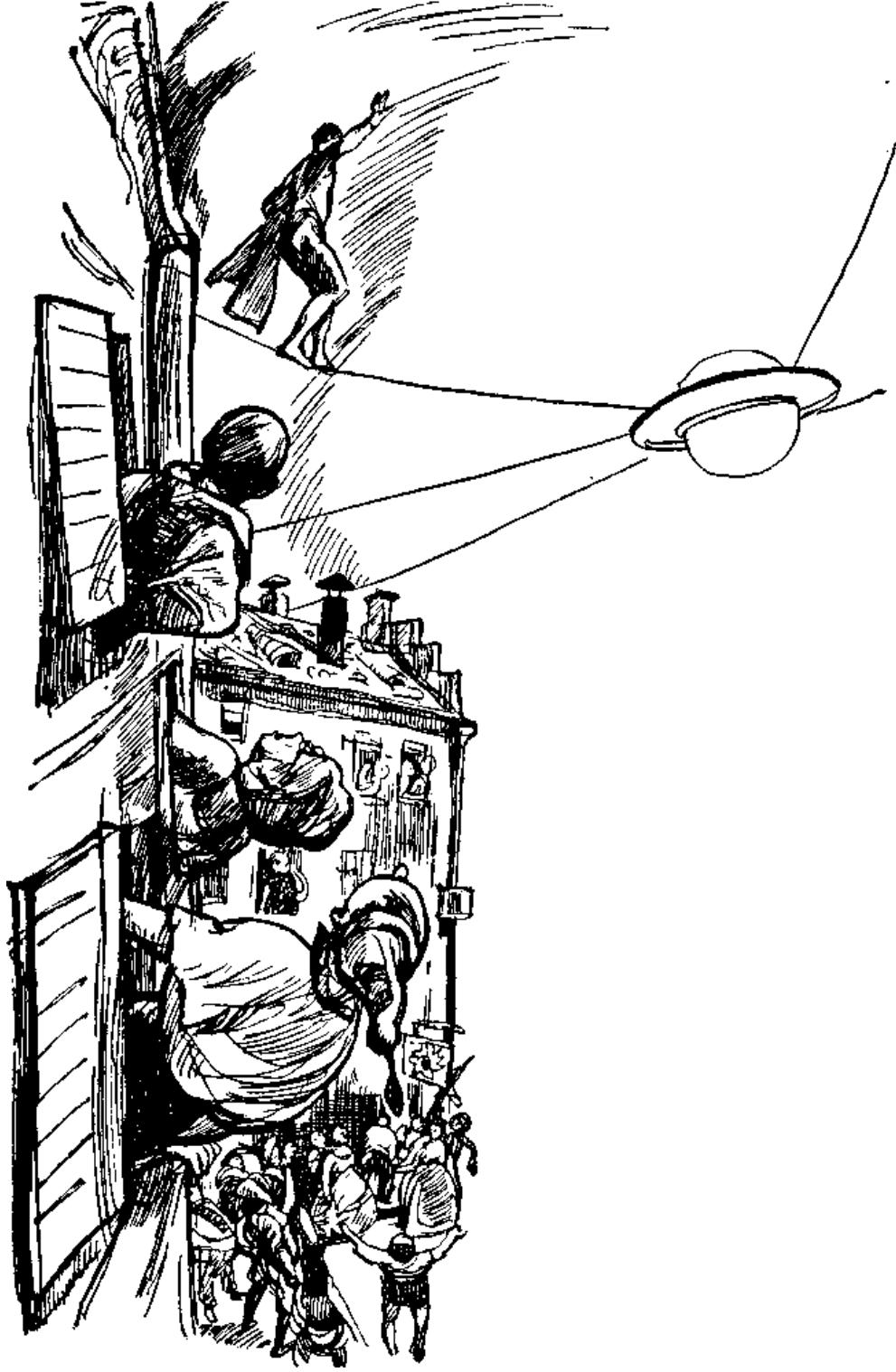
Who knows what Tibul was thinking then? He was probably saying to himself: "I'll cross over the square on this wire, as I walked a rope at the fair. I won't fall. This cable is attached to the lamp. The other one goes from the lamp to the house on the other side. If I cross both cables, I'll reach the other side and safety."

The officer raised his gun and took aim. Tibul walked along the edge of the roof to where the cable began, stepped on to it and began moving along it towards the lamp.

The crowd gasped.

He would move very slowly, then, suddenly, he would take several quick steps, nearly running, but placing his feet carefully and balancing with his outstretched arms. It looked as if he would fall at any minute. His shadow now appeared on the wall. The closer he got to the lamp, the bigger and paler his shadow became, the lower it slid down the wall.

It was a long drop to the ground.



When he was halfway to the lamp, the officer's voice boomed out:

"I'm going to shoot! He'll fall right into the pool. One! Two! Three!"

There was a loud bang.

Tibul continued along the cable, but for some strange reason it was the officer who toppled into the pool.

He had been shot.

One of the Guards held a smoking pistol. He had just killed the officer.

"You dog!" said the Guard. "You wanted to kill a friend of the people, but I stopped you in time. Long live the people!"

"Long live the people!" the other Guards shouted.

"Long live the Three Fat Men!" their enemies shouted and began shooting at Tibul from all sides.

He was now only two steps from the lamp. Tibul flapped his cape to keep the blinding light from his eyes. Bullets whizzed past him. The crowd below shouted with joy.

Bang! Bang!

"Missed him!"

"Hooray! They missed!"

Tibul climbed on to the iron ring of the lamp.

"Just wait!" his enemies threatened. "He wants to cross to the other side. We'll get him when he goes down the other cable."

Suddenly something quite unexpected happened. The striped figure, which seemed black against the

bright light, crouched on the iron ring and turned a lever. Something clicked, clanged—and the lamp went out! This took everyone by surprise. The square became as still and as dark as the inside of a trunk.

The next moment something clanged very high up. A light patch appeared in the dark top. Everyone saw a little bit of sky with two twinkling stars. Then a small black figure climbed through the hatch, and there was the sound of running feet across the glass top.

Tibul the Acrobat had escaped.

The horses had been frightened by all the shooting and the sudden darkness. The doctor's carriage nearly turned over. The driver reined in the horses and took another road.

Thus, after a most unusual day and a most unusual evening, Doctor Caspar Arnery finally returned home. His housekeeper, Auntie Ganimed, met him on the porch. She was very worried, and no wonder, for the doctor had been gone so long! Auntie Ganimed clasped her hands, clucked her tongue and shook her head.

"Where are your spectacles? Did you break them? Ah, Doctor! Oh, Doctor! Where is your cape? Did you lose it? My, my!"

"Auntie Ganimed, I also broke the heels of my shoes."

"What a shame!"

"Something much worse than that happened today. Prospero the Gunsmith was captured. He's been put in an iron cage."

Auntie Ganimed had no idea what had happened during the day. She had heard the cannons booming, she had seen the red glow over the rooftops. A neighbour had told her that a hundred carpenters were making scaffolds for the rebels on Court Square.

"I was very frightened. I locked the shutters and decided to stay indoors. I waited for you all day long. I was so worried. Your lunch got cold and supper got cold," she said.

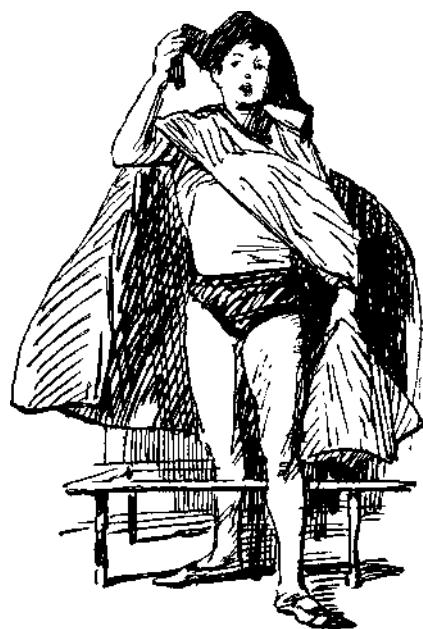
The night was ending. Doctor Caspar made ready for bed. Among the hundred different sciences he had studied was History. The doctor had a large leather-bound book. In it he wrote down his thoughts about important events.

"One must always keep things in good order," said the doctor raising his finger. And so, even though he was very tired, he pulled a chair over to the table, opened his leather-bound book and began to write:

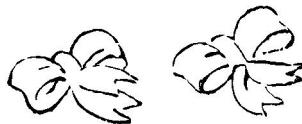
"The workers, the miners, the sailors, all the poor working people of the town, rose up against the rule of the Three Fat Men.

The Guards won the battle. Prospero the Gunsmith has been captured, but Tibul the Acrobat escaped. A Guard shot his officer on Star Square. That means all the soldiers will soon refuse to fight against the people and defend the Three Fat Men. But I am worried about Tibul."

The doctor heard a scraping noise behind his back. He turned around and faced the fire-place. A tall man in a green cape had just climbed down the chimney and stepped into the room. It was Tibul the Acrobat.



Part Two



THE DOLL OF TUTTI THE HEIR

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BALLOON MAN'S STRANGE ADVENTURES

The next day work was in full swing in Court Square. The carpenters were building ten scaffolds. A dozen armed Guards were overseeing the work. The carpenters did not seem happy about their job.

"We don't want to build scaffolds for workers and miners!" they said.

"They are our brothers!"

"They were ready to die to free all the working people!"

"Silence!" the head Guard roared in a voice so terribly loud that the planks stacked against the wall toppled over. "Silence! Or I'll have you all whipped!"

Since early morning crowds had been pouring into Court Square.

A strong wind was raising up clouds of dust, swinging the shop signs on their hinges, blowing hats off and rolling them under the wheels of carriages.

In one place the wind did something very unusual: it carried off the man who sold balloons!

"Hooray! Hooray!" the children cheered, watching him fly through the air.

They clapped their hands because it was such fun to watch him, and because they were happy to see him in such a fix. The children had always envied the balloon man. Envy is a bad thing, but they couldn't help it. The red, blue and yellow balloons were magnificent. Each child wished he had one. The balloon man had a huge bunch of them, but miracles don't usually happen. Never, not even once, did he give the most obedient boy or the neatest girl a single balloon: neither a red one, nor a blue one, nor a yellow one.

Now he had been punished for being so mean. He was flying over the town, hanging on to the strings of his balloons for dear-life. They looked like a bunch of magic grapes flying high up in the blue sky.

"Help!" the balloon man yelled, though he had no hope of help coming, and kicked wildly.

He had on a pair of straw slippers that were too big for him. Everything was all right as long as his feet were on the ground. To keep his slippers from falling off, he used to drag his feet along like a very lazy person. But now, when he was up in the air, he couldn't very well drag his feet on nothing.

"What the devil!" he muttered.

The wind tossed the bunch of balloons this way and that.

One slipper finally fell off.

"Look! It's a peanut! A peanut!" the children cried from below.

And the falling slipper really did look like a peanut.

A dancing master was passing by just then. He was very elegant. He was tall, with thin legs and a small head and looked like a violin or a grasshopper.

His delicate ears, used to the sad sounds of a flute and the soft words spoken by dancers, could not stand the loud, happy shrieks of the children.

"Stop shouting!" he said angrily. "You should never shout so loud! If you want to express your joy, use beautiful, melodious words such as...."

He struck a pose, but had no time to tell them what sort of words they should use. For, like all dancing masters, he was in the habit of looking at the ground and at people's feet. Alas! He did not see what was happening above.

The balloon man's slipper fell right on his head. Since his head was rather small, the large straw slipper fitted it like a hat.

Then the elegant dancing master bellowed like a cow. The slipper covered half his face.

The children nearly burst from laughing.

"Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha!"

*The dancing master One-Two-Three
Does not look up like you or me.
He can't distinguish right from wrong,
His voice is shrill, his nose is long.
It serves him right, just look at that!
He got a straw shoe for a hat!*

This is what the boys sang as they sat on a fence, ready to jump down on the other side and run away at a moment's notice.

"Oh!" moaned the dancing master. "Oh, how terrible this is! If only it were a dancing slipper, and not this horrid old boot!"

In the end, the dancing master was arrested.

"My good man," the officer said, "your appearance is disgusting. You're disturbing the peace. Such things should never be done and especially not in troubled times like these."

The dancing master wrung his hands.

"This is all a terrible lie!" he wept. "What a misunderstanding! I, who have always lived among waltzes and smiles, I, who am so graceful—can I ever disturb the peace? Oh, Oh...."

No one knows what else happened to the dancing master that day. And it is not of much importance to our story.

What is important is the fate of the flying balloon man. There he was, flying along, like a piece of dandelion fuzz.

"This is ridiculous!" he howled. "I don't want to fly! I simply don't know how to fly!"

But it was no use. The wind grew stronger, it swept the balloons higher and higher, over the town and towards the Palace of the Three Fat Men.



Now and then the balloon man would get a peep at things below. Then he would see the rooftops, the dirty tiles, the blocks of houses, the narrow blue ribbon of water, the tiny people and green patches of gardens. The whole town was spinning around below him.

Things looked very bad, indeed.

"If I keep on in this direction, I'll tumble right into the park of the Three Fat Men!" The balloon man shuddered at the thought.

The next minute he was sailing slowly and gracefully over the park, getting lower and lower. The wind was dying down.

"I'll land any minute now. They'll catch me, then they'll beat me, then they'll put me in jail. Maybe they'll even chop my head right off, so as not to be bothered."



No one noticed him except a flock of birds that took off in fright from a nearby tree. The floating bunch of balloons cast a light shadow, like a cloud. It was a bouquet of rainbow colours as it slipped along the gravel path, over a flower bed, a statue of a boy riding a goose and a sentry who had fallen asleep. Wonderful changes came over the sentry's face as the shadow slipped across it. First his nose became blue, then green, and then red, like bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope.

The fatal moment was drawing near: the balloon man was blown towards the open windows of the Palace. He was certain he would fly right into one of them, just like a piece of fluff.

And that is exactly what happened.

He flew into a window. It was a window in the Palace kitchen, in the bakery, where the bakers and pastry cooks made cakes and pies.

There was to be a great feast at the Palace of the Three Fat Men to celebrate their victory over the rebels the day before. After the feast the Three Fat Men, the State Council, the courtiers and special guests were all to go to Court Square.

My friends, it is a real treat to pay a visit to the Palace pastry cooks. The Three Fat Men knew what good food was. And then, it was such a special occasion. A grand feast! You can imagine what was going on in the Palace kitchens that morning.

As he flew into the bakery, the balloon man felt both terrified and excited. It is probably just the way a wasp feels as it flies towards a cake which a careless housewife has left on the window-sill to cool.

He flew in very quickly and didn't really have a chance to look around. At first, he thought he was in a strange bird-house, where many-coloured, rare tropical birds hopped and sang, whistled, chirped and chattered. The very next second he decided it was not a bird-house after all, but a fruit shop, full of squashed tropical fruits that were dripping juice. A dizzying sweet smell hit him in the nose; the hot, stuffy air was choking. Everything was all jumbled together.

The balloon man landed with a *plop!* in something soft and warm. He didn't let go of his balloons, but held them tightly by the strings. Now the balloons floated over his head.

He shut his eyes and decided to keep them shut, no matter what happened.

"Now I know," he thought. "This is neither a bird-house nor a fruit shop. It's a bakery. And I'm sitting in a cake!"

And he was.

He was sitting in a kingdom of chocolate and oranges, pomegranates and whipped cream, candied fruit, powdered sugar and jam, and he was sitting on a throne, just like the king of the colourful, sweet-smelling kingdom. The cake was his throne.

He kept his eyes shut. He was ready for anything, a terrible row, a scandal, anything at all. But he never could have expected things to happen as they did.

"That's the end of the cake," the second pastrycook said sternly and sadly.

Then there was silence. You could hear the bubbles bursting in the pan of boiling chocolate.

"What'll they do?" the balloon man wondered in terror, squeezing his eyes as tight as he could.

His heart jumped up and down like a penny in a piggy-bank.

"Fiddlesticks!" said the head pastrycook just as sternly. "They have finished the meat course upstairs. The cake must be brought in in twenty minutes. The coloured balloons and the stupid face of this flying idiot will be a wonderful decoration for a very special cake like this. Give me the whipped cream!" he ordered.

It was handed to him immediately.

Oh, what happened then!

Three pastrycooks and twenty kitchen-boys attacked the balloon man with a gusto that would have pleased the fattest of the Three Fat Men. In a flash, the balloon man all but disappeared. He sat there with his eyes shut, not knowing what he was beginning to look like. He was covered all over with cream. His head and his round face, that looked like a painted teapot, stuck out. All the rest of him was hidden under a layer of thick white cream with a lovely tint of pale pink. Now the balloon man looked like anything else in the

world, except himself. The resemblance was gone, just as his straw slipper was gone.

A poet might think he was a snow-white swan. A gardener might think he was a marble statue. A laundress might think he was a pile of soapsuds. And a little boy might think he was a snowman.

On top of it all were the balloons. This was a very unusual decoration, but, all in all, it was rather pretty.

"Well," said the head pastrycook and stepped back to look at his work, as an artist does. Then his voice became as terrible as before and he shouted: "The candied fruit!"

The candied fruit appeared. There were all kinds, all shapes, all sizes: bitter and sweet, and sour, triangles, circles, stars, crescents and rosebuds. The kitchen-boys were doing their best. No sooner had the head pastrycook clapped his hands three times, than the entire mountain of whipped cream that covered the cake was studded with candied fruit.

"That's enough!" he said. "I think we'd better put it in the oven for a few minutes to brown the frosting."



"In the oven! Why? Which oven? Me into the oven?!" the balloon man shuddered.

At that very moment one of the servants dashed into the kitchen.

"The cake! The cake!" he shouted. "Immediately! They're waiting for the cake upstairs."

"It's ready!" said the head pastrycook.

"Thank goodness!" The balloon man breathed a sigh of relief. And he opened his eyes a tiny bit.

Six servants dressed in light-blue livery raised the huge platter on which he sat and carried him off. He could hear the kitchen-boys laughing.

They carried him up a wide staircase to the hall above. As

they entered the hall, the balloon man shut his eyes for a second. It was noisy and merry there. Many people were talking at once, there were bursts of

laughter and applause. To judge by the sound of it, the feast was a great success.

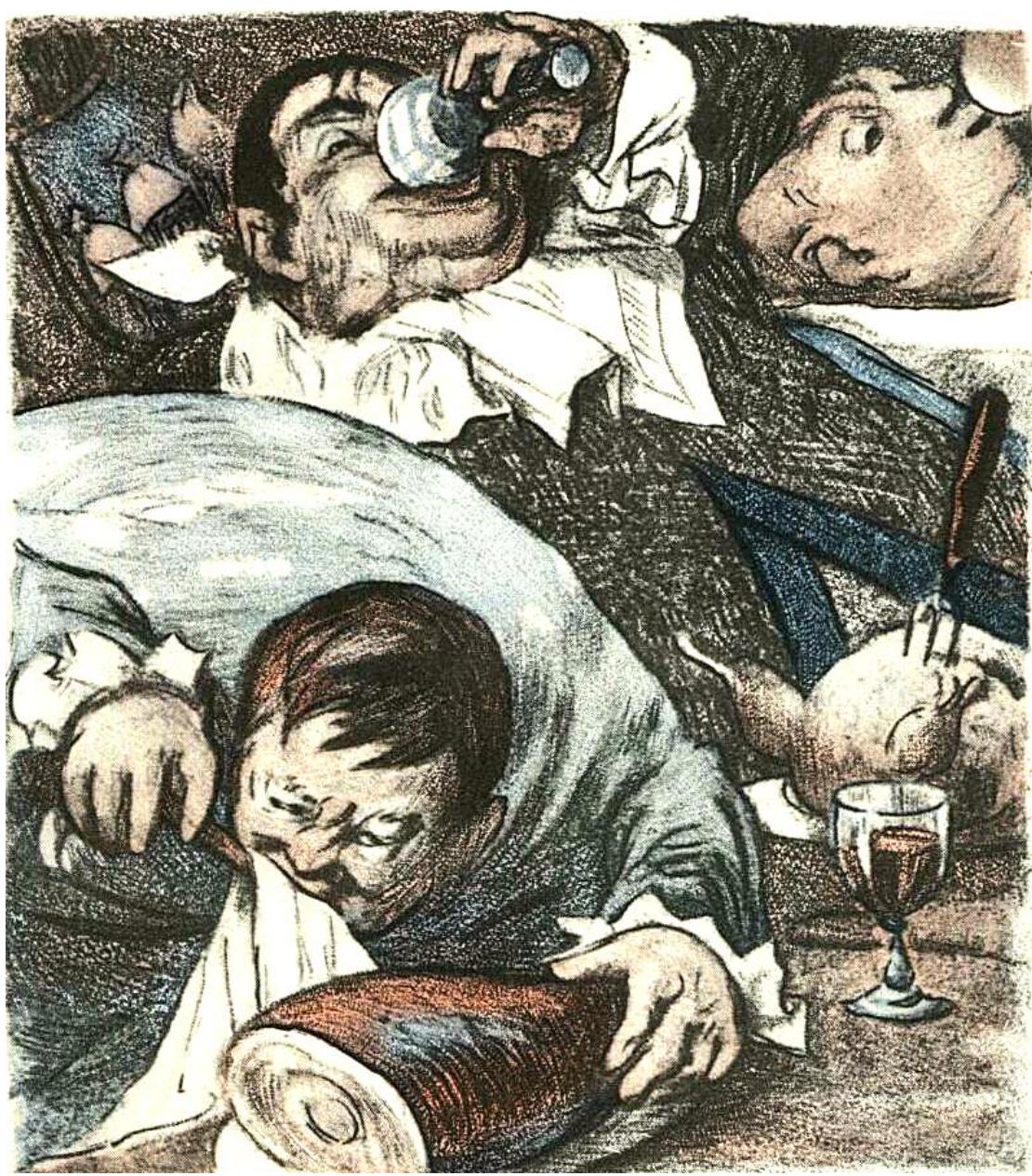
The balloon man, or, rather, the cake, was set on a table. Then the balloon man opened his eyes. And he saw the Three Fat Men. They were so fat, his mouth fell open.



"I'd better close it right away," he said to himself. "I think I'd better not show any signs of life."

But, alas, his mouth would not shut. This lasted for two whole minutes. Then the balloon man's surprise lessened. With some effort he finally got his mouth closed. But then his eyes popped wide open. So he went on closing his mouth and eyes in turn for some while until he was able to overcome his surprise.

The Three Fat Men sat in the place of honour, on a platform above everyone else in the hall.



They were eating much more than anyone else. One of them even began to chew his napkin.

"You're eating your napkin...."

"Am I really? I didn't notice."

He put down his napkin and immediately began to chew the Third Fat Man's ear. By the way, it did look like a dumpling.

Everyone laughed.

"This is no time for joking," the Second Fat Man said, raising his fork. "Things look serious. They've just brought in the cake."

"Hooray!"

Everyone seemed very excited.

"What'll they do? Oh, what'll they do?" the balloon man thought in despair. "They'll eat me!"

The clock struck two.

"The executions on Court Square will begin in an hour," the First Fat Man said.

"They'll hang Prospero the Gunsmith first, won't they?" one of the honoured guests asked.

"He won't be executed today," the State Councillor replied.

"Why? Why not?"

"We want him alive for a while. We want him to tell us the rebels' plans and the names of the leaders."

"Where is he now?"

Everyone was terribly interested in the conversation. They even forgot about the cake.

"He's still in the iron cage. It's here in the Palace zoo of Tutti the Heir."

"Let's see him!"

"Bring him in!" the First Fat Man ordered. "I want our guests to have a good look at the wretch. I would gladly invite you all to the zoo, but there's too much noise, what with the roaring and screeching. And then, it smells bad. It's much worse than the clinking of glasses and the sweet aroma of fruit."

"Certainly! Why of course! There's no sense in going to the zoo."

"Tell them to bring Prospero here. We can look at the monster as we eat our cake."

"Oh dear, they're talking about the cake again!" the balloon man shivered. "Gluttons, that's all they can think of!"

"Bring in Prospero," the First Fat Man said again.

The State Councillor left. The servants who stood in two lines moved apart and bowed. The two lines became twice as low.

The gluttons were silent.

"He's terrible," the Second Fat Man said. "He's stronger than anyone else. He's stronger than a lion, and his eyes burn with such hatred you can't even look him in the eye."

"He has a frightful head," said the Secretary of the State Council. "It's huge. It looks like the top of a column. His hair's red. It looks as if it's on fire."

Now, when the conversation had turned to Prospero the Gunsmith, a change came over the gluttons. They

stopped eating, joking and making merry. They pulled in their stomachs, and some even turned pale. Many were sorry they had said they wanted to see Prospero.

The Three Fat Men became very serious. They seemed to have grown a little thinner.

Suddenly, the hall fell silent. Each of the Three Fat Men tried to hide behind the others.

Prospero the Gunsmith was brought in.

First came the State Councillor. Then came Guards on either side of the prisoner. They did not take off their black oilskin hats when they came in and their swords were bared. There was a clanging of chains. The gunsmith's hands were shackled. He was led up to the table. He stopped a few steps from the Three Fat Men. Prospero's head was bowed. He was pale. There was dried blood on his forehead and temples under his tangled red hair.

Then he lifted his head and looked at the Three Fat Men. Everyone sitting near by jerked back.

"Why did you bring him here?" one of the guests shouted. It was the richest miller in the country. "He frightens me!"

With these words the miller fainted, falling face down in the fruit sauce. Some of the guests rushed towards the doors. No one was paying any attention to the cake now.

"What do you want?" Prospero asked.

The First Fat Man took a deep breath and said:

"We wanted to see what you were like. Don't you care to have a look at those who've captured you?"

"It's disgusting to look at you."

"Don't worry, we'll soon chop off your head and save you the bother of looking at us."

"I'm not afraid of you. I only have one head. But the people have thousands of heads. You can't chop all of them off."

"The executions on Court Square will soon begin. The executioners will take care of your comrades."

The gluttons chuckled. The miller came to his senses and licked the fruit sauce off his nose.

"Your brains are covered with fat," Prospero said. "You can't see farther than your fat stomachs."

"Well, what do you know!" the Second Fat Man said crossly. "And what are we supposed to see?"

"Ask your ministers. They know what's going on in the country."

The State Councillor made a funny cackling noise. The ministers drummed their fingers on their plates.

"Ask them," Prospero continued, "they'll tell you...."

He stopped speaking. Everyone waited anxiously.

"They'll tell you that the peasants whom you rob of the grain they work so hard to grow are rising up against the landowners. They are burning down their estates, they are chasing them off their land. The miners don't



want to dig coal that will all belong to you. The workers are smashing their machines so as not to earn more gold for you. The sailors are tossing your goods into the sea. Your soldiers don't want to serve you any more. The scientists, clerks, judges and actors are all going over to the side of the people. All those who used to slave for you and got pennies for their work, while you grew fat, all the unfortunate, hungry and poor, the orphans, cripples and beggars, all of them have risen up against you, against the fat and the rich, who have exchanged their hearts for stones."

"I think he's talking too much," the State Councillor said.

But Prospero continued.

"For fifteen years I taught the people to hate you and your power. We've been gathering our forces for a long, long time! And now your last hour has come."

"That's enough!" the Third Fat Man shrieked.

"Put him back in his cage!" the Second Fat Man thundered.

And then the First Fat Man said:

"You'll sit in your cage until we catch Tibul the Acrobat. We'll execute you together. And the people will forget all about rising up against us!"

Prospero said nothing. He bowed his head again.

The First Fat Man continued:

"You forget whom you're rising up against. We Three Fat Men are mighty and strong. Everything belongs to us. I, the First Fat Man, own all the grain that grows in our land. The Second Fat Man owns all

the coal, and the Third Fat Man has bought up all the iron. We are richer than anyone else! The richest man in the country is a hundred times poorer than us. We can buy anything we want to with our gold!"

Then the gluttons all became terribly excited. The words of the First Fat Man gave them courage.

"Back into the cage with him! Into the cage with him!" they screamed.

"Back to the zoo!"

"Get him back into the cage!"

"Rebel!"

"Back into the cage!"

Prospero was led away.

"And now, let's try the cake," said the First Fat Man.

"This is the end of me!" the balloon man thought.

Everyone was looking at him. He closed his eyes.
The gluttons were having a wonderful time now.

"Ho-ho-ho!" they roared.

"Ha-ha-ha!"

"What a beautiful cake! Just look at all the balloons!"

"They're gorgeous."

"Look at that ugly mug!"

"It's splendid!"

They came closer.

"I wonder what's inside this funny thing?" one of them said and gave the balloon man a sharp nick on the forehead.

"Probably candy."

"Or champagne."

"How interesting! How very interesting!"

"Let's cut the head off first and see what's inside."

"Help!"

The poor balloon man could stand it no longer and croaked "Help!" opening his eyes as he did. Just then a child's voice was heard shouting:

"My doll! My doll!"

Everyone stopped talking and listened. The Three Fat Men and the State Councillor looked very worried.

The shouting changed to crying. A boy who was very unhappy was crying somewhere in the large hall.

"Why, that's Tutti the Heir crying!" the First Fat Man said.

"It's Tutti the Heir crying!" the other two Fat Men repeated.

All three of them turned pale. They were very frightened.

The State Councillor, several ministers and servants rushed towards one of the doors.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?" people in the hall began to whisper.

A boy ran into the hall. He pushed aside the ministers and the servants. He ran up to the Three Fat Men. His curls shook and his patent-leather shoes shone. He was sobbing. No one could understand what he was shouting through his sobs.



"The brat will notice me!" the balloon man thought and trembled. "This awful frosting which doesn't let me breathe properly or move a finger will certainly look tasty to him. And they don't want him to cry, so they'll cut him a slice of cake together with my head."

But the boy didn't even look at the cake. He didn't even look at the magnificent balloons that hung above the balloon man's round head.

He was crying bitterly.

"What's the matter?" the First Fat Man asked.

"Why is Tutti the Heir crying?" asked the Second.

The Third puffed out his cheeks.

Tutti the Heir was twelve years old. He was being brought up in the Palace of the Three Fat Men. He was treated like a little prince. The Three Fat Men wanted an heir. They had no children. And so all their

riches and the country they ruled were one day to be Tutti's.

Tutti's tears frightened the Three Fat Men even more than the words spoken by Prospero the Gunsmith.

The boy was clenching his fists, waving his arms, and stamping his feet.



He was really having a tantrum.

And no one knew why.

His tutors peeped out from behind the columns, too frightened to come into the hall. These teachers, dressed all in black with black wigs on their heads, looked like the soot-covered chimneys of oil lamps.

After a while, when the boy had calmed down a bit, he told them what had happened.

"My doll, my wonderful doll is broken! They spoiled my doll! The Guards stuck their swords into my doll!"

And he began to sob again.

He rubbed his eyes with his fists and smeared the tears all over his face.

"What?!" the Fat Men roared.

"What?!"

"The Guards?!"

"They stuck their swords?"

"Into the doll that belongs to Tutti the Heir?"

And everyone in the hall said softly, as if heaving a sigh all together :

"That's impossible!"

The State Councillor groaned. The nervous miller fainted again, but came back to his senses in a flash as the Fat Men shouted.

"Stop the party! Postpone all business! Summon the Council! All the officials! All the judges! All the ministers! All the executioners! Today's executions are postponed! There are traitors in the Palace!"

There was a great commotion. A minute later Palace messengers were galloping away in all directions. Five minutes later judges, councillors and executioners were galloping towards the Palace from all sides. The crowd that was waiting for the executions to begin on Court Square had to go back to their homes. Town-criers announced that the

executions were being put off till the next day, because of a very important event.



The cake with the balloon man in the middle was taken back to the kitchen. The gluttons were all sober now. They crowded around Tutti the Heir and listened to his story.

"I was sitting on the grass in the park, and the doll was sitting next to me. We were hoping there'd be an eclipse of the sun. It's very interesting, you know. I read about it in a book yesterday. When there's an eclipse, you can see the stars in the day-time.

The boy was sobbing so much he could hardly talk. And so one of his tutors told them the whole story of what had happened. However, the tutor was having

quite a bit of trouble speaking himself, as he was trembling with fright.

"I was near Tutti the Heir and his doll. I was sitting in the sun with my face turned up. I have a wart on my nose and I thought the sun would make it go away. Suddenly, some Guards appeared. There were twelve of them. They were arguing about something. When they came up to us they stopped. They looked very fierce. One of them pointed to Tutti the Heir and said, 'Look at the wolf-cub. Three fat pigs are bringing up a wolf-cub.' Alas! I knew what they meant."

"Who are the three fat pigs?" the First Fat Man asked. The other two blushed. Then the First Fat Man got red in the face, too. The three of them were huffing and puffing so hard that a glass door leading to the balcony swung open and shut.

"They crowded round Tutti the Heir," the tutor continued, "and they said: 'The three pigs are bringing up a wolf-cub of iron. Tutti,' they said, 'which side is your heart on? They have taken out your heart. You have to grow up mean, cruel and hard-hearted, hating all people. When the three pigs finally die, the cruel wolf will take their place!'"

"Why didn't you stop them?" the State Councillor shouted, shaking the tutor's shoulder angrily. "Couldn't you see they were traitors who had gone over to the side of the people?"

The tutor was now trembling like a leaf. He babbled:

"Yes, I guessed it, but I was afraid of them. They were terribly angry. And I had no weapon at all. They had their hands on their swords and were ready to use them. 'Look,' one of them said, 'look at this stuffed dummy. The wolf-cub is playing with a doll. They don't let any live children near him. They gave him a stuffed toy, a doll with a spring inside, to be his playmate.' Then another said: 'My wife and son are back home in our village. One day my boy was out with his pea-shooter and hit a pear on a tree in a landlord's orchard. The landlord ordered my boy to be flogged for insulting the power of the rich, and his servants made my wife pay a big fine.' Then the Guards all started shouting together and crowded still closer round Tutti the Heir. The one who had just told them about his son pulled out his sword and stuck it into the doll. Then the others did, too." (At this Tutti the Heir sobbed louder than ever.) " 'Here, take this, wolf-cub!' they said. 'We'll get to your fat pigs next!'"

"Where are the traitors?" the Three Fat Men thundered.

"They dropped the doll and ran off into the park. They were shouting 'Long live Prospero the Gunsmith! Long live Tibul the Acrobat! Down with the Three Fat Men!'"

"Why didn't the Palace Guards shoot them?" everyone wanted to know.

It was then that the tutor told them the most frightening news.

"The Palace Guards were waving their hats at them. I was watching from behind the iron fence, and I saw the Guards saying good-bye to them. The Palace Guards said: 'Comrades, go to the people and tell them that the whole army will soon go over to their side.' "

That is what happened in the park.

The alarm was sounded. The loyal Palace Guards were stationed in the Palace, at all the park entrances and exits, at all the bridges and along the road leading to town.

A meeting of the State Council was called. All the guests left. The Three Fat Men were weighed by the chief Palace doctor.

Despite all the excitement, they had not lost a single bit of fat. The chief Palace doctor was then arrested and given nothing to eat but bread and water.

Palace servants found the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir lying in the tall grass. It had not seen the eclipse of the sun. It was broken beyond repair.

Tutti the Heir could not stop crying. He hugged the broken doll and sobbed. The doll looked just like a little girl. It was as big as Tutti. This was a very expensive, beautifully made doll. Now her dress was all torn, and there were big black holes in her chest from the soldiers' swords. An hour before she could sit and stand, smile and dance, but now it was only a scarecrow, a heap of rags. Somewhere in the neck and chest, under the pink silk, a broken spring creaked,

just as an old wall clock creaks before striking the hour.

"She's dead!" Tutti cried. "Oh, she's dead!"

Little Tutti was not a wolf-cub.

"The doll must be fixed," the State Councillor told the meeting of the State Council. "The grief of Tutti the Heir knows no bounds. The doll must be repaired at all costs!"

"We will buy him another doll," the ministers said.

"Tutti the Heir does not want another doll. He wants this doll brought to life."

"But who can fix it?"

"I know," said one of the ministers.

"Who?"

"Gentlemen, we have forgotten that Doctor Caspar Arnery lives in town. He can do anything. He will fix the doll that belongs to Tutti the Heir."

There was great rejoicing in the room.

"Hooray!" they all shouted.

And then the entire State Council sang together:

*Doctor Caspar Arnery,
What a clever man is he!
He can trap the sliest fox,
He can crack the hardest rocks,
He can fly from here to Mars,
He can reach the farthest stars.*

And they immediately sat down to write out an order addressed to Doctor Caspar.

This is what they wrote:

*Doctor Caspar Arnery,
The State Council of the Government of the Three
Fat Men is sending you a broken doll that belongs
to Tutti the Heir and hereby orders you to repair
the doll by tomorrow. If the doll becomes as
healthy and alive-looking as before, you will have
whatever you wish as your reward. If you do not
do as we order, you will be severely punished.*

(Signed) State Councillor

The State Councillor then signed the paper. And they put the big State Seal on it. It was round, with a picture of a bag full of money in the centre.

Count Bonaventura, Captain of the Palace Guards, took two men and set out for town to find Doctor Caspar Arnery and hand him the order of the State Council.

They rode on horseback. A carriage followed. In it was a Palace official, holding the doll on his lap. Its lovely curly head rested on his shoulder.

Tutti the Heir stopped crying. He was told that they would bring his doll back hale and hearty the very next morning.

The rest of the day passed uneasily at the Palace.
But what about the flying balloon man?
We know they took him back to the Palace bakery.
And that is when the accident happened.

One of the servants who was carrying the cake stepped on an orange peel.

"Watch out!" the other servants cried.

"Help!" the balloon man shouted when he felt himself sliding. But the servant had lost his balance. He came crashing down on the hard tile floor. He jerked his long legs and howled.

"Hooray!" the kitchen-boys shrieked with joy.

"What the devil!" the balloon man said hopelessly, as he tumbled down together with the rest of the cake, landing on top of the servant who had slipped.

The huge platter was smashed to pieces. Snowy puffs of whipped cream and icing flew in all directions. The servant jumped to his feet and ran off.

The kitchen-boys whooped and danced.

The balloon man sat on the kitchen floor in a puddle of raspberry syrup, surrounded by bits of broken dish and mountains of delicious whipped cream that were sadly melting away on the ruined cake.

It was with great relief that he realised that the three head pastrycooks had gone, and the only people left in the kitchen besides himself were the kitchen-boys.

"I'll get them to help me to escape," he decided.
"My balloons will do the trick."

He was still holding on to the strings.

The kitchen-boys crowded round him. He could tell by the look in their eyes that they thought the balloons were the greatest treasures in the world and that each of the boys dreamed of having one for his very own. So he said:

"I'm sick and tired of all these adventures. I'm not a little boy any more, and I'm no great hero. I hate flying, I'm scared of the Three Fat Men, and I don't know how to look lovely in the middle of a fancy cake. I'd like nothing better than to see the Palace rid of me." The boys stopped laughing.



The balloons swayed in the air. Sun-rays coming through the window lit them up and burned inside each one with a blue, yellow, or red flame. They were the grandest balloons in all the world. "Can you get me out of here?" the balloon man asked, tugging at the strings.

"Yes," one of the boys answered softly. And then he added: "Would you give us the balloons?" The balloon man had won.

"Oh, all right," he said, as if he didn't care. "These balloons cost a lot of money. I need them very much, but I think I'll give them to you. I like you boys. You have such happy, honest faces, and such merry voices."

"Brats!" he added to himself.

"The head pastrycook is in the pantry now," one of the boys said. "He's measuring out supplies for tea cookies. We have to get you out of here before he comes back."

"That's right," the balloon man agreed. "There's no use wasting time."

"Wait, I know a secret."

With these words one of the kitchen-boys went over to a big copper pot that was on a tile stand. He raised the lid. "Let's have the balloons first."

"You're crazy!" the balloon man said angrily. "What do I want with that pot? I want to get out of here. Do you think I'll climb into a pot instead?"

"Yes, that's just what you have to do."

"Get into the pot?"

"Yes."

"And then what?"

"You'll see. First, get into the pot. That's the best way to escape."

The copper pot was so big that the fattest of the Three Fat Men could easily have got inside it, to say nothing of the skinny balloon man.

"Hurry up, if you don't want to get caught."

The balloon man looked down into the pot. It had no bottom. He saw a big dark hole, just like a well.

"All right," he sighed. "Into the pot it is. At least it's no worse than flying through the air and being covered with icing. Well, good-bye, you rascals! Here's the payment for my escape."

He untied the knot and gave each boy a balloon. There was one for each: twenty boys and twenty balloons, each one tied to its own string.

Then he climbed into the pot feet first. One of the boys put on the lid.

"Balloons, balloons!" they shouted happily.

They rushed out of the kitchen to a little lawn in the park near the bakery windows.

It was much more fun to run around with the balloons out in the open.

Suddenly, the three pastrycooks stuck their heads out of three windows.

"What's going on here?!" they all cried. "Come back inside this minute!"

The boys were so frightened by the shouting that they let go of the strings and the balloons flew off.

Their happiness had ended.

Twenty balloons were caught up by the wind. Higher and higher they flew into the blue sky. Meanwhile, the kitchen-boys stood below on the grass among the flowering sweet-peas, their mouths open and their heads in white caps thrown back as they looked up at the sky.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NEGRO AND THE HEAD OF CABBAGE

You probably remember that Doctor Caspar's frightening adventures ended with Tibul the Acrobat climbing out of the fireplace in his study.

No one knows what went on in Doctor Caspar's workshop after that. Auntie Ganimed was exhausted from all the excitement and the long waiting. She was fast asleep, dreaming of roast chicken.

The next day (this is the day on which the balloon man flew into the Palace of the Three Fat Men and the Guards broke the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir) Auntie Ganimed had a most unpleasant accident. She let a mouse out of a mousetrap. The night before the very same mouse had eaten a pound of Turkish delight. And the night before that it had knocked over a glass with carnations. The glass had broken and for some strange reason the carnations had begun to smell like catnip. The mouse got caught that terrible night.

The next morning Auntie Ganimed awoke very early. She picked up the mousetrap. The mouse was sitting inside the little cage looking quite at home, as if it didn't mind being there at all. It was a very sly mouse.

"Next time, you won't eat Turkish delight that doesn't belong to you!" Auntie Ganimed said, putting

the cage with the mouse where she could keep an eye on it.

When she had dressed, Auntie Gammed went downstairs to Doctor Caspar's workshop. She wanted to tell him the good news. The morning before he had said it was really a shame that so much tasty candy had disappeared.

"Mice like Turkish delight, because it contains a lot of acids," he had explained.

This had made Auntie Ganimed feel better.

"So the mouse likes my acids. Well, we'll see how it likes my mousetrap."

Auntie Ganimed stood by the door of the workshop with the mousetrap in her hand.

It was very early in the morning. Through the open window she could see the dew glistening on the grass. The wind that carried off the balloon man that day didn't begin until later.

There were sounds coming from behind the door.

"Poor man," Auntie Ganimed thought. "Didn't he go to bed at all?"

She knocked.

The doctor said something, but she couldn't make out the words.

The door opened.

Doctor Caspar stood on the threshold. There was a smell of burnt cork in the room. The small flame of a spirit lamp was burning in the corner. Doctor Caspar had probably been doing some kind of scientific experiments.

"Good morning!" the doctor said cheerfully.

Auntie Ganimed held up the mousetrap for him to see. The mouse was sniffing, and its nose wiggled as it sniffed.

"I've caught the mouse!"

"Ah!" the doctor sounded very pleased. "Let's see it!"

Auntie Ganimed hurried to the window.

"Here it is!"

She held the mousetrap out towards him. And suddenly she saw a Negro. There, sitting near the window on a box marked "HANDLE WITH CARE", was a very handsome Negro.

The Negro had nothing on but a pair of red shorts.

The Negro was black, purple and brown and his skin shone. He was smoking a pipe.

Auntie Ganimed shrieked so loudly she nearly burst. She spun around and flapped her arms wildly, like a scarecrow. In all the commotion she somehow unhooked the mousetrap. The cage popped open, the mouse jumped out and disappeared.

That's how frightened Auntie Ganimed was.

The Negro laughed loudly. The red shoes on his long brown legs looked like huge dried red peppers.

The pipe stem jiggled up and down in his mouth. The doctor was also laughing and the new spectacles perched on his nose went up and down, too.

Auntie Ganimed flew out of the room.

"The mouse!" she screamed. "The mouse! The Turkish delight! The Negro!"

Doctor Caspar rushed out after her.

"Auntie Ganimed," he pleaded, "there's no need to be upset. I forgot to tell you about my new experiment. But you could have expected.... After all, I'm a scientist, a doctor of many sciences,

I have so many strange things in my workshop. I'm always experimenting. And you should expect to see not only a Negro there, but even an elephant. Auntie Ganimed.... Auntie Ganimed! The Negro's one thing, but scrambled eggs are something else again. We're waiting for our breakfast. My Negro would like a large dish of scrambled eggs."

"The mouse likes acids, the Negro likes scrambled eggs," Auntie Ganimed repeated nervously.

"Well, there you are. We'll have the scrambled eggs right now, and take care of the mouse tonight. We'll catch it tonight for sure, Auntie Ganimed. There's nothing left for it to do here, it's already eaten all the Turkish delight."

Auntie Ganimed wept and added her tears to the eggs instead of salt. They were such bitter tears that they took the place of pepper, too.

"I'm glad you put in a lot of pepper. The eggs are very tasty!" the Negro said as he polished them off.

Auntie Ganimed was measuring out some drops to ease her heart. The medicine smelled of carnations.

Through the window she could see Doctor Caspar going out. He looked fine with his new scarf, new shoes (though they were really an old pair with good red heels), and new walking-stick.

But there, going down the street with him, was the Negro.

Auntie Ganimed shut her eyes tight and sank down to the floor. She landed on the cat, which yowled. This was the last straw. Auntie Ganimed hit the cat. It was always getting under her feet and, anyway, it couldn't even catch a mouse.

Meanwhile, the mouse found its way into Auntie Ganimed's cupboard, where it was nibbling away at some almond cookies and thinking sadly of the Turkish delight.

Doctor Caspar Arnery lived on Shadow Street. If you turn left at the corner you'll find yourself in Widow Elizabeth's Lane. From there, crossing the street famous for the great oak split by lightning, and continuing in that direction you will find yourself at the Fourteenth Market Place.

That is where Doctor Caspar and the Negro were headed. The wind was rising. The split oak creaked with every gust. A bill poster was having a hard time trying to paste a notice on a fence. The wind tore the large sheet of paper from his hands and slapped it against his face. From far away it looked as if he was wiping his face with a big napkin. But he finally got the paper plastered, to the fence.

This is what it said:

Hurry!
Hurry!
Hurry!
Today The Government of the Three
Fat Men
PRESENTS
A FAIR FOR THE PEOPLE
Hurry to the 14th Market Place
AMUSEMENTS
SIDESHOBS
FUN FOR ALL
Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!

"I know what this is all about," Doctor Caspar said. "The rebels are to be executed on Court Square today. The Three Fat Men have ordered their executioners to chop off the head of every man who rose against the rule of the rich and the gluttons. The Three Fat Men want to fool the people. They're afraid the people might gather on Court Square and break the scaffolds, kill the executioners, and free their brothers who have been sentenced to death. That's why they're putting on a show for the people. They want them to forget all about today's executions."

Doctor Caspar and his black companion came to the Fourteenth Market Place. There were crowds near the booths, but nowhere did the doctor see a single fop, a single grand lady in a dress the colour of gold-fish

scales and ripe grapes, a single important-looking old man riding along in a gold-covered sedan chair, or a single merchant with a huge leather purse on his side!

There were only the poor people of the slums: workers and craftsmen, peddlers of oat-cakes, day-labourers, carriers, old women, beggars, and cripples. The only bright spots among the tattered, old grey clothes were green cuffs here and there, a bright cape or ribbon.

The wind tore at the old women's grey hair and made their eyes tear. The beggars' brown rags flapped in the wind.

There were no smiling faces in the crowd. Everyone seemed to be waiting for something terrible to happen.

"The executions will be held on Court Square," they were saying. "Our comrades' heads will fall there. But here, clowns that have been paid a lot of gold by the Three Fat Men will prance around like monkeys."

"Let's go to Court Square!"

"We have no weapons. We have no swords or pistols. And Court Square is surrounded by three rings of armed Guards."



"The soldiers are still protecting the Three Fat Men. They shot at us. But sooner or later, they'll join us against their leaders."

"Last night a Guard shot his officer on Star Square. He did it to save Tibul's life."

"But where is Tibul? Did he escape?"

"Nobody knows. The Guards were burning down the workers* houses all through the night. They wanted to find him, to smoke him out."

Doctor Caspar and the Negro now reached the booths. The show had not yet begun. They could hear voices, the jingling of bells, the sound of a flute and

something rustling, growling and squeaking behind the flowery curtains and partitions, where the actors were getting ready for the show.

The curtain parted and a face appeared. It was a Spaniard, a very famous pistol shot. His moustache bristled, and one of his eyeballs rolled in its socket.

"Oho!" he said when he saw the Negro. "Are you going to take part in this show, too? How much did they pay you?"

The Negro was silent.

"I got ten pieces of gold!" the Spaniard boasted. He thought the Negro was one of the actors. "Come over here," he whispered and looked very mysterious.

The Negro climbed up on to the stage. And the Spaniard told him a secret. This is what it was. The Three Fat Men had hired a hundred actors to perform in all the market places. They were supposed to tell the people how wonderful it was to live in a country ruled by the rich and the gluttons and what bad people the rebels Prospero the Gunsmith and Tibul the Acrobat were.

"They've hired magicians, lion-tamers, clowns, ventriloquists, and dancers. And they gave us all a lot of money."

"Did all the actors agree to praise the Three Fat Men?" Doctor Caspar asked.

The Spaniard hissed at him.

"*Shhh!*" he said, putting his finger to his lips. "Don't talk so loudly. A lot of them didn't, and they were arrested."

The Negro stamped his foot angrily.

Just then the music began. The performances were beginning in some of the booths. The crowd milled about.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" a clown standing on the wooden stage shouted in a high-pitched voice. "I would like to wish you all...."

He stopped shouting and waited for the noise to die down. Powder kept falling off his face.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to wish you all good health today, of all days, when the executioners of our dear, pink Three Fat Men will chop off the heads of those horrible rebels!" He never finished. One of the workers threw a half-eaten oatcake at him. It landed right in his mouth and filled it up completely.

"Mmm-mmm-mmm!"

The clown gurgled, but it didn't help. The poorly-baked, half-raw gob of dough filled his mouth. He waved his arms about and made horrible faces.

"Hah! Serves you right!" people in the crowd shouted. The clown scampered off behind the curtain. "Scoundrel! He sold himself to the Three Fat Men! He's ready to damn those who've gone to meet their death to free us!"

The music became louder. Other bands joined in. There were nine fifes, three bugles, three Turkish drums, and a violin, the sound of which gave everyone a toothache.

The owners of the booths wanted the loud music to drown out the noise of the crowd.

"The actors may get scared of the oat-cakes," one of them said. "We must pretend nothing has happened." "Come one, come all! The show's about to begin!" One of the booths was called "The Trojan Horse". The showman came out from behind the curtain. He had on a jacket with round brass buttons and a green tophat. His cheeks were painted a bright red.

"*Shhh!*" he hissed, as if he were talking German. "*Shhh!* This is the show you've always wanted to see!"

There was a little less noise after that.

"This is such a special day, that we've invited Lapitup the Strong Man to perform for you!"

"Ta-ti-tu!" the bugles blew.

Rattles were spun around to sound like applause.

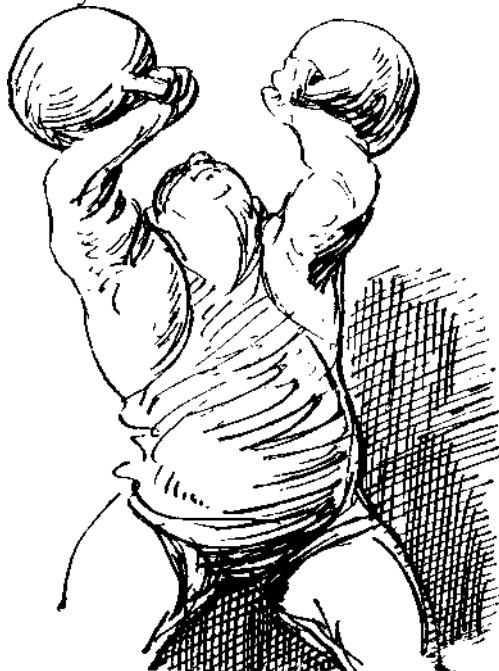
"Lapitup the Strong Man will now show you what his amazing muscles can do."

The band began to play. The curtain parted. Lapitup the Strong Man came forward. A huge man in pink tights, he really did look strong.

He huffed and puffed and he held his head low like a bull. His muscles moved up and down under his tights. They looked like rabbits that had been swallowed by a boa-constrictor.

Stagehands brought in the weights and dropped them on the stage, nearly breaking the floor boards. A cloud of dust rose from the spot. A murmur went through the crowd.

The strong man began to do his tricks. He picked up a weight in each hand, tossed them into the air like rubber balls, caught them, and then clapped them together, making sparks fly.



"Look!" he said. "This is how the Three Fat Men will crack the skulls of Prospero the Gunsmith and Tibul the Acrobat."

The strong man had also been bought by the gold of the Three Fat Men.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he laughed at his own joke.

He knew that no one would dare throw an oat-cake at him, for everyone could see how strong he was.

In the silence that fell on the crowd the Negro's voice sounded very clearly. Every head turned his way.

"What did you say?" the Negro asked, placing his foot on the bottom step.

"I said that's how the Three Fat Men will crack the skulls of Prospero the Gunsmith and Tibul the Acrobat."

"Keep your mouth shut!"

The Negro spoke calmly, sternly, and quietly.

"Who do you think you are, you black thing, you?" the strong man said angrily.

He dropped the weights and put his hands on his hips.

The Negro climbed on to the stage.

"You are very strong and no less mean. Why don't you tell us who you are? Who gave you the right to insult the people? I know you. You're a blacksmith's son. Your father is an honest man. Your sister's name is Ellie. She's a laundress. She washes the rich people's clothes. Perhaps she was shot by the Guards yesterday. And you ... you're a traitor!"

The strong man backed away in amazement. The Negro was really telling the truth. Lapitup couldn't understand how he had found all this out.

"Get out of here!" the Negro shouted.

The strong man came to his senses. His face turned purple with anger. He clenched his fists.

"You've no right to order me about!" he hissed. "I don't know you. You're the Devil!"

"Get going! I'll count to three. *One!*"

The crowd stood still. The Negro was a head shorter than Lapitup and one-third his weight. But everyone was sure that if there was going to be a fight, the Negro would win, for he looked so fierce and confident. "*Two!*"

The strong man pulled his head into his shoulders. "The Devil!" he hissed. "*Three!*"

The strong man disappeared. Many people had shut their eyes and waited for him to deal the Negro a terrible blow. When they opened them, the strong man was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared behind the curtain.

"That's how the people will chase the Three Fat Men away!" the Negro said with a big smile.

The crowd roared. People clapped their hands and threw their caps into the air.

"Long live the people!" "Hooray! Hooray!"

Doctor Caspar was the only one who was shaking his head. No one could tell why he was so displeased.

"Who is he? Who is he? Who's the Negro?" people kept asking each other.

"Is he an actor, too?"

"We never saw him before!"

"Who are you?"

"Why did you defend the people?"

"Wait! Wait a minute!" cried a man in tattered clothes who was making his way through the crowd. It was the very same beggar who had stopped to speak

to the flower girls and coachmen the night before. Doctor Caspar recognised him.

"Wait a minute!" the beggar shouted excitedly. "Can't you see we've been fooled? This Negro's just another actor, like Lapitup the Strong Man. They're all part of the same gang! He got his money from the Three Fat Men, too."

The Negro clenched his fists.

Now the joy of the crowd changed to anger.

"Sure! One scoundrel chased another away."

"He was afraid we'd beat up his friend, so he thought he'd play a joke on us."

"Get out of here!"

"Scoundrel!" "Traitor!"

Doctor Caspar wanted to say something, to hold the crowd back, but it was too late. A dozen men had climbed up on the stage and surrounded the Negro.

"Hit him!" an old woman screeched.

The Negro held up his hand. He was calm.

"Stop!"

His voice rose over the shouting, the noise, and the cat-call. Everything became suddenly quiet, and in the stillness the Negro words sounded truthful and simple:

"I'm Tibul the Acrobat."

There was confusion everywhere.

The circle of attackers fell away.

"Oh!" the crowd gasped.

And only one voice asked:

"But why are you black?"

"Ask Doctor Caspar Arnery!" The Negro smiled as he said this and pointed to the doctor.

"Of course it's him!"

"Tibul!"

"Hooray! Tibul is alive! Tibul is with us!"

"Long live...."

But the words ended abruptly. Something unexpected and unpleasant had happened. There was confusion at the back. People scattered in all directions.

"Quiet! Be quiet!"

"Run, Tibul, run for it!"

Three men on horseback, followed by a carriage, appeared on the square.

It was Count Bonaventura, Captain of the Palace Guards, accompanied by two of his men. A Palace official rode inside the carriage. On his lap he was holding the broken doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir. The doll was sadly leaning its lovely curly head on his shoulder.

They were looking for Doctor Caspar Arnery.

"It's the Guards!" someone shouted.

Several persons climbed over a nearby fence.

The black carriage came to a stop. The horses tossed their heads, making the harness jingle and flash. The wind fluttered through the light-blue feathers.

The riders pulled up beside the carriage.

Captain Bonaventura had a terrible voice. If the sound of the violin gave you a toothache, his voice made you feel a tooth had been knocked out.

He rose up in his stirrups and roared:
"Where does Doctor Caspar Arnery live?"

He was pulling at the reins. He wore a pair of coarse leather gloves with flaring cuffs.

His question hit an old woman like a bolt of lightning. She waved her hand frantically in various directions.

"Where does he live?!" the captain repeated.

Now his voice sounded as if it could knock out not one but every tooth in a person's mouth.

"Here I am. Who wants to see me?"

The crowd parted. Doctor Caspar approached the carriage with small steps.

"Are you Doctor Caspar Arnery?"

"I am."

The door of the carriage opened.

"Get in! You'll be taken to your house and told what to do."

A footman jumped off the backboard and gave the doctor a hand in. The carriage door banged shut behind him.

The procession started off, raising a cloud of dust. In another moment they had all disappeared round a corner.

Neither Captain Bonaventura nor his men noticed Tibul the Acrobat in the rear of the crowd. And even if they had seen the Negro, they would not have recognised him to be the man they had been hunting for the night before.

It seemed all danger had passed. But then there was a sound of loud hissing.

It was Lapitup the Strong Man, who had poked his head round the partition and was hissing:

"Wait! You just wait!" and he shook his tremendous fist at Tibul. "I'll catch up with the Guards and tell them you're here!"

And he tried to squeeze through an opening in the partition.

But it couldn't resist the weight of his huge pink body. With a loud crash it collapsed.

The strong man freed his leg from a crack in the partition and pushing people out of his way, he raced off after the carriage.

"Stop!" he screamed, waving his thick arms frantically. "Stop! I've found Tibul the Acrobat! He's here! I've got him!"

Things were beginning to look bad. Then the Spaniard with the rolling eye joined in. He had a pistol stuck in his belt and was waving another. He pranced up and down the stage, shouting:

"Ladies and Gentlemen! We must hand Tibul over to the Guards, or we'll get into a lot of trouble! Listen, we can't go against the Three Fat Men!"

He was joined by the owner of the booth.

"He ruined my show! He chased Lapitup the Strong Man away! I don't want the Three Fat Men to be angry at me!"

The crowd closed in around Tibul to protect him.

The strong man couldn't catch up with the carriage. He came back to the square. He was coming full tilt towards Tibul. The Spaniard hopped down off the stage and pulled his other pistol from his belt. The showman came hobbling out with a big white paper hoop, the kind trained dogs jump through in the circus. He was waving the hoop as he came clattering down after the Spaniard.

The Spaniard cocked his pistol.

Tibul saw that he had better run for it. The crowd let him through. He was gone in a flash. He bounded over a fence and found himself in a vegetable garden. There he had a quick look through a crack in the fence and saw that the strong man, the Spaniard, and the owner of the booth were all running towards him. They looked so funny that Tibul couldn't help laughing.

The strong man was like a raging elephant, the Spaniard like a rat hopping along on its hind legs, and the showman limped along like a lame crow.

"We'll catch you alive!" they shouted. "You'd better give yourself up!"

The Spaniard clicked the cock of his pistol and ground his teeth. The showman waved the paper ring.

Tibul waited for them to attack. He was standing on loose black earth. All around him were vegetable beds. There were cabbages, beets, green shoots, and broad leaves.

The wind made the leaves flutter. The sky was clear and blue.

The battle began.

All three of the attackers came up to the fence.

"Are you there?" asked the strong man.

There was no answer.

Then the Spaniard said:

"You might as well give yourself up! I have a pistol in each hand. They're the best pistols money can buy, they're made by 'Burglar and Sons'. And I'm the best shot in the country."

Tibul was no great pistol shot. In fact, he had never even owned a pistol. But close at hand (or, rather, close at foot) there were very many heads of cabbage. He bent down and broke off a round and heavy one and tossed it over the fence. The cabbage hit the showman in the stomach. It was followed by a second and then a third head of cabbage. They exploded just like bombs.

The enemy was confused.

Tibul bent down to pull up another head of cabbage. He grabbed it with both hands, pulled hard, but he couldn't get it loose. And then, of all things, it began talking to him in a human voice!

"I'm not a head of cabbage! This is *my* head. I sell balloons. I escaped from the Palace of the Three Fat Men through a tunnel. It begins in a pot and ends right here. It's a very long, dark tunnel."

Tibul couldn't believe his eyes! A head of cabbage was talking!

Then he bent closer to get a better look at the wonder. And he couldn't doubt what he saw, for the

eyes of a person who can walk a rope don't lie. True, the head didn't look the least bit like a head of cabbage.

It was the round face of the balloon man. As always, it looked like a china teapot with painted daisies on it.

The balloon man's head was poking out of the ground, and the earth was like a damp, lumpy black collar around his neck.

"Well, what do you know!" Tibul said.

The balloon man stared at him with the bright-blue sky reflected in his round eyes.

"I gave the kitchen-boys my balloons. They helped me escape. Oh, look! There's one of my balloons now."

Tibul looked up and saw a tiny orange ball high up in the sky.

It was indeed one of the balloons the kitchen-boys had let goof.

The three men who were standing on the other side of the fence, trying to think of a plan of attack, also noticed the balloon. The Spaniard forgot about everything else in the world.



He jumped two feet off the ground, rolled his eye and took aim, for he loved nothing better than target practice.

"Look!" he shouted. "That silly balloon is ten bell-towers high. I'll bet anybody ten pieces of gold that I can hit it. There's no better shot than I!"

No one wanted to take him up on the bet, but that didn't stop him. Both the strong man and the showman were furious.

"You stupid idiot!" the strong man growled. "This is no time to go shooting up balloons! We have to catch Tibul! Don't waste your bullets."

It was no use. The balloon was too tempting a target for the good shot. The Spaniard took aim again, closing his rolling eye. Meanwhile, Tibul pulled the balloon man out of the ground. What a sight he was! His clothes were covered with icing and syrup, with gobs of mud and lovely candied-fruit stars!

There was a black hole in the ground where Tibul had yanked him up like a cork from a bottle. Lumps of earth rolled back down the tunnel. It sounded like rain beating on a roof.

The Spaniard pulled the trigger. But he didn't hit the balloon. Alas! All he hit was the showman's green tophat, which was nearly as tall as a bell-tower.

Tibul scaled the next fence and was gone.

The green tophat fell to the ground and rolled off. The Spaniard looked very embarrassed. His reputation as the best shot in the country was now ruined. Not only that, but the showman would never respect him again.

"You scoundrel!" The showman was in a rage. He slammed the paper hoop down over the Spaniard's head.

The paper burst, encircling his neck in a jagged paper collar.

Lapitup, meanwhile, was standing by not knowing what to do. The neighbourhood dogs were excited by

the shot. One of them dashed round the corner and headed straight for the strong man.

"Run for your life!" he shouted and was off.

The three of them scattered.

The balloon man was left all alone. He climbed over the fence and looked around. The three men had tumbled down a green hill. There Lapitup was hopping along on one foot, holding on to where the dog had nipped his fat leg. The showman had climbed a tree and was hanging on for dear life, looking very-much like an owl. The Spaniard was wagging his head in the paper ring and shooting blindly at the dog, but hitting a scarecrow each time instead.

The dog had come to a stop at the top of the hill. He had apparently decided to stay there.

He was wagging his tail and smiling, with his shiny pink tongue hanging out. He seemed very happy about the bite he had taken out of Lapitup's leg.

CHAPTER SIX

AN UNEXPECTED DELAY

"Ask Doctor Caspar Arnery," Tibul had said when the people wanted to know why he had become a Negro.

But we can guess the reason without asking the good doctor. Remember, Tibul managed to escape from the battlefield. Remember, the Guards were

tracking him down, they set fire to the workers' quarters, they opened fire in Star Square. Tibul was able to hide in Doctor Caspar's house. But he might have been discovered at any moment. The danger was too great, for too many people could recognise him.

Every shopowner was on the side of the Three Fat Men, because he himself was fat and rich. Any rich man who lived on the same street as Doctor Caspar could call the Guards and tell them the doctor was hiding Tibul in his house.

"You'll have to change your appearance," Doctor Caspar had said to Tibul the night he had come down the chimney.

And the doctor helped Tibul to change.

He said:

"You're very tall. You have a broad chest, broad shoulders, strong white teeth, curly black hair. If not for your white skin, you'd make a good North American Negro. Why, that's an excellent idea! I'll help you become one."

Doctor Caspar Arnery had studied a hundred sciences. He was a very serious and good-natured man. But all work and no play is a very dull way to live. And so at times Doctor Caspar used to amuse himself. Since he was a scientist, he relaxed by inventing things. He would make books of transfers for poor orphans, wonderful fireworks, toys and musical instruments with lovely, unusual sounds. He would invent new paints, colours no one had ever seen before.

"Here, have a look!" he said to Tibul. "This colourless liquid will make anything it touches dark brown. And this bottle will make everything the colour it was to begin with."

Tibul undressed. He rubbed the stinging liquid that smelt of burnt cork all over his body.

An hour later he turned dark brown.

That was when Auntie Ganimed came in with her mousetrap. We know what happened after that.

Now let us return to Doctor Caspar. We left him when Captain Bonaventura took him away in a black Palace carriage.

The horses were galloping down the road. And we know that Lapitup the Strong Man could not catch up with them. It was dark inside the carriage. The doctor thought the man sitting next to him was holding a tousled girl on his lap.

The man was silent. So was the child.

"I hope I'm not crowding you?" the doctor said politely, tipping his hat.

"Don't worry," the Palace official replied brusquely.

Flashes of light came in through the narrow windows. Soon the doctor's eyes became used to the dark. He made out the official's long nose and half-closed eyes, the lovely little girl and her beautiful dress. The child seemed very sad. She was probably very pale, but he could not be sure in the dim light.

"Poor child," Doctor Caspar thought. "She's probably ill."

"Have you called on me because the little girl is sick? Do you need my advice?"

"Yes, we do," the man with the long nose said.

"I'm sure she's one of the Three Fat Men's nieces, or a guest of Tutti the Heir," the doctor thought.



"She's dressed in fine clothes, she's come straight from the Palace, and a Captain of the Guards is escorting her. Yes, she's a very important person. Oh! I've completely forgotten that live children are *never* allowed near Tutti the Heir. How did this sweet little girl ever get into the Palace?"

The doctor did not know what to think. He tried talking to the long-nosed official again.

"What's wrong with the child? Is it diphtheria?"

"No, she has a hole in her chest."

"Do you mean there's something the matter with her lungs?"

"She has a hole in her chest," the man repeated.

The doctor was too polite to argue.

"Poor child," he said.

"This is not a child, it's a doll," the man said.

Just then the carriage rolled up to the doctor's house.

The Palace official and Captain Bonaventura followed the doctor inside. He took them straight to his workshop.

"If this is a doll, then why have you come to me for help?"

The Palace official began to explain, and at last everything became clear.

Auntie Ganimed, who was still excited from all the goings-on that morning, was peeping through the keyhole. She saw the terrible Captain Bonaventura.



He stood there, leaning on his sword and jiggling his foot in its huge top-boot. His spurs looked like comets. Auntie Ganimed saw the Palace official sit a sickly looking little girl wearing a fancy pink dress in the armchair. The child bent her curly head and seemed to be looking down at her lovely little satin slippers with gold rosebuds instead of pompons.

A strong wind was banging the shutter of the hall window, and the noise made it difficult for Auntie

Ganimed to hear what was going on. But she was still able to catch some of what was said.

The Palace official showed Doctor Caspar the order signed by the State Councillor. The doctor read it and looked worried.

"The doll must be repaired by tomorrow morning," the Palace official said as he rose.

Captain Bonaventura's spurs jangled.

"Yes ... but...." and Doctor Caspar shrugged. "I'll certainly do my best. But I can't promise to fix it. I don't know anything about the springs that make this magic doll work. I'll have to study it carefully and see what's been broken. Then I'll have to make new parts to fit. And all of this will take a lot of time. Perhaps my knowledge will not be enough. Then I won't be able to restore the wounded doll to health. I'm not at all sure, gentlemen. You've given me so little time. Only one night.... I can't promise you anything."

The official interrupted him. Raising a finger he said:

"Tutti the Heir's grief is too great for any more delays. The doll must be brought to life again by tomorrow morning. That's an order of the Three Fat Men! No one dares to disobey their orders! Tomorrow morning you will bring the mended, healthy doll to the Palace of the Three Fat Men."

"Yes ... but...."

"And no 'buts' about it! The doll must be repaired by tomorrow morning. If you're successful, you will

receive a big reward. If not, you'll be punished severely."

The doctor was stunned.

"I'll try my best," he said. "But you must realise that this is a very serious matter."

"Certainly!" the official barked and brought his finger down. "I've given you the order. It's your duty to obey it. Good-bye!"

Auntie Ganimed sprang back from the keyhole and scuttled off to her room, where the happy mouse was squeaking in the corner. The terrible visitors left. The Palace official climbed back into the black carriage. Captain Bonaventura, his spurs flashing and jangling, jumped on to his horse. The Guards pulled their hats down and were off.

The doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir was left in the doctor's workshop.

Doctor Caspar saw his visitors out and then went to find Auntie Ganimed. His voice was unusually stern when he said:

"Auntie Ganimed! I want you to listen carefully. I'm known as a wise man, a good doctor and a skilled craftsman. I value both my fame and my head. Tomorrow morning I may lose both. I have a very difficult job to do tonight. Do you understand?" Here he waved the order of the State Councillor of the Three Fat Men in front of her. "I don't want anyone or anything to bother me! I don't want any noise in the house. Don't clatter about with the dishes. Don't burn food on the stove. Don't call out to your hens. Don't

go catching mice. I don't want to hear about fried eggs, or cauliflower, or Turkish delight, or medicines! Do you understand?"

Doctor Caspar was very angry.

Auntie Ganimed locked herself in her room.

"Such strange things are going on," she mumbled. "I simply can't understand a thing. First the Negro, now the doll, and an order of some kind or other. Yes, strange things are happening these days!"

To calm her nerves she decided to write a letter to her niece. She had to write very slowly, to keep the pen from scratching, for she didn't want to disturb the doctor.

A whole hour passed. Auntie Ganimed was still writing. She had just come to the part about the strange Negro who had appeared in Doctor Caspar's study that morning.

"They left together. The doctor came back later with a Palace official and some Guards. They had a doll that looks just like a little girl, but the Negro wasn't with them. I don't know what's become of him."

Doctor Caspar was also wondering what had become of the Negro, that is, of Tibul the Acrobat. While the doctor worked on the doll, his thoughts kept turning back to Tibul. He was angry. He was talking to himself.

"How careless he was! I turned him into a Negro, I made him such a beautiful colour, no one would ever have recognised him. But then he had to go and give himself away at the Fourteenth Market Place! He may

get caught any minute! Oh, dear! He's so careless! Does he want to be put into an iron cage?" Doctor Caspar was very worried. First, Tibul had been so careless, and now here was this doll that had to be fixed. Then there was all the trouble of the day before and the ten scaffolds on Court Square.

"We live in such terrible times!" the doctor said.

He did not know that the executions had been postponed. The Palace official was not a talkative man. He had said nothing of what had happened at the Palace that day. As the doctor examined the poor doll, he wondered aloud:

"Where did she get such wounds? They were certainly made by a weapon, probably a sword. This wonderful, child-like doll was pierced right through. Who could have done it? Who could have dared to run his sword through the doll that belongs to Tutti the Heir?"

The doctor had no idea that the Palace Guards had done it. He could never imagine that they, too, would refuse to serve the Three Fat Men and would side with the people. How happy he would have been if he had known!



Doctor Caspar was holding the doll's head. The sun streamed in through the window. Its beams fell right on the doll. Doctor Caspar looked at it carefully.

"That's strange. That's very strange," he said to himself. "I've seen this face before. Yes, I have! I recognise it. But where? When? It was alive, it was the face of a live girl. It was smiling, looking pretty, happy, sad. Yes, I'm sure of it! There can be no doubt about it! But I'm so terribly near-sighted it's hard for me to remember faces."

He brought the doll's curly head close to his eyes.

"What a marvellous doll! What a skilled craftsman made it! It's not at all like an ordinary one. Dolls usually have bulging blue eyes with no expression at all, a small turned-up nose, a mouth like a bow and stupid blonde curls like lamb's wool. These dolls all look happy, but they're really stupid. There's nothing at all doll-like about this one, though. It's just like a girl who's been turned into a doll!"

Doctor Caspar admired his unusual patient. And all the while he kept thinking that somewhere, some time before he had seen that pale face, those serious grey eyes and those short tousled curls. He remembered the way she used to turn her head sideways and look up at him so seriously with a spark of mischief in her eyes.

The doctor heard himself saying:

"What's your name, doll?"

But it did not answer. Then the doctor remembered that the doll was broken. He had to fix her voice, fix

her heart, teach her to smile again, to dance and behave like other little girls of her age.

"She seems to be about twelve."

There was no time to lose. Doctor Caspar got down to work.

"I must bring the doll back to life again!"

Auntie Ganimed finished writing her letter. Two hours passed. She was very bored. And then she became curious. "I wonder what sort of rush work the doctor is doing? What was that doll they brought him?"

She tiptoed to the workshop door and peeped through the heart-shaped keyhole. Alas! The key was in the lock. She couldn't see a thing. At that moment the door opened and Doctor Caspar came out. He was so upset he didn't even scold Auntie Ganimed for peeping. He didn't have to. She was terribly embarrassed as it was.

"Auntie Ganimed, I'm leaving now. I have to go out. Please call a cab."

He was silent and then rubbed his forehead.

"I'm going to the Palace of the Three Fat Men. It is quite likely I won't return."

Auntie Ganimed was shocked.

"You're going to the Palace of the Three Fat Men?"

"Yes. Things look pretty bad. They brought me the doll of Tutti the Heir. It's the best doll in the whole world. But the spring that made it work is broken. The State Council of the Three Fat Men ordered me to

repair it by tomorrow morning. If I don't, a terrible fate awaits me."

Auntie Ganimed was ready to cry.

"And I can't fix this poor doll. I took it apart, I discovered what made it work. I could have fixed it. But... it's such a small thing! I can't because of a trifle. There's a tiny cogwheel inside and it's cracked. It's no good any more. I'll have to make a new one. I have the metal for it, it's something like silver. But before I can start making the wheel, I have to soak the metal in a solution of vitriol for at least two days. Two days, do you understand? And the doll must be ready by tomorrow morning!"

"Can't you put in another kind of wheel?" Auntie Ganimed suggested timidly.

The doctor waved his hand sadly.

"I've tried everything. Nothing works."

Five minutes later a covered cab rolled up to the doctor's house. He was going to the Palace of the Three Fat Men.

"I'll tell them the doll can't be fixed by tomorrow morning. They can arrest me if they want to."

Auntie Ganimed bit the edge of her apron and shook her head until finally she was afraid it might fall off.

Doctor Caspar sat the doll down on the seat beside him and was off.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRANGE DOLL IS LOST

The wind howled in Doctor Caspar's ears. The tune was horrid, even worse than the screeching of a knife on a grinder's wheel.

The doctor pulled his cape collar up over his ears and turned his back to the wind.

Then the wind began to play with the stars. It put them out, rolled them about and hid them behind the black triangles of the rooftops. When it got tired of playing this game, it began heapining clouds. But the clouds kept falling apart. Then the wind got very cold. It got that cold from anger.

The doctor had to wrap himself up in his cape. He put half of it over the doll.

For no good reason he began to feel frightened.

"Faster! Faster!" he urged the driver on.

Everything round about was threatening, dark and deserted. There were only a few yellow lights in the windows, am others were shuttered. People were expecting terrible things to happen.

Many things seemed unusual and suspicious that evening. The doctor even felt the strange doll's eyes might start shining in the dark like two transparent stones. He tried not to look at his companion.

"What nonsense!" he said to calm himself. "My nerves are all on edge. This is a very ordinary evening. It's just that there are very few people out tonight. And the wind is playing tricks with their shadows, making each one of them look like a hired killer in a black cape. Then again, the gas lights at the street corners are a deadly blue. Oh, I wish we were at the Palace already!"

The best medicine for fear is to fall asleep. It works still better if you pull a blanket over your head. This was the remedy the doctor chose. Instead of a blanket, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. He began counting to a hundred. It didn't help. Then he decided upon some very strong medicine. He began counting a different way.

"One elephant and one elephant make two elephants. Two elephants and one elephant make three elephants. Three elephants and one elephant make four elephants...."

He had already counted up a big herd of elephants. And the hundred and twenty-third elephant turned into a real one. Since the doctor could not tell whether it was an elephant or Lapitup the Strong Man in pink tights, he must have finally fallen asleep and been dreaming.

In your dreams time flies much faster than in real life. The good doctor not only reached the Palace of the Three Fat Men in his dream, but he found himself on trial. The Three Fat Men stood before him, each holding a doll by the hand.

They didn't even want to hear his explanations.

"You did not obey our order!" they thundered. "You deserve to be punished severely! You will have to cross over Star Square on a tight-rope carrying the doll. But first, you'll have to take off your spectacles."

Doctor Caspar said he was very sorry that things had turned out so badly. He was most concerned about the doll. This is what he said:

"I'm quite used to falling and know how to do it. It won't matter if I lose my balance and fall off the wire into the pool. I've had some experience, for I fell with the tower on the square near the town gates. Think of the doll, though! The poor doll! It will be smashed to pieces. Have pity on it. I'm quite sure it's not a doll at all, but a live girl with a lovely name. I seem to have forgotten her name, I can't remember it."

"No!" the Three Fat Men cried. "No! You will not be pardoned! That's an order of the Three Fat Men!" They shouted so loudly that the doctor woke up.

"That's an order of the Three Fat Men!" someone was shouting.

The doctor was not asleep any more. The shouting was very real. He pulled his hat off his eyes and looked about.

The night had got a good deal blacker while he had been sleeping.

The carriage had come to a stop. It was surrounded by black figures. It was they who were shouting, it was they who had got mixed up in the doctor's dream. Their waving lanterns cast flickering shadows.

"What's the matter?" the doctor asked. "Where are we? Who are you?"

One of the men came closer and raised his lantern, shining the light on the doctor. The lantern swayed. The hand that held it had on a glove of coarse leather with a wide cuff.

The doctor understood who the men were: they were Palace Guards.

"That's an order of the Three Fat Men!" the Guard repeated.

The yellow light made his shiny oilskin hat look like a hat of iron.

"No one can come within a mile of the Palace. The order was issued today. There's trouble in town. You can't go any farther!"

"But I simply must get to the Palace."

The doctor was angry.

The Guard said in a steely voice:

"I'm Captain Tserep, in charge of the Guard. Don't take another step! Turn back!" he shouted to the driver, waving his lantern at him.

Now the doctor was really worried. However, he was sure that as soon as they learned who he was and why he was on his way to the Palace, they'd let him through.

"I'm Doctor Caspar Arnery," he said.

The Guards all laughed. Their lanterns danced up and down.

"Look, mister, we don't feel like joking so late at night and in such bad times," the Captain of the Guard said.

"But I *am* Doctor Caspar Arnery."

The Captain became furious. He said slowly, clanging his sword at each word:

"You're lying, because you want to get into the Palace. Doctor Arnery doesn't go roaming at night. Especially tonight, of all nights. He's very busy right now. He's bringing the doll of Tutti the Heir back to life. He won't come to the Palace before tomorrow morning. I'm going to arrest you for lying to me!"

"What!" Now it was the doctor's turn to become furious. "So, he doesn't believe me? Very well, I'll show him the doll," the doctor thought as he felt around on the seat for it. But.... The doll was gone.

It had fallen out of the carriage while he was sleeping. A chill ran down the doctor's spine. "Maybe I'm still dreaming?" he thought. Alas! He was not.

"Well!" the Captain of the Guard muttered, as he clenched his fist over the lantern ring. "Get going! I'm letting you off because I've no time to be bothered with a stupid old man like you. Go on!"

The doctor had to obey. The driver turned the carriage around. It creaked and rattled, the horse snorted, the iron lanterns flashed for the last time, and the poor doctor started back to town...This was the last straw.

It was just too much for him. He burst into tears. They had all been so rude to him, they had called him

a stupid old man. But worst of all, he had lost the doll of Tutti the Heir! "I suppose that means I've also lost my head," he thought and wept His spectacles became so clouded he couldn't see a thing. He felt like burying his head in a pillow. Meanwhile, the driver was racing his horse. The doctor moaned for ten more minutes, and then his usual good sense returned.

"I can still find the doll. There were very few people about this evening. And the roads here are always deserted. Perhaps no one has passed by in all this time."

He told the driver to slow down and look at the ground carefully.

"Well? Do you see anything?" he kept asking every minute.

"Can't see a thing. No, nothing here," the driver replied.

And then he would tell him what he could see, things that were quite useless and of no interest.

"There's a barrel."

"No, that's not it."

"That looks like a good piece of glass."

"No."

"And a torn shoe."

"No," the doctor answered. His voice kept getting sadder.

The driver was really trying hard. He looked every way. He saw so well in the dark he might have been the captain of an ocean liner instead of a cab-driver.

"Still can't see the doll? It has on a pink dress."

"No, there's no doll," the driver answered in a deep, sad voice.

"That means someone has found it. There's no sense looking any more. Here, this is where I fell asleep. It was still sitting next to me then. Oh, dear!" And the doctor was ready to weep again.

The driver sniffled in sympathy.

"What do we do now?"

"I don't know. I don't know at all." Doctor Caspar rested his head in his palms, swaying to and fro from grief and the bumps in the road. "I know!" he cried. "Why, of course! That's it. Why didn't I think of it before! The doll ran away. I fell asleep, and it ran away. Certainly. She was alive. I noticed that right away. But that doesn't make me any less guilty so far as the Three Fat Men are concerned."

Suddenly, he felt hungry. He was silent and then he said very solemnly:

"I haven't had dinner today! Please take me to the nearest inn."

His hunger had calmed him.

They rolled along the dark streets for quite a while. All the innkeepers had locked their doors. All the fat people in town were worried that night. They had put new locks on their door and had piled chests and wardrobes behind them. They stuffed up the windows with pillows and striped mattresses. The fattest and the richest expected to be attacked that night. Their watch dogs had not been fed since the morning to make them still fiercer. It was a terrible night for the

fat and the rich. They were certain the people would rise up again at any moment. Rumours that several Guards had turned against the Three Fat Men am had run their swords through the doll of Tutti the Heir, and had then left the Palace, spread quickly through the town. This made all the rich and the gluttons still more nervous.

"Well!" they all raged. "Just think! We can't even rely on the Guards any more. Yesterday they put down the uprising, but today they're ready to turn against us!"

Doctor Caspar lost all hope of having supper and some rest. There was not a sign of life anywhere.

"Do I really have to go back home?" he thought unhappily.

"It's so far away. I'll probably die of hunger on the way."

Just then he smelled roast meat. Yes, that was what was! It smelled like roast lamb and onions. And the driver had caught sight of a light nickering in the distance. What could it be?

"Ah, if only it's an inn!" the doctor cried happily.

They drove up. But it was not an inn.

Away from the road on an empty plot beyond some dark houses, stood a house on wheels. A narrow strip of light was coming from a crack in the door.

The driver climbed down from his box and went to have a look, while the doctor, who had forgotten all about his terrible adventure, was inhaling the

wonderful aroma of the roast lamb. He snorted and closed his eyes with delight.

"I'm afraid of dogs!" the driver shouted back to him.
"And I think there are some sort of steps here."

It all ended well. The driver climbed the steps and knocked.

"Who's there?" The door opened, turning the narrow strip of light into a big bright square of light. A man was standing on the threshold. In all that blackness, with the bright light shining at his back, he seemed like a black paper cutout.

The driver said:

"It's Doctor Caspar Arnery. And who are you?
Whose house on wheels is this?"

"This is Uncle Brizak's carnival wagon," the shadow on the doorstep replied. It seemed excited and waved its hands. "Please come in, gentlemen! We are very happy to see Doctor Caspar Arnery here at Uncle Brizak's."

What a happy ending! They had certainly driven around enough in the dark for one night! Hooray for Uncle Brizak's carnival wagon! The doctor, the driver and the horses found shelter, food and rest, for the house on wheels was a very hospitable one. The people who lived in it belonged to Uncle Brizak's roving troupe of carnival performers.

Who had not heard of Uncle Brizak! Who had not heard of his carnival wagon! All year round it travelled from market to fair putting on performances. What wonderful actors they were!

And what wonderful shows they put on! Tibul the Acrobat's act had always been the main attraction.

We already know that he was the best tight rope-walker in the land. We saw his skill for ourselves when he walked across the high cable over Star Square under a barrage of fire.

Audiences had clapped their hands off when Tibul had appeared in the market squares! Shopkeepers and beggar-women, schoolchildren and soldiers, everyone who ever watched him, had clapped and clapped and clapped. But now the shopkeepers and fops were sorry they had thought him so wonderful. "We applauded him, and now he's turned against us!" they said.

Uncle Brizak's carnival wagon was a sad place now that Tibul had left it.

Doctor Caspar said nothing of what had happened to Tibul. He also said nothing of the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir.

And what did Doctor Caspar see inside the carnival wagon, inside the house on wheels?

He was given a large Turkish drum to sit on. It had red triangles and gold wire netting around it.

The house was built like a railway car. Canvas curtains divided it into several rooms.

It was very late. The people who lived in the carnival wagon were all asleep. The man who had opened the door for them and who had seemed like a black paper doll turned out to be an old clown. His name was August. He was on duty that night, and had just been making himself some supper when the

doctor's carriage rolled up. Yes, it really was roast lamb and onions.

The doctor sat on the drum and looked around. An oil lamp was burning on a wooden box. Hanging on hooks from the walls were hoops covered with pink and white tissue paper, long striped whips with shiny metal handles, bright costumes adorned with beads and gold spangles, embroidered flowers and coloured bits of cloth. There were masks, too. Some had horns, some had funny long noses, some had big grinning mouths. One had a huge pair of ears that looked real, except that they were very, very big.

There was a small strange animal in a cage in a corner.

Along one of the walls was a long wooden table. Ten mirrors hung over it. An unlit candle was stuck to the table with melted wax near each of the mirrors.

There were boxes, paint brushes, powder-puffs, wigs, mounds of pink powder and damp coloured spots under every mirror.

"We had to flee from the Guards today," the clown said. "Tibul the Acrobat used to be one of our performers. The Guards were after us, because they think we're hiding Tibul." The old clown looked very sad. "But we don't even know where he is. He was probably killed, or put in an iron cage."



August sighed and shook his grey head. The animal in the cage looked at the doctor with cat-like eyes.

"I wish you could have come earlier," the clown continued. "We all like you very much. You would have made us feel better. Everyone knows you're a friend of the poor, a friend of the people. Remember something that happened long ago? We were putting

on a show at the Steer Liver Market. That was last spring. My little girl was singing a song."

"Yes, yes, I remember," the doctor said. He felt strangely excited.

"Remember? You were at the market that day. And you were watching our show. My little girl was singing a song about a pie that would rather burn in the oven than land in the stomach of a fat nobleman."

"Yes, yes, I remember! And then what?"

"A grand lady heard the song and got angry. She told her long-nosed servants to box my little girl's ears."

"And I chased them away," the doctor said. "The old woman recognised me and was ashamed of herself. Right?"

"Yes. Then you left, and my little girl said that if the grand lady's servants had boxed her ears, she would have died of disgrace. You saved her. She'll never forget you!"

"Where is your little girl now?" the doctor asked. He was very excited.

The old clown went over to the canvas curtain and called someone.

The name he called was very strange. The way he said it was like the sound of a tightly-closed wooden box opening with a squeak.

"Suok!" he called.

Several moments passed. Then a corner of the curtain was lifted and a little girl popped her tousled

curly head out. She gazed at the doctor with big grey eyes that were very serious, and yet a bit mischievous.

The doctor took one look at her and gasped: it was the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir!



Part Three



SUOK

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE YOUNG ACTRESS HAS A DIFFICULT PART

Yes, it was she!

But where in the world had she come from? Was it a miracle? Of course not! Doctor Caspar knew only too well that miracles don't happen. It was simply a mistake. The doll was really alive and when he had so foolishly fallen asleep in the carriage, she had run away like a naughty little girl.

"It's no use smiling at me! Your innocent smile won't make me forgive you for what you've done," he said sternly. "See, you've been punished already. I might never have found you and yet I did, quite by chance."

The doll stared at him in amazement. Then she began to blink her eyes like a little rabbit. She looked at the clown in a very puzzled way. August sighed.

"Who are you? Answer me!"

The doctor tried to sound as stern as he could, but the doll was so lovely he found it very hard to be angry.

"See, you don't even remember me," she said. "I'm Suok."

"Su-ok," the doctor repeated. "But you're the doll of Tutti the Heir!"

"I'm no doll! I'm a girl!"

"What? Why, you're pretending!"

The doll came out from behind the curtain. The lamp shone brightly on her. She was smiling and her tousled head was tilted. Her hair was the colour of a baby bird's grey fluff.

The fuzzy animal in the cage never took its eyes off her. Doctor Caspar didn't know what to think. In a little while, dear reader, you will discover the secret. But now we'd like to warn you of something very important that Doctor Caspar Arnery failed to notice. When a person is excited, he may not notice things that are quite obvious.

This is what it was: the doll looked so very different here, in the carnival wagon. Her grey eyes sparkled with joy, she seemed serious and attentive, but there was not a trace left of her sadness. In fact, you would have said she was a mischievous child pretending to be very prim and proper. .

And where was her beautiful pink silk dress? Where were the golden rosebuds on her slippers, the lace, the spangles, the fairytale clothes which would make any little girl look like a princess, or at least like a Christmas-tree ornament? The doll was dressed very simply. She had on a sailor blouse and skirt and had no stockings on her feet, only a worn pair of slippers that were once white and now looked grey. But don't think these simple clothes made her one bit less pretty. They really looked very nice on her. Sometimes you see a little ragged girl and pass by without really noticing her and then suddenly realise that she is much prettier than a princess.

But there was something much more important. Remember, the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir had terrible holes in her chest. Now they had disappeared!

This was a very happy, healthy doll.

But Doctor Caspar didn't notice a thing. Perhaps in another moment or two he would have seen the difference, but just then someone knocked. Everything became still more confused.

A Negro entered the carnival wagon. The doll jumped. The animal in the cage spat, even though it wasn't a cat.



We know who the Negro was. Doctor Caspar knew, too, since he was the one who had changed Tibul into a Negro. But no one else knew the secret. The confusion lasted a full five minutes. The Negro behaved most strangely. He lifted up the doll and began kissing its cheeks and nose, but the cheeks and nose kept turning this way and that to get out of his way. It was as if he were trying to bite an apple on a string. Old August closed his eyes and, sick with fear, swayed back and forth like a Chinese emperor deciding whether to chop off a criminal's head or make him eat a mouse without any sugar on it.

The doll's slipper came off and hit the oil lamp. The overturned lamp went out. It became very dark and still more terrifying. Then everyone noticed it was nearly dawn. The cracks in the door let in pale strips of light.

"It's dawn already," the doctor said. "I have to set out for the Palace of the Three Fat Men and bring them Tutti the Heir's doll."

The Negro pushed open the door. The grey light of morning filled the room. August sat as before with his eyes closed. The doll was hiding behind the curtain. Doctor Caspar quickly told Tibul about all that had happened. He told him about the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir, of how it had vanished and how he had luckily come upon it here, in the carnival wagon.

The doll was listening to their conversation from behind the curtain, but it didn't make any sense to her.

"He called him Tibul!" she thought in wonder.
"That's not Tibul. That's a very strange and awful man. Tibul doesn't look a bit like him."

Then she peeped out and had a look. The Negro took a small bottle from the pocket of his red shorts. He pulled out the cork and began rubbing himself all over with the liquid. In another moment a miracle happened. The Negro became white! It was Tibul! There could be no doubt about it.

"Tibul!" the doll shrieked. She rushed out from behind the curtain and threw her arms around his neck.

The clown, whose eyes were still closed, decided something terrible had happened and fell senseless to the floor. Tibul raised him by the seat of his pants.

It was now the doll's turn to start kissing Tibul.

"Goodness!" she said breathlessly. "How did you get so black? I didn't even recognise you."

"Suok!" Tibul said sternly.

She let go of his neck and stood at attention before him like a good tin soldier.

"What?" Suok asked in her best schoolgirl voice.

Tibul put his hand on her tousled head. She looked up at him with shining eyes.

"Did you hear what Doctor Caspar said?"

"Yes. He said that the Three Fat Men told him to heal the doll that belongs to Tutti the Heir. He said the doll ran away from his carriage. And he also said *I'm* that doll!"

"He's wrong," Tibul said. "Doctor Caspar, I can assure you that this is not a doll. This is my little friend, the dancing-girl Suok, my true friend and circus partner."

"Yes!" the doll said happily. "We used to walk across the rope together." She was very pleased to hear Tibul call her his true friend and partner.

"Dear Tibul," she whispered and rubbed her cheek against his hand.

"What?!" said the doctor. "Is she really a live girl? You say her name is Suok? Yes, ah, yes! Now I remember. I saw her once before. Yes, yes! I saved her from the servants of that old woman who wanted to have her caned!" Here the doctor clasped his hands. "Of course! That's why I thought the doll of Tutti the Heir looked so familiar. It's an amazing resemblance."

Soon everything became clear to everyone.

It was getting lighter and lighter outside. A rooster cleared his throat near by.

Then the doctor became sad again.

"All this is very well. But it means I haven't got the doll, it means that I really did lose it."

"It means you've found it," Tibul said, putting his arm around Suok.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. Do you understand what I mean, Suok?"

"I think I do," she answered softly.

"Well?" Tibul said.

"Certainly," the doll said and smiled.

The doctor didn't understand a thing.

"You always listened to me when we used to perform for the crowds on Sundays, Suok. You'd stand there on the striped platform and I'd say *Allez!*! And then you'd step on to the wire and walk towards me. I'd be waiting for you in the middle, high over the crowds. Then I'd bend one knee, say *Allez!* again, and you'd place your foot on my knee and climb to my shoulders. Were you frightened then?"

"No. You'd say *Allez!* and that meant I had to be calm and not be afraid of anything."

"Well then," said Tibul. "I'm saying *Allez!* now. You will be a doll!"

"All right, I'll be a doll."

"A doll?" said Doctor Caspar. "What's this all about?"

I am sure, dear reader, that you have understood. You did not live through as much excitement and worry as poor Doctor Gas-par, and so you are calmer and understand things more quickly. Just think, the doctor hadn't even had an hour's sleep for two days. As it is, one can only wonder at his strength.

Before the second rooster awoke, everything had been decided. Tibul drew up a detailed plan of action.

"Suok, you're a very good actress, even though you're so young. When we put on the pantomime 'The Stupid King' last spring you played the part of the Golden Cabbage Stump admirably.

"Then you had the part of a transfer picture in the ballet, and you were very good as the miller changing

into a teapot. You dance and sing better than anyone else, you have a good imagination and, most important of all, you're a brave and intelligent girl."

Suok was aglow from happiness. So much praise was making her shy.

"Now you'll have to play the part of Tutti the Heir's doll."

Suok clapped her hands and kissed everyone in turn: first Tibul, then old August, then Doctor Caspar.

"Wait," Tibul said. "That's not all. You know that Prospero the Gunsmith is locked up in an iron cage in the Palace of the Three Fat Men. It's up to you to set him free."

"Must I unlock the cage?"

"Yes, I know a secret that will help Prospero escape from the Palace."

"A secret?"

"Yes. There's a secret tunnel there."

Then Tibul told them about the balloon man.

"The tunnel starts somewhere in a big pot, probably in the Palace kitchen. You'll have to find it."

"All right."

The sun had not yet risen, but the birds were awake. The grass on the little plot outside the door showed green. Now that it was light, the strange animal in the cage turned out to be an ordinary red fox.



"There's no time to lose! We have far to go." "But first, you must put on the prettiest dress you have," Doctor Caspar said.

Suok brought out all her circus costumes. They were magnificent, because she had made them herself. Like any talented actress, she had very good taste.

Doctor Caspar rummaged through the colourful pile of clothes. "I think this will do," he said at last. "It's not a bit worse than the one on the broken doll. Put it on!"

Suok changed her dress. She stood there in the first rays of the morning sun, looking prettier than any birthday girl in the world.

Her dress was pink, but when she moved, it seemed covered with golden raindrops. The dress glittered, rustled and smelled lovely.

"I'm ready," Suok said.

It only took them a minute to say good-bye. Circus performers don't like tears. They risk their lives too often. Besides, there couldn't be any hugging for fear of spoiling her dress. "Come back soon!" old August said and sighed. "I'm off to the workers' quarters. We have to see how many men we have left. The workers are waiting for me. They've found out that I'm alive and free." With these words Tibul wrapped his cape about him, put on a wide-brimmed hat, a pair of dark glasses and a large fake nose that was part of the Turk's costume in the pantomime entitled "A Journey to Cairo". No one could ever recognise him now. True, the big nose made him look horrible, but it was the safest way.

Old August stood on the threshold. The doctor, Tibul and Suok went down the steps of the carnival wagon.



It was now bright daylight.

"Hurry, hurry!" the doctor said.

A minute later he and Suok were seated in the carriage.

"Are you frightened?" the doctor asked.

Suok smiled in reply. The doctor kissed her forehead.

The streets were still empty. There were hardly any voices to be heard. Suddenly, there was a loud barking. Then a dog began to growl, just as if someone were trying to take away its bone.

The doctor looked out of the carriage window.

Imagine, it was the very same dog that had bitten Lapitup the Strong Man! But that was not all.

The doctor saw something else. A tall thin man with a small head, dressed in a fine but strange-looking suit and looking very much like a grasshopper, was tugging at something pink and pretty that the dog held in its teeth. Pink shreds were flying in all directions.

The man finally won. He snatched his prize and pressed it to his chest as he rushed off in the very same direction the doctor's carriage was coming from.

When he was abreast of the carriage, Suok, who was peeping out from behind the doctor's shoulder, saw something terrible. The strange man was not running, he was flying along in graceful leaps, barely touching the ground, like a real ballet dancer. The green flaps of his frock coat waved in the wind like the arms of a windmill. And he was carrying ... he was carrying a girl with black wounds in her chest.

"It's me!" Suok cried. She fell back on the seat and hid her face in the plush cushion.

At the sound of her cry, the running man turned to look back, and Doctor Caspar recognised him. It was One-Two-Three, the dancing master.

CHAPTER NINE

THE DOLL HAS A VERY GOOD APPETITE

Tutti the Heir was standing on the balcony. His Geography tutor was peering through a telescope. Tutti wanted him to get a compass as well, but there was really no need for a compass.

Tutti the Heir was awaiting the arrival of his doll.

He had had a good long sleep that night after all the excitement.

From the balcony there was a good view of the road from the town gates to the Palace. The sun was rising behind the rooftops of the town and hurt his eyes. Tutti held up his hand to shield them, squinting and crinkling his nose as if he were going to sneeze.

"I can't see anyone yet," his tutor said.

He had been given the important task of being lookout, because his profession made him best prepared to judge distances, horizons, moving objects, and other such things.

"Are you sure there's nothing there?" Tutti kept asking.

"Don't argue. I have, besides this telescope, both knowledge and an accurate conception of objects. I see a jasmine bush, which has a very beautiful and difficult name in Latin. Farther on are the bridges and

the sentries, with butterflies flying round them. Farther on is the road again. Wait! Wait!"

He turned the lens. Tutti the Heir stood on tiptoe. His heart was pounding.

"Yes!" said the tutor.

Just then three men on horseback rode out of the Palace park towards the road. It was Captain Bonaventura and his men going to meet the carriage that had appeared in the distance.

"Hooray!" Tutti shouted so loudly that geese in far-off villages began to cackle in reply.

The fencing master stood on the ground below the balcony, ready to catch the Heir if he fell over the stone railing from excitement.

And so, Doctor Caspar's carriage was rolling towards the Palace. There was no more need for the telescope or the Geography tutor's scientific knowledge. Now anyone could see the carriage and the white horse.

What a happy moment! The sentries stepped aside as the carriage halted at the last bridge. Tutti the Heir waved his arms wildly and jumped up and down, shaking his golden curls. Finally, he saw what he had been waiting for. A little old man climbed clumsily down from the carriage. The Guards stood respectfully at attention. The little man took the wonderful doll from the carriage. It looked like a fresh pink bouquet tied with ribbons.

It was a marvellous sight under the morning sky, amid the glitter of sun and grass.

A minute later the doll was in the Palace. It was walking all by itself.

Oh, Suok was playing her part perfectly! If she had suddenly found herself surrounded by dolls, they, too, would have taken her for a doll like themselves.

She was very calm. She felt she was playing her part well.

"There are things that are much harder to do," she thought. "Like juggling burning lamps. Or doing a double somersault."





Suok had done both when she had worked in the circus.

So she was not afraid. She even liked the game she was playing. Doctor Caspar was the one who was really worried. He followed Suok in. She took dainty little steps like a ballerina walking on her toes. Her dress trembled and rustled at every step.

The polished floor shone brightly, and the little girl was reflected in it like a pink cloud. She seemed very small in the huge halls that the shiny floors made higher and the mirrors made wider.

She looked like a little flower basket floating over still waters.

She walked on, smiling happily, past the sentries, past the men in leather and iron, who looked at her

with awe, past the Palace officials, who were smiling for the first time in their lives.

They stepped back respectfully as she passed, just as if she were the rightful owner of the Palace, newly come to take possession.

It became so still that her light steps, which were no louder than the sound of a petal falling, could be heard in the hall.

Meanwhile, a little boy, as radiant as she, was running down the wide staircase. It was Tutti the Heir.

They were both the same height.

Suok stopped.

"So that's what Tutti the Heir is like!" she thought.

Standing there before her was a thin boy who looked more like an angry little girl. He had grey eyes and he was rather sad. His tousled head was tilted.



Suok knew who Tutti the Heir was. Suok knew who the Three Fat Men were. She knew that the Three Fat Men grabbed all the iron, all the coal and all the grain that the poor and hungry people of the country produced. She remembered only too well the grand lady who had set her servants upon her. She knew that they were all in it together: the Three Fat Men, the grand ladies, the fops, the shopkeepers, the Guards—all those who had locked Prospero the Gunsmith in an iron cage and were now after her friend, Tibul the Acrobat.

When she had started out for the Palace she had thought that Tutti the Heir would be horrible, just like the grand lady, except that he would have a long tongue hanging out of his mouth.

But she didn't feel at all disgusted when she saw him. In fact, she was glad to meet him.

Her grey eyes looked at him happily.

"Is that you, doll?" Tutti said, touching her hand.



"Oh dear, what shall I do?" Suok was really frightened. "Do-dolls talk? Oh, no one told me what to do! I don't know what the doll the Guards broke could do."

Doctor Caspar came to the rescue.

"Your Highness," he said to Tutti the Heir. "I have cured your doll! As you see, I have not only brought her back to life, I have made her still more wonderful. The doll looks prettier than before, she has a magnificent new dress and, what is most important, I have taught your doll to talk, to sing and to dance."

"How wonderful!" Tutti said softly.

"It's time to begin," Suok decided.

And then the little actress from Uncle Brizak's carnival wagon made her debut on a new stage.

The stage was the Grand Palace Ballroom. A large audience had gathered to watch her. They crowded round on all sides, standing at the top of the stairs, in the passages, on the balcony. They peered through the round windows and climbed the columns to get a better view.

Many heads and shoulders, of the most varied colours and hues, glittered in the bright sunlight.

Suok saw that the faces watching her were all smiling.

There were the kitchen-boys from whose fingers sweet syrups and greasy sauces dripped like sap; there were the ministers in coloured frock-coats who were like monkeys dressed up to be peacocks; there were the plump little musicians in tight-fitting tailcoats, courtiers, grand ladies, hunchbacked physicians, long-nosed scholars, curly-headed messengers; there were the servants dressed as brightly as the ministers. The entire crowd was hanging on to any support they could find.

And everyone was silent. They watched the pink little creature with bated breath. She met their glances calmly and with all the dignity of a twelve-year-old actress. She wasn't at all shy. This audience could hardly be more demanding than the audiences of the market squares where Suok had performed nearly every day. Oh, those had been very demanding audiences—the idlers, soldiers, actors, schoolchildren

and little vendors! And Suok had never been afraid of them. They would say: "Suok is the best actress in the world!" And they would toss their last small coin on to her little rug, though it could buy a liver pie, which was all some poor hosier had for breakfast, dinner, and supper.

And so Suok began to play the part of the doll.

She brought her toes together, then stood on tiptoe and raised her bent arms, wiggling her pinkies like a Chinese mandarin. Then she began to sing. Her head wagged right and left in time to the music.

Her smile was cute and mischievous. But she tried to keep her eyes big and round, just like a real doll.

This is the song she sang:

*By a miracle of science,
Doing justice to his fame.
Doctor Caspar, full of kindness,
Brought me back to life again.
Look—a smile, a sigh, a whisper—
And alive am I once more,
Your beloved little sister,
To be with you evermore!
How I longed to meet you, brother,
To sit side by side and talk!
Don't forget your darling sister
With the gentle name Suok!
I have not been dead but sleeping,
Deep and silent was my sleep,
And I dreamed I saw you weeping,*

*And myself would open weep.
Look—I wake—my lashes flutter,
My eyelids part, I smile, I talk!
I have come alive, dear brother,
Come to you—your own Suok!*

"Suok," Tutti said softly. His eyes were full of tears.

The doll finished her song and curtsied. Everyone sighed with admiration. They began to move, to nod, to clack their tongues.

Truly, the melody was very sweet, though somewhat sad for a voice so young and pure.

"She sings like an angel," the conductor said.

"But the words were rather strange," one of the Palace officials said, and the medals on his chest clanged.

That was all the criticism there was. The Three Fat Men entered the hall. Such a crowd might have annoyed them, and so everyone made hastily for the doors. In the confusion that followed, one of the kitchen-boys clapped his syrupy hand on a court beauty's back. She screeched and everyone suddenly discovered that she had false teeth, because they fell out of her mouth. A fat Captain of the Guards stamped over the beautiful false teeth with his ugly boot. There was a crunching sound and the Master of Ceremonies, who was following close on his heels, grumbled.

"Look at all those nuts on the floor! What a noise!
It's disgraceful!"

The beauty who had just lost her teeth wanted to protest. She even raised her hands, but, alas, she could only mumble something no one could understand.

A moment later there were no outsiders left in the ballroom. Only the highest officials remained.

Now Suok and Doctor Caspar found themselves face to face with the Three Fat Men.

The Three Fat Men did not seem to be upset by what had happened the day before. They had just been playing a game of ball in the park under the watchful eye of the doctor on duty. This was healthful exercise. They were very tired. Their perspiring faces glistened. Their shirts were plastered to their backs with sweat, and their backs looked like wind-blown sails. One of them had a bruise under his eye that was the shape of an ugly rose or a pretty frog. Another of the Fat Men looked at it timidly.

"He must have hit him in the face with the ball and made his eye black," Suok decided.

The bruised Fat Man was huffing angrily. Doctor Caspar smiled uncertainly as the Three Fat Men stared at the doll. The beaming face of Tutti the Heir put them in a good mood.

"Well," said one of them. "So you're Doctor Caspar Arnery?"

The doctor bowed.

"How's the doll?" another one said.

"It's wonderful!" Tutti cried.

The Three Fat Men had never seen him so happy before.

"That's fine! It really does look good."

The First Fat Man wiped the sweat off his brow and said with an angry growl:

"Doctor Caspar, since you've carried out our order, you may ask for your reward."

For a moment everyone was silent.

A little secretary in a red wig had his pen ready to write down the doctor's wish.

This is what the doctor said:

"Yesterday ten scaffolds were built on Court Square to execute the rebels."

"They will all be executed today," one of the Fat Men interrupted.

"That is what I mean. This is my request: I want you to grant all the prisoners their lives and their freedom. I want you to call off the executions and burn down the scaffolds."

The red-wigged secretary dropped his pen in horror at these words. As it was terribly sharp, it went right through the Second Fat Man's foot. With a howl he began to spin around on his good foot. The First Fat Man, the owner of the ugly bruise, laughed spitefully, for he had now been revenged.

"What the devil!" the Second Fat Man yelled, as he yanked out the pen. "That's a criminal request! How dare you ask for such things?"



The red-wigged secretary made a dash for his life. The vase of flowers he knocked over on the way crashed to the floor like a bomb bursting. Things were beginning to look very bad. After the Second Fat Man had pulled the pen out of his foot, he threw it after the fast-disappearing secretary. But a person that fat can never be a good spear-thrower! The pen stuck one of the sentries. However, since he was a good soldier, he did not even flinch. The pen remained where it had stuck until the Guard was changed.

"I demand that you free all the workers who have been sentenced to death. I demand that all the

scaffolds be burned," the doctor repeated in a low but firm voice.

"No! No! No! Never! They'll all be executed!" the Three Fat Men shrieked in reply. It sounded like splintering boards.

"Play dead," Doctor Caspar whispered to the doll.

Suok caught on immediately. She raised herself on tiptoe, squeaked pitifully, and swayed. Her dress fluttered like the wings of a butterfly that has been caught, her head dropped, she was about to fall to the floor.

Tutti rushed to her side.

"Oh! Help!" he cried.

Suok squeaked still more piteously.

"See?" the doctor said. "The doll will lose her life again. The springs inside it are very delicate. It'll be spoiled for ever if you don't do as I say. I don't think His Highness Tutti the Heir will be very pleased to see his doll turn into a useless pink rag."

Tutti became enraged. He stamped his feet like a baby elephant. He shut his eyes tight and shook his head.

"No! No!" he screamed. "Do as the doctor says! I don't want my doll to die! Suok! Suok!" he wept.

Naturally, the Three Fat Men had to give in. They issued an order there and then. The pardon was announced. Doctor Caspar left for home in very good spirits.

"I'll sleep the whole day and night," he thought on the way.

As he rode into town he heard people saying the scaffolds were burning on Court Square and the rich people were very angry, because the execution of the poor had been called off.

Meanwhile Suok was left in the Palace of the Three Fat Men.

Tutti went into the garden with her.

The young Heir walked over flower beds, he tripped on the barbed-wire fence and nearly tumbled into the pool. He was so happy he didn't even see where he was going.

"Can't he see I'm a live girl?" Suok wondered. "No one would ever fool me like that."

Soon breakfast was served. Suok saw the pastries. She remembered that the autumn before she had had a piece of pastry for the first time in her life. And even then old August had said it was a bun, not pastry. The pastries served to Tutti the Heir were magnificent. Ten bees buzzed around them, thinking they were flowers.

"What should I do?" Suok thought unhappily. "Dolls are not supposed to eat. But then, there are all kinds of dolls.... Oh, dear, how I wish I had a piece of pastry."

The temptation was too great.

"I want a little piece," she said very softly. A blush came to her cheeks.

"That's grand!" Tutti smiled. "You never wanted to eat before. It was always so boring to eat by myself. Oh, how nice! Now you have an appetite."

Suok took a tiny bite. And another. And another. And suddenly she noticed that the servant who was guarding the Heir from afar was looking straight at her. Not only was he looking at her, he was staring at her with horror.

His mouth had fallen open.

And he was right.

He had never seen a doll eating before.

Suok was frightened. She dropped the fourth piece of pastry, the fluffiest one, with a candied grape on top.

But it all ended well. The servant rubbed his eyes and closed his mouth.

"I'm seeing things," he said to himself. "It must be the heat."

Tutti chattered on and on. Finally, he got tired and fell silent.

It was very quiet at that hot hour of the day. Yesterday's wind had blown itself far away. Now everything was still. Even the birds were hiding somewhere.

It was then that Suok, who was sitting beside Tutti on the grass, heard a strange sound. It was repeated over and over again, like the ticking of a clock all wrapped up in cotton wool. The only difference was that a clock goes *tick-tock* and this went *thump-thump*.

"What's that?" she said.

"What's what?" Tutti asked, raising his eyebrows in surprise, just like a grown-up person does.

"That thumping noise. Is it a watch? Do you have a watch?"

All was quiet again. And again she could hear something thumping. Suok raised her finger. Tutti listened also.

"That's not a watch," he said sadly. "That's my iron heart beating."

CHAPTER TEN

AT THE ZOO

At two o'clock Tutti the Heir was called to the classroom. That was the hour for lessons. Suok was left all alone.

Of course, no one dreamed she was a live girl. Perhaps the real doll that had belonged to Tutti the Heir and that was now in the possession of One-Two-Three the dancing master was just as live-looking. A really skilled craftsman must have made it. True, it didn't eat pastries. But maybe Tutti the Heir was right. Maybe it simply had no appetite. Anyway, Suok was now alone.

Things were rather confusing.

There was the huge palace, the endless corridors, doors, stairways, and balconies.

There were the frightening Guards, the strange, stern men in coloured wigs, the quiet and sparkle everywhere.

No one paid any attention to her.

She was standing at the window in Tutti the Heir's bedroom.

"I've got to think of a plan," she decided. "Prospero's iron cage is in Tutti's zoo. That means I have to find the zoo first."

You already know that Tutti had never been allowed to see any live children. He was never taken into town, not even in a closed carriage. He grew up in the Palace. He was taught various subjects, and his tutors read him books about cruel kings and warriors. No one who came near him was allowed to smile. All his teachers and tutors were tall, thin old men, with firmly pressed thin lips and faces the colour of clay. Besides, all of them had indigestion, and a person with indigestion has no time to smile.

Tutti the Heir had never heard the sound of happy laughter. Sometimes he heard the drunken guffaws of some fat butcher who was visiting the Palace, or of the Three Fat Men themselves. But was that really laughter? No, it was a terrible roaring sound that made him feel frightened, not merry.

The only one in the Palace who smiled was the doll. But the Three Fat Men did not think its smile was dangerous. Besides, a doll could not talk. She could never tell Tutti the Heir of the many things that were hidden from his sight by the Palace park and the sentries with their drums who stood watch at the iron bridges. And that is why he knew nothing about the

people, about poverty, hungry children, factories, mines, prisons, and peasants.

He did not know that the rich made the poor work for them and then took away everything that was made by the work-worn hands of the poor.

The Three Fat Men wanted their heir to grow up to be cruel and mean. He was not allowed to play with children. Instead, they gave him a zoo of his own.

"Let him look at the animals/" they decided. "He has a lifeless doll. Now he will have a collection of cruel beasts. Let him see how the tigers are fed raw meat and how the boa-constrictor swallows live rabbits. Let him listen to the roaring of the bloodthirsty beasts and look into their red burning eyes. Then he will learn to be cruel."

But things did not turn out as the Three Fat Men had planned.

Tutti the Heir did his lessons well, he listened to the terrible stories about the cruel kings and warriors, he looked at the long noses of his tutors with hatred, but he did not become cruel.

He loved his doll more than all the animals in his zoo.

You will probably say that a twelve-year-old boy is too big to play with dolls. Many boys his age would much rather go tiger hunting. But there was a reason why he loved his doll. You will soon discover it.

Now let us return to Suok.

She had decided to wait until evening. After all, a doll wandering through the Palace in the middle of the day would have looked very strange.

After lessons were over, Tutti came back.

"You know," Suok said, "when I was sick in Doctor Caspar's house, I had *a* very strange dream. I dreamed I became a real live girl, and that I was a circus performer. I lived in a carnival wagon with the other performers. We went from place to place, stopping at the fairs and large market squares to put on our show. I walked a tight-rope, danced, did all kinds of acrobatic tricks, and played different parts in the pantomimes."

Tutti listened in wide-eyed wonder.

"We were very poor. And we often had no dinner at all. We had a big white horse named Anra. I rode it and juggled, standing on the big saddle. And then Anra died, because for a whole month we had too little money to feed her well."

"Poor?" Tutti repeated. "I don't understand you. Why were you poor?"

"We put on shows for poor people. They could only give us a few copper coins. Sometimes, after a show, when the clown August would pass his hat around the crowd, there'd be nothing in it at all."

Still Tutti the Heir did not understand her.

And so Suok talked to him until evening. She told him of the hard life of the poor, of the large town, of the grand lady who wanted to thrash her, of rich people who set their dogs on little children, of Tibul

the Acrobat and Prospero the Gunsmith. She told him that the workers, miners and sailors wanted to put an end to the rule of the rich and the fat.

But most of what she said was about the circus. And, in the end, she was carried away and completely forgot she was supposed to be telling him her dream.

"I've been living in Uncle Brizak's carnival wagon for a very long time. I don't even know when I learned to dance and ride a horse and swing on a trapeze. Oh, what wonderful things I know how to do!" She clapped her hands. "Take last Sunday, for instance. We were performing in the harbour. I played a waltz on apricot pits."

"On apricot pits? How could you do that?"

"Don't you know? Didn't you ever see a whistle made of an apricot pit? It's really very simple. I took twelve pits and made them into whistles. I rubbed each one on a stone until it had a little hole in it."

"How interesting!"

"I can whistle a waltz on twelve pits, and on other things, too. I can even whistle on a key."

"A key? How? Show me! I have a very nice key."

With these words Tutti the Heir unbuttoned the collar of his shirt and took a thin chain from his neck. A small white key hung from the chain.

"Here!"

"But why do you wear it around your neck?" Suok asked.

"The Palace Councillor gave it to me. It's the key of one of the cages."

"Do you hang the keys from all the cages around your neck?"

"No. But they said this was the most important key. I have to take very good care of it."

Suok showed Tutti what she could do. She whistled a lovely tune by holding the key upside-down, with the hole near her pursed lips.

Tutti was so delighted that he forgot all about the key he was supposed to be taking such good care of. When Suok finished whistling the song she absent-mindedly put it in her lace pocket.

And then it was evening.

A special room had been prepared for the doll. It was the one next to Tutti's bedroom.

Tutti the Heir was fast, asleep. He was having a very strange dream about funny, long-nosed masks. There was also a man carrying a large round stone on his bare yellow back, and a fat man who was whipping the man with a black whip, and a tattered boy eating a potato, and a grand lady in silks and laces who was riding a white horse and whistling an awful waltz on twelve apricot pits.

At the same time, in a place very far from the small bedroom, in a far corner of the Palace park, strange things were happening. Have no fear, dear reader, it was nothing terrible. Tutti the Heir wasn't the only one who was having a strange dream that night. A Palace Guard who was on sentry duty near Tutti the Heir's zoo had fallen asleep at his post. He, too, was having a very strange dream.

There he sat, on a stone bench, leaning against the railing and dozing contentedly. His sword in its shiny scabbard rested between his knees. His pistol was peacefully stuck into the black silk sash round his waist. Beside him on the gravel path was a lantern which cast its light on his boots and on the long caterpillar that had fallen on to his sleeve from the leaves above.

Nothing could have been more peaceful.



And so, the sentry was fast asleep. He was having a most unusual dream. He dreamed that Tutti the Heir's doll came up to him. It looked exactly as it had that morning, when Doctor Gas-par Arnery had brought it

back to the Palace. It had on the same pink dress, ribbons, lace and sequins. The only difference was that in his dream the doll had changed into a real, live girl. She walked quite naturally, stopping every now and then to look around.

The lantern illuminated her from head to toe.

The Guard even smiled in his sleep.

Then he sighed and shifted to a more comfortable position, leaning his shoulder against the railing and his nose against an iron rose in the grillwork.

When Suok saw the sentry was asleep, she picked up the lantern and tiptoed cautiously behind the zoo fence.

The Guard was snoring loudly.



In his sleep he thought it was the tigers roaring in their cages.

Actually, it was very still. All the animals were asleep.

The lantern gave very little light. Suok moved ahead slowly, peering to the right and left. Luckily, it was not too dark, for the night was brightened by the stars, and the park lights were shining over the trees and rooftops.

Suok went down a short path between two rows of hedges covered with white flowers.

Suddenly, she smelled the animals. She knew the smell well, for once a lion-tamer had joined their troupe and had brought along his three lions and Great Dane.

Suok reached a small clearing. The black shadows on all sides looked like little houses.

"Those are the cages," she whispered to herself.

Her heart beat loudly. She was not afraid of the animals, because circus performers are not timid people. She was afraid the sound of her footsteps and the light from the lantern would wake one of the animals and its growls would then wake the sentry.

She crept closer to the cages.

"Where can Prospero be?" she thought nervously.

Suok raised the lantern and looked into the cages. Everything was quiet, nothing moved. The light of the lantern, broken up by the cage bars, fell in patches on the sleeping beasts.

She saw a pair of thick hairy ears, a paw here, a striped back there. The eagles, sleeping with outspread wings, looked like ancient crests. Strange shapes loomed at the back of some of the cages.

One of the cages had thin silver bars on it. It was full of parrots perched on little twigs. When Suok stopped by the cage she thought that the parrot sitting closest to the bars, an old bird with a long red beard, opened one eye and looked at her. His eye was just like a lemon pit.

But that was not all. It quickly closed its eye, as if it were pretending to be asleep. And Suok even thought it hid a smile in its red beard.

"I'm being silly," she said to herself. But she felt frightened all the same.

Every now and then something would click, crunch and squeak, in the stillness.

If you ever go into a stable or pass by a chicken coop at night you will be amazed how quiet it is; and yet, you will hear any number of small noises: the rustle of a wing, a grunt, a board squeaking or a tiny peep that has escaped from a sleeping hen's throat.

"Where can Prospero be?" Suok was getting very worried. "What if he was executed today and they put an eagle in his cage?"

And then a hoarse voice whispered:

"Suok!"

There was a sound of heavy, rapid breathing and other noises which seemed like the moaning of a large, sick dog.

"Oh!" she gasped.

She turned the light where the voice had called to her. There were two red dots gleaming in the darkness. A large, black creature was standing up in the cage like a bear, holding on to the bars, its head pressed against them.

"Prospero!" she said softly.

Many thoughts flashed through her mind: "Why is he so ugly? He's covered with hair like a bear. And

there are red sparks in his eyes. He has long curved claws. It's a gorilla, not a man."

Suok was ready to cry.

"You've come at last, Suok," the terrible creature said. "I knew I would see you again."

"I've come to set you free," Suok said in a shaky voice.

"I'll never leave this cage. I'm dying."

And the terrible whining noises came again. The creature collapsed. Then it raised itself again and pressed against the bars.

"Come closer, Suok."

Suok came closer. A terrible face was staring at her. No, this was not a human face. It looked more like the muzzle of a wolf. But the most frightening thing was that the wolf had human ears, though they were covered with short, stiff bristles.

Suok wanted to close her eyes. The lantern bobbed up and down in her trembling hand. Yellow patches of light darted through the air.

"You're afraid of me, Suok. I don't look like a human being any more. Don't be afraid! Come closer. You've grown so. And you're thinner. Your face is very sad."

He spoke with great difficulty. He was slipping lower and lower and finally lay down on the wooden floor of his cage. His breath came in quick gasps, his mouth was open, revealing two rows of long yellow teeth.

"I'm dying. But I knew I'd see you again before I died."

He groped around with his shaggy monkey-like arm. He was looking for something in the darkness. There was the sound of a nail being pulled from a board and then the terrible arm poked through the bars.

"The creature was holding up a small board.

"Here, take this. It will explain everything."

Suok hid it in her pocket.

"Prospero!" she called softly.

There was no answer.

Suok held the lantern closer. The creature's teeth were bared, Its unseeing eyes looked past her.

"Prospero!" Suok cried, dropping the lantern. "He's dead! He's dead! Oh, Prospero!" she wailed.

The lantern went out.



Part Four



PROSPERO
THE GUNSMITH

Part Four

PROSPERO THE GUNSMITH

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE END OF THE PALACE BAKERY

The noise the animals were making awakened the sentry who had fallen asleep at the entrance to the zoo just before Suok made off with his lantern.

The beasts were growling and roaring, squeaking and banging their tails against the iron bars of their cages, while the birds were all flapping their wings.

The sentry yawned till his jaw cracked, he stretched, grazing his knuckles on the railing and was suddenly wide awake.

He jumped to his feet. The lantern was gone! Above him the stars twinkled softly. The jasmine bush gave off a lovely fragrance.

"Humph!"

The animal chorus was getting louder and louder.

The sentry sounded the alarm. A moment later men with torches came running towards him. The torches spluttered. The Guards cursed. One of them got tangled in his sword and fell, scraping his nose on another Guard's spur.

"Someone stole my lantern!"

"Someone sneaked into the zoo!"

"It's thieves!"

"It's the rebels!"

The Guard with the bloody nose, the Guard with the broken spur and all the other Guards set out into the darkness against the unknown enemy, their torches tearing through the night.

But they could not find anything suspicious going on in the zoo.

The tigers roared, opening wide their foul-smelling mouths. The lions paced up and down their cages nervously. The parrots were chattering and squawking. They hopped about and fluttered, making the cage look like a brilliant merry-go-round. The monkeys were swinging on their trapezes. And the bears growled in their deep voices.

The sight of light and the sound of shouting made the animals still more nervous.

The Guards inspected each and every cage.

There was nothing wrong.

They didn't even find the lantern Suok had dropped.

But suddenly the Guard with the bloody nose said:

"Look!" and raised his torch higher.

Everyone looked up. The green top of the tree seemed black against the sky. The leaves were motionless. It was a very quiet night.

"See that?" the Guard bellowed. He shook his torch.

"Yes. It's something pink."

"And little."

"It's sitting up there."

"Idiots! Don't you know what that is? It's a parrot. It flew out of the cage and into the tree."

The Guard who had been on duty and had sounded the alarm looked embarrassed.

"We'll have to get it down. It got all the animals excited."

"That's right. Go on up after it, Vurm. You're the youngest here."

The one they had called Vurm went over to the tree. He didn't know what to do.

"Go on up and grab it by the beard."

The parrot sat very still. Its feathers were a shiny pink among the dark leaves.

Vurm pushed his hat towards his nose and scratched the back of his head.

"I'm scared. You know how parrots bite."

"Go on, stupid! Get up there!"

Vurm finally began to climb the tree. But when he was halfway up, he stopped, hung on for a second, and then slid back down again.

"I can't do it! And you won't make me! I'm not supposed to fight parrots."

Just then they heard a cackling, angry voice. Someone was hurrying towards them in the darkness, scrapping his shoes on the gravel.

"Don't touch him!" he shouted. "Don't disturb him!"

It was the head animal keeper of the zoo. He was a very learned man, a zoologist by profession, who knew all there was to know about animals.

He had been awakened by the noise.

The head animal keeper lived near by. He had been in such a hurry that he still had on his nightcap.

He was very excited, for a bunch of clumsy soldiers had dared to barge into his zoo, and now some silly fool wanted to grab his parrot by the beard!

The Guards let him pass.

The animal keeper tilted back his head. There was definitely something pink among the leaves.

"Yes," he said. "It's a parrot. It's my best parrot. It has a terrible temper and never likes to stay in the cage. It's Laura."

"Laura! Laura!" he called in a high-pitched voice. "You have to be gentle with her. Laura! Laura! Here, Laura!"

The Guards guffawed. The little old man in the coloured bathrobe and slippers, with his head tilted back and the tassel of his nightcap hanging to the ground looked very funny there among the huge Guards, the burning torches and the howling animals.

But the funniest part was yet to come. The animal keeper began to climb the tree. And he climbed rather well, too. They could see it was not the first time he had done it. One, two, three! His legs flashed among the leaves until he finally reached the end of his short but dangerous journey. "Laura!" he cooed.

And suddenly his startled screech pierced the air. It could be heard throughout the park and over the countryside for a mile around.

"It's the devil!" he screeched.

There seemed to be some sort of monster sitting in the tree, and not a parrot at all.

The Guards sprang back. The animal keeper came flying down. Luckily, a short, stout branch broke his fall; and there he hung, suspended by his nightshirt.

Oh, if only the other scientists could see their old friend now! What a sight he was! They would surely have turned their heads away to spare his feelings! He looked so silly and undignified as he hung there in mid-air.

The Guards fled. The flames of their torches were streaked by the wind. In the darkness it looked as if black horses with flaming manes were galloping down the road.

The animals finally calmed down. The zoo keeper hung quietly from his branch. But things were in an uproar at the Palace.

Some fifteen minutes before the strange parrot was found in the tree, the Three Fat Men had received a very bad piece of news. This is what the ministers had told the Three Fat Men:

"There's trouble in town. The workers have pistols and guns. They're shooting at the Guards and throwing all the fat people into the river.

"Tibul the Acrobat is free. He's forming the people of the outskirts into the army.

"Many of the Guards have gone into the workers' quarters, because they don't want to serve the Three Fat Men any more.

"There's no smoke coming from the factory chimneys. All the machines are idle. The miners

refuse to go down into the pits to mine coal for the rich.

"The peasants are fighting the landlords."

Yes, this is what the ministers had told the Three Fat Men.

As usual, the Three Fat Men began getting fatter from trying to think. Right there and then, in front of the entire State Council, they each gained a pound.



"This is too much!" The First Fat Man croaked. "I can't stand it. Oh! Ah! My shirt is too tight!"

At that his collar burst open.

"I'm getting fatter!" the Second Fat Man howled.
"Help!"

While the Third Fat Man looked glumly at his stomach.

The State Council had to decide what to do. First of all, something had to be found that would stop the Three Fat Men from getting fatter. Then, the revolt in town had to be put down.

This is what they decided to do about keeping down the Three Fat Men's weight:

"Dancing!"

"Why, of course! That's the answer! Dancing is the best possible exercise."

"A dancing master should be found immediately. He'll give the Three Fat Men ballet lessons."

"Yes, of course," the First Fat Man said, "but...."

It was at this very moment that they heard the old animal keeper screech, as he had just seen a devil in the tree instead of his favourite parrot, Laura.

The ministers raced off towards the zoo.

"Huff! Puff!" was all you could hear from all sides.

Thirty families of the prettiest brown and orange butterflies left the park in fright.

A sea of torches appeared. It was a flaming, smouldering forest racing ahead in the darkness.

When there were only about ten yards left to the zoo gate, everyone who was running suddenly stopped

short, as if something was blocking their path. Then they all turned and dashed back, howling and screaming, falling all over each other, darting this way and that in their terror. Torches dropped to the ground, flames spread, and clouds of black smoke billowed up.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Help!"

The cries echoed through the park. The flames shot up, casting a red glow on the scene of flight and confusion.

From behind the iron fence that surrounded the zoo a huge man had appeared. He strode forward calmly, with broad, firm steps.

Seen in the glow, the red-headed man with flashing eyes advanced like a terrible nightmare. In one hand he held a leash made out of a length of chain, with a panther on the other end of it. The sleek black cat leaped, whined, and struggled like a lion on a knight's pennant, trying to wriggle out of the terrible collar. Its long red tongue darted in and out of its mouth.

Those who dared turn back saw that the man was carrying a girl in a shiny pink dress on his other arm. The child seemed very frightened by the snarling panther, she tucked her rosebud slippers up under her and pressed close to her friend's shoulder.

"It's Prospero!" the courtiers howled as they fled.

"Prospero! It's Prospero!"

"Help!"

"It's the doll!"

"The doll!"

And then Prospero let the panther go. It flicked its tail as it took tremendous leaps after the running men.

Suok jumped down from Prospero's arm. There were many pistols lying about where they had been dropped by the fleeing men. Suok picked up three of them. She gave Prospero two and kept one. It was nearly half her size. But she knew how to use the black shiny thing: she had learned to shoot in the circus.

"Come on!" Prospero said.

They had no time to worry about what was going on in the park or to think of the raging panther.

They had to find the underground tunnel. They had to escape.

Where was the pot Tibul had spoken of? Where was the mysterious pot through which the balloon man had escaped?

"Let's go to the kitchen!" Suok shouted as she ran on, waving her pistol.

They ran on in complete darkness, tearing through the bushes and scaring the sleeping birds. Oh, what Suok's lovely dress looked like now!

"I smell something sweet," Suok said suddenly, stopping under a lighted window.

Instead of raising her finger for attention, as people usually do, she raised her black pistol.

By the time the Guards came running, they were at the top of the tree. In a second they had reached the main window from the top branches.

It was the very same window through which the balloon man had flown in the day before.

It was the Palace bakery.

Here, despite the late hour and the alarm that had been sounded, work was in full swing. The pastrycooks and the kitchen-boys in white caps dashed back and forth: they were preparing a very special fruit dessert for the next day's dinner, to celebrate the return of the doll of Tutti the Heir. They decided not to have a cake this time, for who could be sure that another flying guest would not ruin the French cream and the very delicious candied fruit?

There was a huge pot of boiling water in the middle of the bakery. Clouds of white steam rose from it, filling the entire room. The kitchen-boys were having a grand time cutting up the fruit in the foggy kitchen.

Then, through the clouds of steam the cooks and pastrycooks saw something terrible.

The branches outside the window dipped, the leaves rustled as before a storm, and two people appeared on the window-sill: a red-headed giant and a little girl.

"Hands up!" Prospero said. He was holding a pistol in each hand.

"Don't make a move!" Suok shouted, raising her pistol.

Two dozen white sleeves flapped in the air without waiting for the strangers to repeat their commands.

And then the pots began to fly!
It was the end of the shining glass and copper,
steaming sweet, fragrant world of the Palace bakery.

The gunsmith was looking for the main pot. That was his only escape, and the only escape for the little friend who had saved him.

They turned over pots, tossed about frying-pans, funnels, dishes and plates. Glass fell crashing to the floor, spilled flour rose up in white clouds like a sandstorm in the Sahara; there were almonds, raisins and candied cherries all over the floor; sugar flowed from the high shelves like waterfalls; the flood of sweet syrup rose a foot deep on the floor; water splashed, fruit bounced about, stacks of copper pots rolled across the kitchen. Everything was topsy-turvy. Sometimes you have a dream like that, but you know it's a dream and you can do anything you feel like doing.

"Look!" Suok shouted. "Here it is!"



They had found what they were looking for. The top of the pot flew off into the shambles. It landed in the sticky red, green and yellow lake of syrup. Prospero saw that the pot had no bottom.

"Hurry!" Suok said. "I'll follow you."

The gunsmith climbed into the pot. When he had disappeared in the tunnel, he heard shouting coming from the bakery above,

Suok had no time to climb into the pot. The panther, after striking terror in the park and the Palace, had found its way to the bakery. There were splotches of blood on it where the Guards had wounded it.

The pastrycooks and kitchen-boys all piled into a far corner. Suok forgot about her pistol and threw a pear at the panther.

The beast leaped after Prospero, going head first into the pot. It slithered down the dark, narrow tunnel, its long black tail sticking out of the pot. Then the tail disappeared, too.

Suok clapped her hands to her eyes.

"Prospero! Oh, Prospero!" she wailed.

The pastrycooks doubled up with evil laughter. Just then the Palace Guards charged into the bakery. Their uniforms were torn, their faces were bloody, their pistols were still smoking. They had been fighting the panther.

"The panther will tear Prospero to bits! I don't care about anything now. You can arrest me." Suok spoke

very calmly. The small hand holding the huge pistol hung limply at her side.

A shot rang out. It came from the tunnel, where Prospero had shot the panther.

The Guards crowded round the pot, knee-deep in the lake of syrup.

One of them peered into it. Then he stuck his hand down and pulled at something. Two other Guards helped him. With a grunt they pulled up the dead panther by the tail.

"He's dead," one of the Guards said, mopping his brow.

"He's alive! He's alive! I've saved him! I've saved the people's friend!" Suok cried with joy. Poor little Suok, in her torn dress with crumpled golden rosebuds in her hair and on her slippers.

She turned pink from happiness.

She had done what her friend Tibul the Acrobat had told her to do: she had saved Prospero the Gunsmith.

"So!" one of the Guards said, taking Suok by the hand. "Let's see what you're going to do now, you famous doll. We'll see."

"Take her to the Three Fat Men."

"They'll sentence you to death."

"Idiot," Suok said calmly, licking a sweet blob of syrup from the pink lace of her dress.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ONE-TWO-THREE THE DANCING MASTER

We do not know what happened to the doll. It is not yet time to explain many other puzzling things, such as, for instance, what sort of parrot was sitting in the tree; why the old animal keeper, who might still be hanging from the tree like a shirt on a clothes-line, became so frightened; how Prospero the Gunsmith escaped from his cage; where the panther came from; how Suok got to be on the gunsmith's shoulder; who the monster was that spoke to Suok in a human voice; what sort of board the monster gave Suok; and why it died.

Each of these questions will be answered in good time. I can only say that no miracles took place and that there was a reason for everything that happened.

Now it is morning. A wonderful change has taken place in nature. The air is so pure that even a mean old lady who looked just like a goat stopped grumbling for once. The trees are not rustling, they seem to be imitating the happy voices of children.

Everyone feels like dancing on such a morning. No wonder then, that the ballroom of One-Two-Three the dancing master was crowded.

You can't do much dancing if you're hungry. Nor will you dance if you're sad. But the only ones who were hungry and sad were those who were gathering

that morning in the workers' quarters to storm the Palace of the Three Fat Men again. The fops and grand ladies, the sons and daughters of the gluttons and the rich were feeling fine. They did not know that Tibul the Acrobat was mustering the poor and hungry working people into an army; they did not know that the little circus dancer Suok had freed Prospero the Gunsmith, whom the people had needed so; they paid little attention to the disturbances that were taking place in town.

"Nonsense!" said a young lady with a sharp nose as she put on her dancing slippers. "If they try to storm the Palace again, the Guards will destroy them just like they did before."

"Certainly!" a young fop chirped as he chewed an apple and inspected his frock-coat. "Those miners and those dirty workers have no rifles, no pistols and no swords, while the Guards even have cannons."

One after the other the smug and carefree couples came up to One-Two-Three's house. There was a sign on the door that read:

*Mr. ONE-TWO-THREE
Dancing Master*
*I teach not only dancing, but refinement,
grace, agility, good manners and a poetic
outlook on life*
Payment for ten lessons
IN ADVANCE

Inside, on the honey-coloured waxed floor of the round ballroom, One-Two-Three was in charge.

He played a black flute which seemed to stay at his lips by some magic, for he was continuously waving his hands in lace cuffs and white kid gloves. He bowed and twirled about, rolled his eyes and tapped his shoe in time to the music. Every few minutes he would rush over to the large mirror to see how handsome he was and to check whether his many bows were in place and his pomaded hair was as shiny as it should be.

The couples circled about. There were so many of them and they perspired so freely, that the whole gathering might have been a brightly-coloured and very untasty soup.

Here and there a man or lady spinning around in the general bustle would look like a bushy turnip, or a cabbage leaf, or something stranger still, something that was bright and funny-looking and that might have been floating around in a plate of soup.

One-Two-Three was the soup spoon. He looked the part, too, because he was so tall, thin and willowy.

Oh, if only Suok could have seen all this dancing, how she would have laughed! Even when she played the part of the Golden Cabbage Stump in the "Stupid King" pantomime she had danced more gracefully. And she was supposed to have danced like a real cabbage stump!

In the midst of all this dancing, three huge fists in coarse leather gloves pounded on the door of One-Two-Three the dancing master.

The "soup" came to a halt.

Five minutes later One-Two-Three was being taken to the Palace of the Three Fat Men.

Three Palace Guards had come for him. One of them hoisted him on to his horse facing its tail, so that he was riding backwards. Another Guard had One-Two-Three's large paper box. It was very big.

"I must take along my flute, some suits, wigs, notes and my favourite songs," One-Two-Three had said as he had made ready to leave with the Guards. "After all, I don't know how long I'll have to stay at the Palace. And I'm used to beauty and fine things. That's why I like to change my clothes very often."

The dancers ran after the horses, waving their handkerchiefs and shouting words of encouragement to One-Two-Three.

The sun stood high in the sky.

One-Two-Three was very pleased to be taken to the Palace. He liked the Three Fat Men, because the sons and daughters of all the fat, rich people liked them. The richer a rich man was, the more One-Two-Three liked him.



"Really," he would say to himself, "what good are poor people to me? Do they ever take dancing lessons? They're always busy working and never have any money. Now, take the rich merchants, the fops, and grand ladies. They always have pockets full of money, and they're never busy doing anything."

As you see, One-Two-Three was no fool, according to his way of thinking, but according to our way, he certainly was.

"That Suok is really stupid!" he would say to himself. "Why does she bother dancing for beggars, soldiers, workers and ragamuffins? They'll never give her more than a few coppers."

The foolish One-Two-Three would probably have been still more amazed had he known that the little dancing girl had risked her life to save Prospero the Gunsmith, the leader of those beggars, workers and ragamuffins.

The riders galloped on towards the Palace.

They saw strange things on the way. There was a constant sound of firing in the distance. Groups of excited people crowded in every doorway. Every now and then small groups of workers, carrying pistols would dash across the street. One would have thought that this was a very good day for business, but the shopkeepers were closing up their shops. They stuck their shiny fat faces out from behind the shutters to see what was going on. Voices carried the following message from one street to the next:

"Prospero!"

"Prospero!"

"He's with us!"

"He's wi-ith u-us!"

Every so often a Guard would flash by on a horse that was foaming at the mouth. Now and then a fat man would trot panting down a side street, surrounded

by his red-headed servants who were waving the sticks with which they were going to protect their master.

On one street corner the servants suddenly began beating their fat master, instead of protecting him. They raised a terrible row.

At first One-Two-Three thought they were beating the dust out of an old armchair.

After giving their fat master three dozen whacks, the servants each kicked him in the pants and then, putting their arms around each other and waving their sticks, they ran off, shouting :

"Down with the Three Fat Men! We don't want to serve the rich! Long live the people!"

Meanwhile, the voices on the streets kept shouting:
"Prospero!"

"Pro-o-s-pe-e-ro-o!"

There was a smell of gunpowder in the air.

And, finally, a terrible thing happened.

Ten Guards blocked the road when three of their fellow Guards galloped up with One-Two-Three. These ten Guards were on foot.

"Halt!" one of the ten commanded. His blue eyes burned with rage. "Who are you?"

"Can't you see?!" the Guard who had One-Two-Three backwards on his horse said just as angrily.

The horses, which had been reined in at a full gallop, were prancing up and down. Their bridles jingled. One-Two-Three was quaking with fear. It was

difficult to decide what was shaking more, he or the bridles.

"We're the Palace Guards of the Three Fat Men!"

"And we're hurrying to the Palace. Let us pass!"

The blue-eyed Guard pulled a pistol from his belt and said:

"If that's the case, hand over your pistols and swords! A soldier's weapons should serve the people, not the Three Fat Men!"

The nine other Guards surrounded the riders and pulled out their pistols, too.

The riders grabbed their guns. One-Two-Three fainted and toppled off the horse. It is difficult to say when he finally came to again, but, at any rate, it was after the battle between the riders and the rebel Guards was over. The rebels must have won, for One-Two-Three saw the Guard with whom he had been riding backwards. The Guard was dead.

"Oh, dear! Blood!" One-Two-Three babbled, closing his eyes.

But what he saw a moment later made him really sick.

His large cardboard box was smashed. And all his precious belongings had tumbled out. His lovely suits, his notes and wigs were scattered over the dusty road.

"Oh dear!"

In the heat of battle, the Guard who was supposed to have taken care of the box, had dropped it. It had been squashed on the large paving stones.

"Oh me, oh my!"

One-Two-Three rushed towards his belongings. He frantically went through the vests, frock-coats, stockings, and shoes with the cheap, glittering buckles. His grief knew no bounds. All his things, all his clothes were there, but the most important thing was gone. While One-Two-Three stood in the middle of the road, raising his little fists to the sky, three riders were galloping towards the Palace of the Three Fat Men.

Before the battle, their horses had belonged to the three Guards who were escorting One-Two-Three the dancing master. After the battle, when one of them had been killed, and the other two had surrendered and gone over to the side of the people, the victors had found something pink wrapped up in gauze in the dancing master's smashed cardboard box. Then the three of them had hopped on the captured horses and galloped off.

The blue-eyed Guard who rode on ahead was pressing a pink bundle wrapped in gauze to his breast.

Everything fled from the road. The Guard had a red ribbon tied to his hat. That meant that he had gone over to the side of the people. The people along the way (if they weren't fat men or gluttons, naturally) applauded him as he rode by. But those who looked closely were soon staring in amazement: for there, from the bundle the Guard was pressing to his chest, hung a little girl's legs with pink shoes and gold rosebud buckles.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

VICTORY

We have just told you of the unusual things that took place that morning. Now we will go back a bit and tell you about the night before. As you know, it was also most unusual.

That night Prospero the Gunsmith escaped from the Palace of the Three Fat Men.

That night Suok was captured.

That night three men with covered lanterns entered the bedroom of Tutti the Heir.

This happened about an hour after Prospero the Gunsmith wrecked the Palace bakery and the Guards captured Suok beside the bottomless pot.

It was dark in the bedroom.

The tall windows were full of stars.

The boy was sound asleep, breathing deeply and evenly.

The three men did their best to cover the light of their lanterns.

There was no telling what they were doing. But there was a sound of whispering in the room. The sentry on guard outside the bedroom door did not look as if anything out of the ordinary was going on. Therefore, the three men in the bedroom must have had a right to be there.

You already know that the young Heir's tutors were not very brave. Remember how terrified one of them was when the Guards stuck their swords into the doll in the Palace park? And how scared he was when he had to tell the Three Fat Men about it?

This time the tutor on duty was just as cowardly as the others.

He was in the bedroom when the three strangers entered, carrying their covered lanterns. He was sitting at the window, guarding Tutti the Heir's sleep, and to keep awake he was counting the stars to brush up on his astronomy.

Then the door creaked, there was a flash of light, and three mysterious shadows flitted by. The tutor crouched down in the big armchair. He was very much afraid that his long nose would give him away. Indeed, it was clearly outlined against the star-filled window and was very noticeable.

But the coward kept his spirits up by hoping that the men would think it was part of the carved arm of the chair, or part of the roof of the building opposite.

The three men went over to Tutti the Heir's bed. They were barely visible in the dim light cast by their lanterns.

"Right," one of them whispered.

"He's sleeping," another answered.

"*Shhh!*"

"That's all right. He's sound asleep."

"Let's get to work, then."

Something tinkled.

The tutor broke out in a cold sweat. He was sure his nose was getting longer from fright.

"Ready," one of the shadows hissed.



"Let's have it."

Something tinkled again. There was the sound of liquid gurgling as it was poured. Then everything was silent again.

"Where does it go?"

"Into his ear."

"His head is sideways on the pillow. That'll make it easier. Pour it into his ear."

"Be careful! One drop at a time."

"Just ten drops. The first will seem very cold, but it starts working right away, so he won't even feel the second one. He won't feel a thing after the first drop."

"Try to get it in quickly, so the second drop goes in right after the first."

"Otherwise he'll wake up from the icy cold."

"*Shhh.* Here goes! One! Two!"

There was a strong smell of lilies of the valley in the room.

"Three, four, five, six...." someone was counting in a rapid whisper. That's all," the voice said when it had counted up to ten.

"He'll sleep like a log for three days. And he'll never know what happened to his doll."

"It'll be all over by the time he wakes up."

"If we didn't do it, he'd have started crying and stamping his feet. Then the Three Fat Men would have pardoned the girl and let her live."

The three strangers disappeared. The trembling tutor crawled out of the armchair. He lit the small night lamp and by the flickering orange flame tiptoed to the bed.

Tutti the Heir lay there in silk and lace, looking very important. His small tousled head rested on huge pillows.

The tutor bent over the bed, holding the lamp close to the boy's pale face. A drop of liquid glistened in his ear like a pearl in an oyster shell. It seemed both golden and green at the same time.

The tutor touched the drop. It disappeared in an instant, but his hand and arm became as cold as ice.

The boy seemed dead to the world.

Several hours later the wonderful morning we already told you about dawned.

We know what happened to One-Two-Three the dancing master that morning, but it is much more interesting to find out what happened to Suok, whom we left in such a terrible fix.

At first, they decided to throw her in a dungeon.

"No, that's too much trouble," the State Councillor said. "We'd better sentence her quickly to death."

"There's certainly no sense letting her off too easily," the Three Fat Men agreed.

Don't forget that the Three Fat Men had not got over the shock of running away from the panther. They needed a long rest. This is what they said:

"We'll have a snooze first. And then we'll hold court in the morning."

And they went off to their bedrooms.

The State Councillor never doubted that the doll-girl would be sentenced to death by the court. He ordered his men to drug Tutti the Heir. He wanted him to sleep through it all, so that his tears would not make the Three Fat Men change their terrible sentence.

The three men with lanterns had carried out the State Councillor's orders.

Tutti the Heir was sound asleep.

Suok was in the Guard Room. She was surrounded by Guards. If a stranger happened to come in, he

would certainly have wondered what a sad, pretty little girl in a beautiful pink dress was doing among all those Guards. She looked so out of place among the saddles, rifles and beer mugs.

The Guards were playing cards. Horrible blue smoke rose from their pipes. They kept bickering and shouting at each other. These Guards were still loyal to the Three Fat Men. They shook their huge fists at Suok, they stamped their feet and made terrible faces at her.

Suok paid no attention to them. To get even, she stuck out her tongue and sat facing the lot of them with her tongue out for nearly an hour.

She was quite comfortable sitting there on top of a barrel. Her dress was getting crumpled, but it had lost its beauty anyway, for it had been torn by branches, scorched by torches and splattered with syrup.

Suok was not worried. Girls her age are not afraid of real danger. They won't be frightened by a pistol sticking into their ribs, but they'll probably be afraid to go into a dark room by themselves.

This is what Suok was thinking:

"Prospero the Gunsmith has escaped. Now he and Tibul will lead the people to the Palace. Then they'll free me."

While Suok was sitting there on the barrel, three Guards galloped up to the Palace. They were the very same Guards we told you about in the previous chapter. You know that the one with the blue eyes had

a strange bundle. Two feet in pink slippers with rosebud buckles hung out of it.

When these three riders came to the bridge guarded by Palace sentries, they pulled the red ribbons off their hats.

They had to do this, for otherwise the sentries would not have let them pass. They would have opened fire on the three Guards, for the red ribbons meant they had gone over to the side of the people.

They galloped past the sentries, nearly knocking over the Captain of the Guards.

"It must be a very important message," he said, picking his hat up from the ground and knocking the dust from his uniform.

Suok's hour of doom had struck. The State Councillor entered the Guard Room.

The Guards all jumped to attention.

"Where's the girl?" the Councillor asked, raising his spectacles.

"Come here!" the head Guard cried.

Suok slid down from the barrel.

The Guard grabbed her roughly by the belt of her dress and lifted her into the air.

"The Three Fat Men are waiting in the Court Hall," the Councillor said, letting his spectacles drop back into place. "Take her in after me."

With these words he left the room. The Guard marched after him, with Suok dangling from his outstretched hand.

Oh, beautiful gold rosebuds! Oh, lovely pink silk!
All was crushed and broken in the cruel hand.

It was very uncomfortable and it hurt to hang there in mid-air, suspended over the Guard's horrible arm. So Suok pinched him as hard as she could. It was a good pinch, even though the Guard had on a thick jacket.

"Damn!" the Guard said and dropped her.

"What?" the Councillor said arid turned around.

Just then the Councillor got an unexpected blow and toppled over.

The next moment he was joined on the floor by the Guard who had just been dangling Suok.

He had also been socked in the ear. And what a blow it must have been to have knocked over such a huge, fierce Guard!

Before Suok had a chance to look around, someone had grabbed her up and carried her off.

These were also strong rough hands, but they seemed kinder, and Suok was not dangling in mid-air as before, when the Guard who now lay senseless on the polished floor had been carrying her.

"Don't be afraid!" someone whispered.

The Three Fat Men were waiting impatiently in the Court Hall. They wanted to try the clever doll themselves.

The room was filled with court officials, councillors, judges and secretaries. Their red, lilac, green, orange, white and golden wigs sparkled in the

sunlight. But even the merry sun spots could not brighten the scowling faces under the wigs.

The Three Fat Men were huffing and puffing from the heat. Sweat trickled down their faces and fell on the table, ruining the papers that lay before them. Secretaries kept changing the sheets of wet paper.

"The Councillor keeps us waiting," said the First Fat Man, twitching his fingers.

Finally the doors opened.

Three Guards entered the room. One of them was holding the girl. Oh, how sad she looked!

The pink dress, which only the day before had been so wonderful with all its sequins and lace, was now torn and tattered. The golden rosebuds had withered, the sequins had fallen off, the silk was all crumpled and torn. The girl's head hung limply on the Guard's shoulder. She was deathly pale, and her mischievous grey eyes were lifeless.

The brightly-coloured crowd looked up.

The Three Fat Men rubbed their hands in glee.

The secretaries pulled long quills from behind their long ears.

"Aha!" said the First Fat Man. "And where is the State Councillor?"

The Guard who was carrying the girl stepped forward and announced :

"His Excellency, the State Councillor, got a stomach-ache on the way." As he said this, his blue eyes sparkled merrily.

Everyone seemed satisfied by this explanation.

The Court began its session.

The Guard sat the poor child on a rough bench in front of the judges' table. She sat there with her head hanging limply. The First Fat Man began the questioning.

But they found they were up against unexpected trouble: Suok would not answer a single question.

"Who does she think she is!" the Second Fat Man bellowed. "All right then! She'll be sorry. If she refuses to answer, she has only herself to blame. We'll think of a good torture for her!"

Suok did not even move.

The three Guards stood at attention like statues at her side.

"Call in the witnesses!" the Third Fat Man ordered.

There was only one witness. He was brought in. It was the old zoologist, the keeper of the Palace zoo. He had spent the night hanging from a branch by his nightshirt. He had just been taken down. And that is how he appeared at the Palace: in his striped bathrobe, his nightshirt, and nightcap. The tassel of his cap dragged along behind him like a snake.

At the sight of Suok sitting on the bench, the old man began to tremble with fright. Court attendants supported him.

"Tell us exactly what happened."

The animal keeper began his story. He said he had climbed the tree and had seen the doll of Tutti the Heir high up in the branches. And since he had never seen a live doll before, and certainly had never

expected dolls to climb trees in the middle of the night, he had fainted from fright.

"How did the doll free Prospero the Gunsmith?"

"I don't know. I didn't see or hear anything. I was unconscious at the time."

"Will you tell us how Prospero the Gunsmith escaped from the cage?"

Suok said nothing.

"Give her a good shaking."

"Good and hard!" the Three Fat Men said.

The blue-eyed Guard shook the girl. Besides, he cuffed her ear.

Suok said nothing.

The Three Fat Men began to hiss from anger. The coloured wigs in the room wagged back and forth reproachfully.

"I see we'll get nowhere this way," the First Fat Man said.

At these words the animal keeper clapped his hand to his forehead.

"I know what to do!" he cried.

Everyone sat up in their seats.

"There's a cage of parrots in the zoo. There are very rare parrots in that cage. Of course, you all realise that parrots can remember and repeat words spoken by humans. Many of the birds have good memories and sharp ears. I am sure they remember everything that was said during the night at the zoo, both by this wretch here and by Prospero the Gunsmith. That's

why I suggest you call as a witness one of my many magnificent parrots."

There was a murmur of approval in the hall.

The animal keeper left for the zoo and soon returned. Perched on his finger was a big old parrot with a long red beard.

Do you remember, when Suok wandered through the zoo that night she thought one of the parrots looked suspicious? It was watching her, and then it pretended to be asleep and smiled into its long red beard.

And there it sat now, looking just as comfortable on the old man's finger as it was on its silver perch in the cage.

Now the parrot was smirking openly, happy at the thought of betraying Suok.

The animal keeper spoke to it in German. He carried the parrot over to the girl.

It flapped its wings and screamed:

"Suok! Suok!"

Its voice was like the screeching of an old rusty gate being blown off its hinges in the wind.

The room was silent.

The animal keeper beamed.

Meanwhile, the parrot continued its squawking betrayal. It repeated everything it had heard during the night. If you want to know how Prospero the Gunsmith was freed, listen to what the parrot screeched.

Oh, it was really a very rare bird. It could repeat anything a human being said, and, to top it all, it had a long red beard that was the envy of all the other parrots.

"Who are you?" it croaked in a man's voice.

"I'm Suok," it piped in a high little voice.

"Suok!"

"Tibul sent me. I'm not a doll. I'm a live girl. I came to free you. Didn't you see me come into the zoo?"

"No, I must have been asleep. This is the first night I've been able to sleep."

"I was looking for you all over the zoo. I saw a monster that spoke in a human voice. I thought it was you. But the monster died."

"That was Toub. Did he die?"

"Yes. I got very frightened, and I screamed. Then the Guards came running, and I had to hide in a tree. I'm so happy you're alive! I came to free you."

"But my cage is locked."

"I have the key."

As the parrot cackled these words, everyone in the Hall became furious.

"You wretch!" the Three Fat Men roared. "Now we know what happened. You stole the key from Tutti the Heir and let the gunsmith free. He smashed his chain, he broke open the panther's cage and took it along to get through to the Palace."

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"Yes!" came the cries from all sides.

But Suok said nothing.

The parrot nodded and flapped its wings three times.

The trial was over.

This was the sentence:

"The false doll tricked Tutti the Heir. She freed Prospero the Gunsmith, the worst rebel and enemy of the Three Fat Men. The best panther in the zoo was killed because of her. That is why the false doll shall be sentenced to death. She is to be devoured by wild beasts."

But even when this terrible sentence was read, Suok did not move a muscle!

Everyone headed for the Palace zoo. They were greeted by the howling, screeching and whistling of the animals and birds. The animal keeper was very nervous because, after all, he was in charge there!

The Three Fat Men, the councillors, court officials and courtiers all took their places on the stands. They were protected by iron netting.

Oh, how softly the sun shone! And what a lovely blue the sky was! How the parrots' colourful feathers glittered, how the monkeys climbed and tumbled, how cheerfully the old elephant, green with age, stamped his foot!

Poor Suok! She did not even glance at all this beauty. She was probably looking with terrified eyes at the dirty cage where the tigers were pacing back and forth nervously. They were like angry hornets, at

least they had the same colouring, the same yellow and brown stripes.

They glared at the people from under their shaggy brows. Now and then one of them would open wide its bloody-red mouth which stank of raw meat.

Poor Suok!

Farewell, dear circus, dear town squares, dear August, pet fox and dear big, brave Tibul!

The blue-eyed Guard carried the girl to the middle of the zoo square and put her down on the hot pavement.

"But what about Tutti the Heir?" said one of the councillors. "If he finds out his doll was torn to bits by tigers, he'll cry himself to death."

"*Shh!*" his neighbour hissed. "*Shh!* Tutti the Heir has been given a big dose of sleeping medicine. He will sleep like a log for three days and three nights, and maybe even more."

Now everyone looked at the pitiful little pink heap lying there amidst the cages.

Then a lion-tamer came into the circle, cracking his whip. A large pistol gleamed at his side. The Palace band struck up a march. This was Suok's last appearance before an audience.

"*Allez!*" the lion-tamer barked.

The iron door of the cage swung back. The tigers ran out on their heavy, padded paws.

The Three Fat Men began to laugh. The councillors giggled and shook their wigs. The lion-tamer cracked his whip again. Three tigers ran over to Suok.

She lay there quietly, her big grey eyes looking up into the sky. Everyone rose up in his seat to get a better view. They were all ready to shout with joy at the sight of the tigers tearing the little friend of the people to bits.

But....

The tigers came over to her. One bent its furrowed head and sniffed. The second touched her with its cat-like paw. The third didn't even pay attention to her, as it rushed past her to the stands, where it began roaring at the Three Fat Men.

Then everyone realised that this was not a live girl, but a doll, an old, torn, useless doll.

A terrible shout went up. The animal keeper was so confused he bit his tongue. The lion-tamer chased the tigers back into their cage and kicked the dead doll scornfully as he left to take off his shiny blue and gold uniform.

There was complete silence for about five minutes.



And then the stillness was shattered by a bomb bursting in the blue sky over the Palace zoo.

The audience dropped, noses down, on to the floorboards of the stands. The animals reared up. The next moment another bomb exploded. Now the sky was full of white puffs of smoke.

"What happened? What could it be?" everyone shouted.

"The people are storming the Palace!"

"The people have cannons!"

"The Guards have betrayed us!"

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Help!"

The Palace park resounded with shouting and shooting. The rebels had already made their way into the park, no doubt about it!

Everyone made a mad dash for the gates. The ministers pulled out their swords. The Three Fat Men were yelling their heads off.

And this is what they saw in the Palace park.

People were advancing from all sides. There were great numbers of them. Their heads were bare, their foreheads bloody, their jackets torn, but their faces were happy. They had won the battle. The Guards were with them. They all had red ribbons on their hats. The workers were also armed. The poor, dressed in brown clothes and wooden shoes, were closing in. The trees bent and the bushes cracked under the advancing army.

"We have won!" they shouted.

The Three Fat Men saw there was no escape.

"No! That's not true!" one of them howled. "Guards, shoot them all!"

But the Guards stood in the same ranks with the poor. And then a voice thundered out over the crowd. It was Prospero the Gunsmith.

"Surrender! The people have won! The rule of the rich and the gluttons has come to an end! The people have taken over the entire town. All the fat men have been captured."

The Three Fat Men were surrounded by an excited crowd.

The people were waving red banners, sticks, swords, and shaking their fists. And then they began to sing.

Tibul stood there in his green cape beside Prospero. His head was tied with a bloody rag.

"This is all a bad dream!" one of the Three Fat Men muttered, covering his eyes with his hands.

"Tibul and Prospero began to sing. Thousands of voices joined in. The song floated over the entire Palace park, over the canals and the bridges. The people who were still marching towards the Palace from the town gates heard the song and began to sing, too. The song rolled like an ocean wave down the road, through the town gates, into the town and up and down the streets, where the workers and poor people were marching. Now the entire town was singing. It was the song of people who had triumphed over their oppressors.

Not only the Three Fat Men and their ministers huddled together like a herd of bleating sheep at the sound of the song. No, all the fops in the town, all the fat shopkeepers, the gluttons, merchants, grand ladies and bald generals fled in terror at the sound of it, as if this were not a song, but cannon shots and fire.

They wanted to hide from it, they stuck their fingers in their ears, they buried their heads under expensive silk pillows.

It all ended with a huge crowd of rich people running towards the port, scrambling on to ships that would take them far away from the country where

they had lost their power, their riches, and their lives of idleness. But they were surrounded by sailors. The rich people were arrested. They asked to be forgiven. They said:

"Don't punish us. We won't make you work for us any more!"

But the people would not believe them, for the rich had fooled the poor and the workers many times before.

The sun was high over the town. The sky was as blue as could be. All nature seemed to be having a great celebration.

Now everything belonged to the people: the houses, the ships, the factories, the Palace, the warehouses, the shops. Everywhere Guards with red ribbons in their hats stood guard.

Red banners waved at the crossings. There were words on them:

Everything that is made by the poor belongs to the poor!

Long live the people!
Down with the idlers and gluttons!

But what happened to the Three Fat Men?

They were taken to the main hall of the Palace to be shown to the people. Workers in grey jackets with green cuffs held their rifles at the ready as they stood guard. The hall was ablaze with thousands of sun spots. How crowded it was! But how different the

crowd looked. These were not the same people little Suok had performed for the day she had met Tutti the Heir.

Gathered there were all the people who applauded her on the market squares and at the fairs. Now their faces were happy and gay. They pushed and shoved, laughed and joked. Some were even crying with joy.

The grand Palace halls had never seen such guests before. And never before had the sun shone so brightly inside the Palace.

"*Shh!*"

"Be quiet!"

"Silence!"

The prisoners appeared at the top of the staircase. The Three Fat Men never once raised their eyes from the ground. Leading them were Prospero and Tibul.

The marble columns shook from all the shouting. The Three Fat Men were led down the staircase, so that the people could get a better look at them and make sure that the terrible Fat Men had really been captured.

"Here," said Prospero, as he went over to a column. He was nearly half as tall as the great column itself; his red hair blazed like a flaming fire in the sunlight. "Here," he said, "here are the Three Fat Men. They robbed the poor, they made us work till we sweated blood, and they took away all that we made. See how fat they are! But we have won. Now we will work for ourselves and we will all be equal. There won't be any more rich people, idlers or gluttons. Then we will all

live well, we will all have enough to eat. And if times are bad, we will know that there is no one who is getting fat when others go hungry."

"Hooray! Hooray!" the people shouted.

The Three Fat Men huffed and puffed.

"Today is the day of our victory. See how brightly the sun is shining! Hear how beautifully the birds are singing! Can you smell the lovely flowers? Remember this day, remember this hour!"

When he said "hour", all heads turned towards the clock.

It hung on the wall in a space between two columns. It was in a huge oaken box with lots of carving and enamelled ornaments on it. In the middle was the large dark clock face.

"What time is it?" everyone in the Palace Hall thought at that moment.





And suddenly ... suddenly the oaken door of the clock opened. And everyone could see there were no wheels inside. It was just an empty box. Instead of brass springs and wheels, there sat a pink and smiling girl. It was Suok.

"Suok!" they all gasped.

"Suok!" the children shouted.

"Suok! Suok! Suok!"

Everyone began to applaud.

The blue-eyed Guard lifted her down from the box. It was the same blue-eyed Guard who had made off with the doll that belonged to Tutti the Heir. He had picked it up from the cardboard box in which One-Two-Three the dancing master had all his belongings. He had brought it to the Palace, he had knocked over the State Councillor and the Guard who had been dangling the real, live Suok. He had hidden Suok in the empty clock and in her place he had brought the dead, torn doll to the Three Fat Men. Remember how he had shaken and cuffed the stuffed doll in the Court Hall and how he later threw it to the tigers?

Suok was now handed down the rows. People who had said she was the best dancer in the world and had tossed her their last coppers when she danced now hugged and kissed her, pressing her to their hearts. For there, under the rough, torn, soot-covered jackets were their much-suffering, kind and tender hearts.

She laughed, stroked their hair, wiped the blood from their faces, made funny faces at the children, cried and chattered.

"Bring her over here," Prospero the Gunsmith said in a choking voice, and many thought they could see tears in his eyes. "It was she who saved my life!"

"Here! Over here!" Tibul shouted, waving his green cape as if it were a giant green leaf. "She is my little friend. Come here, Suok!"

And from far back in the crowd, smiling old Doctor Caspar was elbowing his way forward.

The Three Fat Men were put in the same cage in which they had once locked Prospero the Gunsmith.



EPILOGUE

A year later there was a great and merry celebration. The people were celebrating the first anniversary of their liberation from the rule of the Three Fat Men.

There was to be a children's performance in Star Square.

Posters everywhere announced:

SUOK!

SUOK!

SUOK!

Thousands of children were waiting for their favourite actress to appear. But she did not appear alone on that festive day. A golden-haired little boy who looked very much like her stood next to her on the stage.

He was her brother. He had once been Tutti the Heir.

The city was alive with music and laughter, flags waved everywhere, wet roses fell from the bowls of the flower-girls, horses decked out with feathers pranced about, merry-go-rounds whizzed around and around, and in Star Square the young audience raptly watched the performance.

After it was over, Suok and Tutti were snowed under with flowers. The children surrounded them.

Suok took a little board from the pocket of her new dress and read something written on it to the children.

You certainly remember the board. One terrible night a dying stranger who looked like a wolf gave it to Suok through the bars of his cage in the Palace zoo.

This is what was written on the board:

"There were two of you, a sister and brother, Suok and Tutti.

"When you were four years old, you were kidnapped from your home by the Guards of the Three Fat Men.

"I am Toub, a scientist. I was taken to the Palace. I was shown little Suok and Tutti.

"And the Three Fat Men said: 'Do you see this girl? Make a doll that will be just like her.' I did not know why they wanted it.

"So I made a doll. I was a great scientist. The doll had to grow just like a live girl. When Suok was five, the doll would have to be five, too. Suok would become a big girl, pretty and sad, and the doll would, too. I made that doll. And then you were separated. Tutti remained in the Palace with the doll, and Suok was given to a travelling circus in exchange for a rare parrot with a long red beard. Then the Three Fat Men said to me: 'Take out the boy's heart and make him an iron heart instead.' But I refused. I said a human being could not be deprived of his human heart. I said that no heart, neither one of iron, nor ice, nor gold, could be given to a person instead of his real, human heart. I was put in a cage, and from that day on they began telling the boy that he had an iron heart. They wanted him to believe that and to be cruel and mean. I lived in a cage among wild beasts for eight long years. I became covered with hair and my teeth grew long and yellow, but I have not forgotten you. I want you to forgive me. We were all robbed and fooled by the Three Fat Men, we were the slaves of the rich and greedy gluttons. Forgive me, Tutti, whose name in the language of the poor means 'Loneliness'. Forgive me, Suok, whose name means 'Life Itself.'"



TO THE READER

The Foreign Languages Publishing House would be grateful for your comments on the content, translation and design of this book. We would also be pleased to receive any other suggestions you may wish to make.

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