

## PURZINIGELE

Many, many years ago there was a rich and powerful lord with a great estate. All the land, all the mountains and forests, for miles and miles around his castle, belonged to him. He was so rich that he could have everything he needed and anything he wanted, and he shared his wealth with his beautiful wife. She, herself, was not only beautiful, but as kind and gentle as any angel, and they both loved each other very deeply. They lived together happily together for many months, until one day when the lord went hunting deep in the forest.

On that day, the hunt had been wild and furious, and he rode ahead, deeper and deeper into the forest — further than he had ever ridden before. Suddenly, he was no longer alone. A small figure, no taller than three feet with a long beard reaching down to his knees, appeared in front of him. As the lord pulled up his horse, the dwarf demanded to know “What are *you* doing here?”. His eyes burnt with anger as he continued “You are trespassing on *my* land, and you will pay for it, either with your life or with your wife!”

The lord was more than a little afraid of the dwarf and his angry words, and of what he might do. He had never met one before, but as a child, he had heard many terrible stories about dwarfs. They were well known for their strength and for their unforgiving nature. He knew that it would be foolish to fight or try to escape. His only hope was to ask for forgiveness.

“Please accept my apologies for entering your land,” said the lord, “I didn’t know that I had passed the boundary, and I give you my word that I will certainly, never, ever do so again.”

Forgiveness was out of the question, when the little man replied in the same harsh tone as before, “Your word without punishment means nothing to me. As I told you, it must be either you or her.”

“Ask whatever you will of me,” replied the lord, “but not that. You may take of my riches or of my land, issue any challenge, or send me on any quest, but please allow me the chance to live with my dear wife.”

The dwarf considered this request, and answered with a cunning grin “If it must be so, then I will place the fate of your wife in her own hands. In one month’s time, she must tell me my name. If she can guess correctly, I will consider the debt paid and she will be free; if not, she will be mine.”

This reply gave little comfort to the lord. He knew that a dwarf never freely gave his name, and so the challenge was impossible. But, he also knew that he had no choice but to agree. Together, they returned along the path which he had ridden, until they came to a huge great grey fir tree. Here the dwarf stopped, and said “This tree, which is three times three, times older than any other in the forest, marks the boundary of my land. Here I will await your wife every day

for three days before the end of one month's time from today. Three times will I give her three chances to guess my name. If she does not come, you will lose both your wife and your life."

With these final words, the dwarf turned and vanished into his forest, leaving the lord to make his way home with a heavy heart. He rode slowly, and the nearer he came to his home, the heavier his heart grew and the slower he rode. His wife, who had been watching out for him since his companions returned, rushed out, happily, to meet him as he entered the gate. But, then she saw that he was sad and very worried, and this troubled her equally. Together, they entered the castle, where her husband told her everything. He told her how he had met the dwarf. He told her how the dwarf had demanded that he give her, his beloved wife, to him. Finally, he told her of the dwarf's conditions for not exacting immediate payment, and his challenge to her.

In the coming days and weeks, the castle was deathly silent, like a house in mourning, or one awaiting the passing of a loved one. The lord neither went hunting nor passed time with his companions. He only sat quietly in the, once proud, throne, passed down through generations of his family, not knowing what he should do. Except when he cast a mournful glance at his wife, his head rested in his hand. She was usually sitting at the window, but not looking outward. She was looking inward, remembering how happy her life with her husband had been, and dreading the future. Whenever she was not there, she was in the castle chapel, praying through her tears, for delivery. None came, and, soon the day came for her to meet the challenge.

On the morning of that day, the unhappy couple went together into the forest. When they could see the old grey fir in the distance, the lord went no further. His wife walked on alone. It should have been a beautiful summer morning in the woods. The birds were singing, squirrels were playing in the branches, and the dog roses were in full bloom. But the lady saw none of this, she walked slowly, her eyes focussed on the dwarf waiting by the tree. He was gaily dressed in red and green, and, as she approached, she saw that he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Now, my lady!" he demanded, hurriedly with anticipation, "Tell me my name."

She had an idea that, because he lived in the woods, he might have the name of a tree. So she guessed first "spruce", then "fir", and finally "pine".

No sooner had she spoken the last, when the dwarf laughed so loud that it echoed through whole forest. Dancing with glee, he cried "You haven't spoken my name! If you don't do better tomorrow, you will be mine!"

He remained, laughing, by the tree at the boundary to his land, as she sadly walked back, with downcast eyes, to her husband, waiting on his. Together, the unhappy couple, sadly returned to the castle. The rest of that unhappy day passed all too quickly, but the evening turned into a long sleepless night.

Early the next morning, by the time the first lark had started its song, the couple had prayed together in the chapel, and set off into the forest. The lord again stopped when they could see the old grey fir in the distance, and his wife walked on alone. It should have been another beautiful summer morning in the woods. The birds were singing, the scent of wild flowers filled the air, and the squirrels on the ground stood to attention as she passed. Like a little guard of honour. But the lady saw none of this, she walked slowly, her eyes focussed on the old tree. She had scarcely arrived, when the dwarf appeared. As he approached, she saw that he was finely dressed in red and blue, and grinning from ear to ear.

“Now my lady, tell me my name!” he hurriedly demanded, and then grinned.

This time, she thought that he might be named after the crops in the fields. She guessed “oats”, then “wheat”, and finally “barley”.

No sooner had she spoken the last, when the dwarf again laughed so loud that it echoed through whole forest. Dancing with glee, he cried “You haven’t spoken my name! If you don’t do better next time, we will be married tomorrow!”

He remained, laughing, by the tree, as she sadly walked back, with tears running from her eyes, to her husband. Together, the unhappy couple, returned to the castle. The rest of the unhappy day passed even more quickly than the day before, but it was followed by a much longer dark, sleepless night.

Early the next morning, by the time the sky had begun to grow light, the couple had prayed together in the chapel, and set off into the forest. It was still very early, and the birds were still sleeping in their nests. Only the morning wind whispered gently in the branches, carrying on it the murmur of a distant stream. They stopped when they could see the old grey fir in the distance, and the lord again took leave of his wife, perhaps for the last time. As he embraced and kissed her, his tears ran freely down his face and onto his beard. She, however, was strangely calm. Her heart wasn’t beating as frantically as it was on the day before, when she walked on alone.

When she reached the old grey fir tree, there was no dwarf to be seen. She was all alone. After waiting a while, she walked further into the forest, and soon came to a stairway, the like of which she had never seen before. Narrow wooden steps had been set into the hillside, and these were flanked with hedges of wild roses, all in full bloom. She followed this path, which led to a beautiful little valley. The meadow was full of the most beautiful wild flowers, and the hills around were covered with grape vines and fig trees. In the middle of all of this, was a pretty little cottage, with its little windows sparkling in the morning sun. A whisp of pale blue smoke rose from its chimney and, inside, somebody was singing.

She crept closer to the house, so that she could look through the windows to see if it was as pretty inside as it was outside. It did indeed have a pretty little kitchen, with pots and pans cooking on the stove. But — the cook was the

dwarf. He stood at the stove, first stirring this pot, and then another, all the while singing.

“Boil my porridge and pepper my plate,  
It was good that when the lady came,  
She didn’t know Purzinigele is my name”

She had seen and heard enough! Even more quietly than she had come, she crept away from the house and back to the forest. She ran down the steps and back to the fir tree, before the dwarf came to meet her. She could hardly wait for happiness, but he arrived not long afterwards. This time he was even more finely dressed, in a red tunic thread through with gold, which seemed to glow like the sunrise.

“Now, my lady, this is your last chance to guess my name” he said, grinning with an expression which actually said “You, my little bird, have no chance to escape my trap.”

Watching the dwarf closely, the lady said “Purr?”

“Wrong!” cried the dwarf “now, you only have two more chances!”

“Sing?” replied the lady.

The dwarf hesitated, and looked at her with a puzzled expression. He reddened slightly, but said, not quite so triumphantly, “Only one more chance. Guess again!”

“Purzinigele!” cried the lady, laughing almost as loudly as he had done the day before. “Your name is Purzinigele!”

When he heard his name spoken, the dwarf became very, very angry. He rolled his furiously red eyes and balled his fists, but he could not break his word. He turned, and still screaming with anger, vanished into the undergrowth. As soon as he was gone, the lady turned and ran back to her husband. They then returned, full of joy back to the castle, where they lived happily for many years afterwards. The lord even started hunting again, but he made sure that he and his companions, always stayed on his land, and never, ever rode beyond the old grey fir tree.

And, what about Purzinigele? He was never seen again.