Andrew Lang

# Soria Moria Castle

There was once upon a time a couple of folks who had a son called Halvor. Ever since he had been a little boy he had been unwilling to do any work, and had just sat raking about among the ashes. His parents sent him away to learn several things, but Halvor stayed nowhere, for when he had been gone two or three days he always ran away from his master, hurried off home, and sat down in the chimney corner to grub among the ashes again.One day, however, a sea captain came and asked Halvor if he hadn't a fancy to come with him and go to sea, and behold foreign lands. And Halvor had a fancy for that, so he was not long in getting ready.How long they sailed I have no idea, but after a long, long time there was a terrible storm, and when it was over and all had become calm again, they knew not where they were, for they had been driven away to a strange coast of which none of them had any knowledge.As there was no wind at all they lay there becalmed, and Halvor asked the skipper to give him leave to go on shore to look about him, for he would much rather do that than lie there and sleep.`Dost thou think that thou art fit to go where people can see thee?' said the skipper; `thou hast no clothes but those rags thou art going about in!'Halvor still begged for leave, and at last got it, but he was to come back at once if the wind began to rise.So he went on shore, and it was a delightful country; whithersoever he went there were wide plains with fields and meadows, but as for people, there were none to be seen. The wind began to rise, but Halvor thought that he had not seen enough yet, and that he would like to walk about a little longer, to try if he could not meet somebody. So after a while he came to a great highway, which was so smooth that an egg might have been rolled along it without breaking. Halvor followed this, and when evening drew near he saw a big castle far away in the distance, and there were lights in it. So as he had now been walking the whole day and had not brought anything to eat away with him, he was frightfully hungry. Nevertheless, the nearer he came to the castle the more afraid he was.A fire was burning in the castle, and Halvor went into the kitchen, which was more magnificent than any kitchen he had ever yet beheld. There were vessels of gold and silver, but not one human being was to be seen. When Halvor had stood there for some time, and no one had come out, he went in and opened a door, and inside a Princess was sitting at her wheel spinning.`Nay!' she cried, `can Christian folk dare to come hither? But the best thing that you can do is to go away again, for if not the Troll will devour you. A Troll with three heads lives here.'`I should have been just as well pleased if he had had four heads more, for I should have enjoyed seeing the fellow,' said the youth; `and I won't go away, for I have done no harm, but you must give me something to eat, for I am frightfully hungry.'When Halvor had eaten his fill, the Princess told him to try if he could wield the sword which was hanging on the wall, but he could not wield it, nor could he even lift it up.`Well, then, you must take a drink out of that bottle which is hanging by its side, for that's what the Troll does whenever he goes out and wants to use the sword,' said the Princess.Halvor took a draught, and in a moment he was able to swing the sword about with perfect ease. And now he thought it was high time for the Troll to make his appearance, and at that very moment he came, panting for breath.Halvor got behind the door.`Hutetu!' said the Troll as he put his head in at the door. `It smells just as if there were Christian man's blood here!'`Yes, you shall learn that there is!' said Halvor, and cut off all his heads.The Princess was so rejoiced to be free that she danced and sang, but then she remembered her sisters, and said: `If my sisters were but free too!'`Where are they?' asked Halvor.So she told him where they were. One of them had been taken away by a Troll to his castle, which was six miles off, and the other had been carried off to a castle which was nine miles farther off still`But now,' said she, `you must first help me to get this dead body away from here.'Halvor was so strong that he cleared everything away, and made all clean and tidy very quickly. So then they ate and drank, and were happy, and next morning he set off in the grey light of dawn. He gave himself no rest, but walked or ran the livelong day. When he came in sight of the castle he was again just a little afraid. It was much more splendid than the other, but here too there was not a human being to be seen. So Halvor went into the kitchen, and did not linger there either, but went straight in.`Nay! do Christian folk dare to come here?' cried the second Princess. `I know not how long it is since I myself came, but during all that time I have never seen a Christian man. It will be better for you to depart at once, for a Troll lives here who has six heads.'`No, I shall not go,' said Halvor; `even if he had six more I would not.'`He will swallow you up alive,' said the Princess.But she spoke to no purpose, for Halvor would not go; he was not afraid of the Troll, but he wanted some meat and drink, for he was hungry after his journey. So she gave him as much as he would have, and then she once more tried to make him go away.`No,' said Halvor, `I will not go, for I have not done anything wrong, and I have no reason to be afraid.'`He won't ask any questions about that,' said the Princess, `for he will take you without leave or right; but as you will not go, try if you can wield that sword which the Troll uses in battle.'He could not brandish the sword; so the Princess said that he was to take a draught from the flask which hung by its side, and when he had done that he could wield the sword.Soon afterwards the Troll came, and he was so large and stout that he was forced to go sideways to get through the door. When the Troll got his first head in he cried: `Hutetu! It smells of a Christian man's blood here!'With that Halvor cut off the first head, and so on with all the rest. The Princess was now exceedingly delighted, but then she remembered her sisters, and wished that they too were free. Halvor thought that might be managed, and wanted to set off immediately; but first he had to help the Princess to remove the Troll's body, so it was not until morning that he set forth on his way.It was a long way to the castle, and he both walked and ran to get there in time. Late in the evening he caught sight of it, and it was very much more magnificent than either of the others. And this time he was not in the least afraid, but went into the kitchen, and then straight on inside the castle. There a Princess was sitting, who was so beautiful that there was never anyone to equal her. She too said what the others had said, that no Christian folk had ever been there since she had come, and entreated him to go away again, or else the Troll would swallow him up alive. The Troll had nine heads, she told him.`Yes, and if he had nine added to the nine, and then nine more still, I would not go away,' said Halvor, and went and stood by the stove.The Princess begged him very prettily to go lest the Troll should devour him; but Halvor said, `Let him come when he will.'So she gave him the Troll's sword, and bade him take a drink from the flask to enable him to wield it.At that same moment the Troll came, breathing hard, and he was ever so much bigger and stouter than either of the others, and he too was forced to go sideways to get in through the door.`Hutetu! what a smell of Christian blood there is here!' said he.Then Halvor cut off the first head, and after that the others, but the last was the toughest of them all, and it was the hardest work that Halvor had ever done to get it off, but he still believed that he would have strength enough to do it.And now all the Princesses came to the castle, and were together again, and they were happier than they had ever been in their lives; and they were delighted with Halvor, and he with them, and he was to choose the one he liked best; but of the three sisters the youngest loved him best.But Halvor went about and was so strange and so mournful and quiet that the Princesses asked what it was that he longed for, and if he did not like to be with them. He said that he did like to be with them, for they had enough to live on, and he was very comfortable there; but he longed to go home, for his father and mother were alive, and he had a great desire to see them again.They thought that this might easily be done.`You shall go and return in perfect safety if you will follow our advice,' said the Princesses.So he said that he would do nothing that they did not wish.Then they dressed him so splendidly that he was like a King's son; and they put a ring on his finger, and it was one which would enable him to go there and back again by wishing, but they told him that he must not throw it away, or name their names; for if he did, all his magnificence would be at an end, and then he would never see them more.`If I were but at home again, or if home were but here!' said Halvor, and no sooner had he wished this than it was granted. Halvor was standing outside his father and mother's cottage before he knew what he was about. The darkness of night was coming on, and when the father and mother saw such a splendid and stately stranger walk in, they were so startled that they both began to bow and curtsey.Halvor then inquired if he could stay there and have lodging for the night. No, that he certainly could not. `We can give you no such accommodation,' they said, `for we have none of the things that are needful when a great lord like you is to be entertained. It will be better for you to go up to the farm. It is not far off, you can see the chimney-pots from here, and there they have plenty of everything.'Halvor would not hear of that, he was absolutely determined to stay where he was; but the old folks stuck to what they had said, and told him that he was to go to the farm, where he could get both meat and drink, whereas they themselves had not even a chair to offer him.`No,' said Halvor, `I will not go up there till early to-morrow morning; let me stay here to-night. I can sit down on the hearth.'They could say nothing against that, so Halvor sat down on the hearth, and began to rake about among the ashes just as he had done before, when he lay there idling away his time.They chattered much about many things, and told Halvor of this and of that, and at last he asked them if they had never had any child.`Yes,' they said; they had had a boy who was called Halvor, but they did not know where he had gone, and they could not even say whether he were dead or alive.`Could I be he?' said Halvor.`I should know him well enough,' said the old woman rising. `Our Halvor was so idle and slothful that he never did anything at all, and he was so ragged that one hole ran into another all over his clothes. Such a fellow as he was could never turn into such a man as you are, sir.'In a short time the old woman had to go to the fireplace to stir the fire, and when the blaze lit up Halvor, as it used to do when he was at home raking up the ashes, she knew him again.`Good Heavens! is that you, Halvor?' said she, and such great gladness fell on the old parents that there were no bounds to it. And now he had to relate everything that had befallen him, and the old woman was so delighted with him that she would take him up to the farm at once to show him to the girls who had formerly looked down on him so. She went there first, and Halvor followed her. When she got there she told them how Halvor had come home again, and now they should just see how magnificent he was. `He looks like a prince,' she said.`We shall see that he is just the same ragamuffin that he was before,' said the girls, tossing their heads.At that same moment Halvor entered, and the girls were so astonished that they left their kirtles lying in the chimney corner, and ran away in nothing but their petticoats. When they came in again they were so shamefaced that they hardly dared to look at Halvor, towards whom they had always been so proud and haughty before.`Ay, ay! you have always thought that you were so pretty and dainty that no one was equal to you,' said Halvor, `but you should just see the eldest Princess whom I set free. You look like herds- women compared with her, and the second Princess is also much prettier than you; but the youngest, who is my sweetheart, is more beautiful than either sun or moon. I wish to Heaven they were here, and then you would see them.'Scarcely had he said this before they were standing by his side, but then he was very sorrowful, for the words which they had said to him came to his mind.Up at the farm a great feast was made ready for the Princesses, and much respect paid to them, but they would not stay there.`We want to go down to your parents,' they said to Halvor, `so we will go out and look about us.'He followed them out, and they came to a large pond outside the farm-house. Very near the water there was a pretty green bank, and there the Princesses said they would sit down and while away an hour, for they thought that it would be pleasant to sit and look out over the water, they said.There they sat down, and when they had sat for a short time the youngest Princess said, `I may as well comb your hair a little, Halvor.'So Halvor laid his head down on her lap, and she combed it, and it was not long before he fell asleep. Then she took her ring from him and put another in its place, and then she said to her sisters: `Hold me as I am holding you. I would that we were at Soria Moria Castle.'When Halvor awoke he knew that he had lost the Princesses, and began to weep and lament, and was so unhappy that he could not be comforted. In spite of all his father's and mother's entreaties, he would not stay, but bade them farewell, saying that he would never see them more, for if he did not find the Princess again he did not think it worth while to live.He again had three hundred dollars, which he put into his pocket and went on his way. When he had walked some distance he met a man with a tolerably good horse. Halvor longed to buy it, and began to bargain with the man.`Well, I have not exactly been thinking of selling him,' said the man, `but if we could agree, perhaps----'Halvor inquired how much he wanted to have for the horse.`I did not give much for him, and he is not worth much; he is a capital horse to ride, but good for nothing at drawing; but he will always be able to carry your bag of provisions and you too, if you walk and ride by turns.' At last they agreed about the price, and Halvor laid his bag on the horse, and sometimes he walked and sometimes he rode. In the evening he came to a green field, where stood a great tree, under which he seated himself. Then he let the horse loose and lay down to sleep, but before he did that he took his bag off the horse. At daybreak he set off again, for he did not feel as if he could take any rest. So he walked and rode the whole day, through a great wood where there were many green places which gleamed very prettily among the trees. He did not know where he was or whither he was going, but he never lingered longer in any place than was enough to let his horse get a little food when they came to one of these green spots, while he himself took out his bag of provisions.So he walked and he rode, and it seemed to him that the wood would never come to an end. But on the evening of the second day he saw a light shining through the trees.`If only there were some people up there I might warm myself and get something to eat,' thought Halvor.When he got to the place where the light had come from, he saw a wretched little cottage, and through a small pane of glass he saw a couple of old folks inside. They were very old, and as grey- headed as a pigeon, and the old woman had such a long nose that she sat in the chimney corner and used it to stir the fire.`Good evening I good evening!' said the old hag; `but what errand have you that can bring you here? No Christian folk have been here for more than a hundred years.'So Halvor told her that he wanted to get to Soria Moria Castle, and inquired if she knew the way thither.`No,' said the old woman, `that I do not, but the Moon will be here presently, and I will ask her, and she will know. She can easily see it, for she shines on all things.'So when the Moon stood clear and bright above the tree-tops the old woman went out. `Moon! Moon!' she screamed. `Canst thou tell me the way to Soria Moria Castle?'`No,' said the Moon, `that I can't, for when I shone there, there was a cloud before me.'`Wait a little longer,' said the old woman to Halvor, `for the West Wind will presently be here, and he will know it, for he breathes gently or blows into every corner.'`What! have you a horse too?' she said when she came in again. `Oh! let the poor creature loose in our bit of fenced-in pasture, and don't let it stand there starving at our very door. But won't you exchange him with me? We have a pair of old boots here with which you can go fifteen quarters of a mile at each step. You shall have them for the horse, and then you will be able to get sooner to Soria Moria Castle.'Halvor consented to this at once, and the old woman was so delighted with the horse that she was ready to dance. `For now I, too, shall be able to ride to church,' she said. Halvor could take no rest, and wanted to set off immediately; but the old woman said that there was no need to hasten. `Lie down on the bench and sleep a little, for we have no bed to offer you,' said she, `and I will watch for the coming of the West Wind.'Ere long came the West Wind, roaring so loud that the walls creaked.The old woman went out and cried:`West Wind! West Wind! Canst thou tell me the way to Soria Moria Castle? Here is one who would go thither.'`Yes, I know it well,' said the West Wind. `I am just on my way there to dry the clothes for the wedding which is to take place. If he is fleet of foot he can go with me.'Out ran Halvor.`You will have to make haste if you mean to go with me,' said the West Wind; and away it went over hill and dale, and moor and morass, and Halvor had enough to do to keep up with it.`Well, now I have no time to stay with you any longer,' said the West Wind, `for I must first go and tear down a bit of spruce fir before I go to the bleaching-ground to dry the clothes; but just go along the side of the hill, and you will come to some girls who are standing there washing clothes, and then you will not have to walk far before you are at Soria Moria Castle.'Shortly afterwards Halvor came to the girls who were standing washing, and they asked him if he had seen anything of the West Wind, who was to come there to dry the clothes for the wedding.`Yes,' said Halvor, `he has only gone to break down a bit of spruce fir. It won't be long before he is here.' And then he asked them the way to Soria Moria Castle. They put him in the right way, and when he came in front of the castle it was so full of horses and people that it swarmed with them. But Halvor was so ragged and torn with following the West Wind through bushes and bogs that he kept on one side, and would not go among the crowd until the last day, when the feast was to be held at noon.So when, as was the usage and custom, all were to drink to the bride and the young girls who were present, the cup-bearer filled the cup for each in turn, both bride and bridegroom, and knights and servants, and at last, after a very long time, he came to Halvor. He drank their health, and then slipped the ring which the Princess had put on his finger when they were sitting by the waterside into the glass, and ordered the cup-bearer to carry the glass to the bride from him and greet her.Then the Princess at once rose up from the table, and said, `Who is most worthy to have one of us--he who has delivered us from the Trolls or he who is sitting here as bridegroom?'There could be but one opinion as to that, everyone thought, and when Halvor heard what they said he was not long in flinging off his beggar's rags and arraying himself as a bridegroom.`Yes, he is the right one,' cried the youngest Princess when she caught sight of him; so she flung the other out of the window and held her wedding with Halvor.

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