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A Fairy Tale

Seldwyla means, in the old tongue, a place of bliss and sunlight — and so, in truth, lies this small Swiss city, tucked somewhere in green folds of the mountains. She still wears the same ring-walls and towers as three hundred years ago, still the same nest; and the founders' deep design is proved by this: they planted the town a good half-hour's walk from any navigable river, a clear sign that nothing should ever *come* of her. Yet she sits beautiful, cradled in green peaks open to the south so the sun pours in but no harsh wind follows. That's why a rather good wine ripens along the old city walls, while higher up the mountains, forests stretch as far as the eye can see — forests that are the city's fortune. For this is Seldwyla's peculiar fate: the *commune* is rich, but the *citizens* are poor — no one in Seldwyla has anything, and no one knows what they've actually lived on for centuries. And yet they live merrily and in good spirits, holding *Gemütlichkeit* — coziness, contentment, the art of being at ease — as their particular genius, and when they go anywhere that burns different wood, they critique the local contentment first and insist no one does it better than they. In such a merry town there's no lack of all sorts of strange stories and life-courses, for idleness is the beginning of all vice. Lives run sideways here. Adventures take root in the cracks of the paving stones. For where nothing much is supposed to happen, all manner of things begin.

In Seldwyla, if someone makes a bad deal or is swindled, people say, “He bought the lard from the cat!” The proverb might be used elsewhere, but nowhere do you hear it as often as here — maybe because there's an old story behind it, a story about the saying’s roots and meaning.

Centuries ago, in Seldwyla lived an elderly woman who shared her house with a beautiful grey-and-black kitten. Spieglein (*little mirror*), as he was named for the gloss of its coat, lived with her in perfect cheer and cleverness, harming no one who let him be. His passion was hunting, but he followed his pleasure moderately and wisely: not because hunting pleased his mistress, nor because he was useful, but simply because he loved the chase. Yet Spieglein never let this become cruelty. He stalked and killed only the boldest, most intrusive

mice — those who dared cross a secret boundary around the house — and even then, always with impeccable skill. Only rarely did he follow a particularly crafty mouse beyond his usual domain. On such occasions, he begged his neighbors' permission, with great courtesy, to hunt in their homes — a permission gladly granted, since Spieglein never stole from milk pots, nor leaped at the hams hung on the walls, but quietly went about his business. Once his work was done, he would leave, mouse in mouth, with discretion.

Spieglein wasn’t shy — he was sociable and gentle, never fleeing from sensible folk. On the contrary, ge’d amuse himself with kind-hearted people, tolerating being lightly teased and even having his ears gently pulled, so long as things remained good-natured. But with foolish types, whom he insisted had “immature, useless hearts,” Spieglein would stand no nonsense. He either avoided them or delivered a swift, scientific swipe to their hand if they pestered him with clumsy roughness.

Thus passed Spieglein’s days: elegant, contemplative, well-off but never proud. He rarely perched on his mistress’s shoulder to snatch a bite from her fork — only if he could tell she truly enjoyed the game. Nor did he spend every day sleeping on his cozy cushion behind the stove; instead, Spieglein kept lively, preferring the narrow railings or the rooftop gutter, pondering the world like a tiny philosopher. Only in spring and autumn, when violets bloomed or the mild warmth of “old wives’ summer” mimicked their time, did this steady life get interrupted for a wild week: Spieglein wandered over farthest rooftops in amorous delight, singing the finest songs. Like a true Don Juan, he courted adventure day and night, and whenever he showed up, he looked so wild and roguish, tousled and reckless, that his quiet mistress would exclaim, “Spieglein! Aren’t you ashamed to live like this?” But shame and Spieglein did not mix. Calm as a creature of principle, knowing exactly what joyful indulgence he could allow, Spieglein restored the gloss of his fur and the innocent sparkle of his eyes with the same serene ritual: a damp paw over the nose, as though nothing had happened, and the world turned right again.

Yet this peaceful existence came to a sudden end. In the prime of Spieglein's life, his mistress died unexpectedly of old age, leaving the beautiful cat orphaned and ownerless.

It was the first great sorrow Spieglein ever knew. With plaintive cries expressing the bleak uncertainty that comes from grief’s deep puzzle, he followed her body out to the street. He roamed the empty house and its surroundings all day, lost and bereft. But Spieglein’s good nature, reason, and feline philosophy soon guided him to accept the unavoidable, to bear it as fate. Grateful to the old home, he offered his loyal services to the laughing heirs —

promising to keep the mice in line, even sharing wise advice that fools would never appreciate because fools, of course, are not sensible. But these new people wouldn't let Spieglein speak at all. They hurled slippers and the late lady's little footstool at his head whenever he showed himself, quarreled ceaselessly with each other for a week, began a lawsuit, and finally locked up the house altogether — so it stood empty, and nobody lived there anymore.

Spieglein sat — thin, shabby, and alone — on the stone step before the shuttered house. No one came to let him inside. By night he slipped secretly under the eaves, spending whole days hidden up there, trying to sleep off his sadness. But hunger soon drove him out into the light, and he had to linger in the warm sun among the townsfolk, hoping for a scrap of food.

With every missed meal, Spieglein grew sharper-eyed; all the moral dignity he once possessed was now merged in his desperate alertness, until he hardly recognized himself. He crept from the doorstep, flitting across the street in search of anything — sometimes returning with crumbs he'd once have scorned, sometimes with nothing at all. Day by day, he grew thinner and more bedraggled: greedier, cringing, and cowardly. Gone were his courage, his feline dignity, his wisdom, his philosophy. When schoolboys came near, he hid in secret corners and watched only for the one who might toss away a crust of bread, marking carefully where it fell. Even the sorriest mongrel scared him off — though once he'd have faced danger head-on, teaching fierce dogs a lesson or two.

Only when a coarse, clueless person passed by — the very sort Spieglein once wisely avoided — would he stay put. Guided by a tiny remnant of feline acumen, he hoped against hope that, just this once, the lout might offer kindness and a bite to eat. Even if he was instead slapped or had his tail yanked, Spieglein no longer scratched in return, but ducked away quietly — only to look longingly at the hand that had struck him, because it smelled of sausage or herring.

So it was, when Spieglein had lost all his pride and all his wits, he sat one day, famished and sorrowful, blinking in the sunlight. Along came Pineiss, the city's master of the dark arts. Spieglein recognized the man and grew hopeful — for who wouldn't, in dire need? He perched humbly on the step, waiting to see what Pineiss might say or do.

"Hello, cat! Shall I buy your lard?" asked Pineiss. And at those words, Spieglein's hope faltered, for he thought the sorcerer was mocking his scrawniness. Yet eager not to offend, he replied politely, "Ah, you must be joking, Herr Pineiss!" "Not at all!" laughed Pineiss, "I'm perfectly serious! I need cat lard for my spells, but it must be traded freely and by contract, or else it's useless. If any cat could make a fair bargain, surely it would be you! Enter my service, I'll feed you on sausages and roast quail till you're plump and round — all you need to do is sell me your lard, by your own accord, when the time comes. On the impossibly high, ancient roof of my house — which, by

the way, is the most magnificent roof in the world for a cat, full of interesting regions and corners — there grows on the sunniest ridges excellent spear-grass, green as emeralds, slender and fine, swaying in the breezes, inviting you to nibble the tenderest tips and enjoy them whenever my delicacies give you a touch of indigestion. You'll stay in perfect health and one day provide me with a vigorous, usable lard!"

Spieglein had pricked up his ears long ago, listening with a watering mouth; but his weakened mind still couldn't quite grasp the arrangement, so he replied, "That's not so bad, Herr Pineiss! If only I knew how I'm supposed to obtain and enjoy the agreed-upon price, once I've had to give up my life to surrender my lard to you — since I won't *be* anymore?"

"Obtain the price?" said the sorcerer, astonished. "You'll enjoy the price in the rich and lavish meals I fatten you with — that goes without saying! But I won't force you into the bargain!" And he made as if to leave.

"Wait!" cried Spieglein, hasty and anxious. "You must at least grant me a modest grace period beyond the moment I reach my greatest roundness and fatness, so I don't have to depart so suddenly when that pleasant — and, oh! — so sorrowful time arrives and is discovered!"

"So be it!" said Herr Pineiss with apparent good nature. "You may enjoy your comfortable state until the next full moon, but no longer! For it mustn't extend into the waning moon, which would exert a diminishing influence on my well-earned property."

The kitten hastened to seal the deal and signed a contract that the sorcerer carried ready in his pocket, writing his name in his sharp, careful script — the last possession and mark of better days.

"You may present yourself for lunch, cat!" said the sorcerer. "Twelve o'clock sharp!" "I'll take the liberty, if you permit it!" said Spieglein, and arrived punctually at Herr Pineiss's house at noon.

And so began, for several months, a most pleasant life for the kitten. He had nothing in the world to do but devour the good things set before him, watch the master at his sorcery if he liked, and stroll about on the roof. That roof resembled a monstrous black cloud-cleaver or three-cornered hat, like the great hats of Swabian farmers — and just as such a hat shades a brain full of tricks and schemes, so this roof covered a large, dark, labyrinthine house full of witchcraft and a thousand tales. Herr Pineiss was a jack-of-all-trades who performed a hundred little offices: he cured people, exterminated bedbugs, pulled teeth, and loaned money at interest; he was guardian to all orphans and widows, cut quills in his spare time — a dozen for a penny — and made beautiful black ink; he dealt in ginger and pepper, in wagon grease and cordials, in needles and shoe tacks; he repaired the town clock and made the annual calendar with the weather predictions, farmer's maxims, and the bloodletting man; he performed ten thousand lawful tasks in broad daylight

for modest pay, and a few unlawful ones only in darkness and out of private passion — or he'd hang a tiny unlawful tail onto the lawful ones before releasing them from his hand, small as the tails on young frogs, as if just for the whimsy of it. Besides all this, he made the weather in difficult seasons, supervised witches with his arts, and when they were ripe, had them burned; for himself, he practiced sorcery only as scientific experiment and for household use, just as he also tested and twisted the city statutes he drafted and copied fair, to probe their durability. Since the Seldwylers always needed such a citizen to do all the tedious little and large things for them, he'd been appointed City Sorcerer and had held the office for many years with tireless devotion and skill, early and late. His house was therefore stuffed from bottom to top with every imaginable thing, and Spieglein had much amusement looking at and smelling everything.

Yet at first he could pay attention to nothing but food. He devoured greedily everything Pineiss offered, barely able to wait from one meal to the next. He overloaded his stomach and truly had to climb onto the roof to nibble the green grasses and cure himself of various ailments. When the master noticed this ravenous hunger, he rejoiced, thinking the kitten would fatten quickly, and the better he did by Spieglein, the cleverer and more economical he'd be in the end. So he built for Spieglein a proper landscape in his parlor: a little forest of fir trees, small hills of stones and moss, and a tiny lake.

On the trees he placed fragrant roasted larks, finches, tits, and sparrows, according to the season, so Spieglein always found something to fetch down and nibble. In the little hills he hid, in artificial mouse-holes, magnificent mice that he'd carefully fattened on wheat flour, then gutted, larded with tender strips of bacon, and roasted. Some of these mice Spieglein could pull out with his paw; others, to heighten the pleasure, were hidden deeper but tied to a thread, which Spieglein had to draw out carefully if he wished to enjoy this pastime of simulated hunting.

The basin of the lake Pineiss filled each day with fresh milk, so Spieglein could quench his thirst in sweetness, and he let roasted gudgeons swim in it, knowing that cats sometimes love a bit of fishing. And indeed, because Spieglein now lived such a splendid life — free to do and leave, eat and drink whatever he pleased, whenever the mood took him — his body thrived visibly. His coat grew smooth and glossy again, his eye bright; but at the same time, as his mental powers gathered strength in equal measure, he regained his better habits. The wild greed subsided, and because he now carried a bitter experience behind him, he became wiser than before. He moderated his appetites and ate no more than was good for him, while resuming sensible and profound contemplations, seeing through things once more.

One day he plucked a handsome fieldfare from the branches, and as he thoughtfully dismembered it, he found its little stomach filled round as a ball

with fresh, undigested food. Green herbs rolled neatly, black and white seeds, and one bright red berry were packed so prettily and tightly together, as if a mother had packed a little knapsack for her son's journey. As Spieglein slowly consumed the bird, the bulging crop dangling from his claw, he pondered philosophically on the fate of this poor creature — who, after such peacefully conducted business, had to lose his life so swiftly he couldn't even digest the packed provisions. "What good did it do him, poor fellow," said Spieglein, "that he fed himself so diligently and eagerly that this little sack looks like a day's work well done? It was this red berry that lured him from the free forest into the birdcatcher's snare. Yet he thought only to improve his lot and sustain his life on such berries — while I, having just eaten the unfortunate bird, have merely eaten myself one step closer to death! Could there be a more wretched and cowardly contract than to prolong one's life a little while, only to lose it at that very price? Wouldn't a voluntary and swift death have been preferable for a resolute tom? But I had no thoughts then, and now that I have them again, I see nothing before me but the fate of this fieldfare: when I'm round enough, I must depart, for no other reason than *being* round. A fine reason for a life-loving, thoughtful cat-gentleman! Ah, if only I could escape this snare!"

He sank into manifold brooding over how it might be done; but since the time of danger hadn't yet arrived, no clarity came, and he found no way out. Yet as a clever fellow, he gave himself over to virtue and self-mastery — always the best preparation and use of time while waiting for something to be decided. He spurned the soft cushion Pineiss had arranged so he'd sleep diligently and grow fat, preferring instead to lie again on narrow ledges and high, precarious perches when he wished to rest. Likewise he disdained the roasted birds and larded mice, choosing instead to catch on the rooftops — now that he had a lawful hunting ground again — a plain live sparrow with cunning and skill, or a nimble mouse in the granaries. Such prey tasted far better than the roasted game in Pineiss's artificial preserve, and it didn't make him too fat. The exercise, courage, and recovered practice of virtue and philosophy also prevented too-rapid fattening, so that while Spieglein looked healthy and glossy, to Pineiss's astonishment he remained at a certain level of plumpness — nowhere near what the sorcerer hoped to achieve with his generous feeding. For Pineiss imagined a spherical, sluggish creature that never moved from its cushion and consisted of nothing but lard. But here his sorcery had erred; for all his cunning, he didn't know that if you feed a donkey, it remains a donkey, but if you feed a fox, it becomes nothing other than a fox — each creature grows according to its nature.

When Herr Pineiss discovered how Spieglein remained perpetually at the same point of well-nourished but supple, vigorous slenderness without putting on any considerable fat, he confronted him one evening and said harshly, "What's this, Spieglein? Why don't you eat the fine foods I prepare and produce for you with such care and art? Why don't you catch the roasted birds in the trees? Why don't you seek the delicious mice in the mountain caves?

Why don't you fish anymore in the lake? Why don't you rest yourself? Why don't you sleep on the cushion? Why do you tire yourself out and refuse to get fat for me?"

"Well, Herr Pineiss!" said Spieglein, "because I feel better this way! Shouldn't I spend my brief time in the manner most pleasant to me?"

"What!" cried Pineiss. "You're supposed to live so that you become thick and round, not wear yourself out! But I see well enough where you're heading! You think to mock me and string me along, so I'll let you run around in this middling state forever? Not a chance! It's your *duty* to eat and drink and take care of yourself so you'll grow fat and develop lard! Renounce this sly, contract-breaking moderation at once, or I'll have a little word with you!"

Spieglein interrupted the contented purring he'd begun to keep his composure, and said, "I know not a blessed word in the contract saying I must renounce moderation and healthy living! If the City Sorcerer counted on my being a lazy glutton, that's not my fault! You do a thousand lawful things each day — let this be added to them, and we'll both stay nicely in order; for you know well enough that my lard is only useful to you if it's grown by lawful means!"

"You chatterbox!" cried Pineiss furiously. "Would you lecture me? Show me, how far have you actually progressed, you idler? Perhaps we can finish you off soon after all!" He grabbed the kitten's belly; but Spieglein felt unpleasantly tickled and dealt the sorcerer a sharp scratch across his hand. Pineiss examined it closely, then said, "So that's how things stand between us, you beast? Very well, I hereby solemnly declare you, by virtue of the contract, fat enough! I'm satisfied with the result and shall secure it! In five days the moon is full, and until then you may enjoy your life, as it is written, and not a minute longer!" With that he turned his back and left Spieglein to his thoughts.

Those thoughts were now quite grim and dark. So the hour had come when good Spieglein must lose his skin? And with all his cleverness, nothing more could be done? Sighing, he climbed onto the high roof, whose ridges jutted darkly into the beautiful autumn evening sky. The moon rose over the town, casting its light on the black, moss-covered hollow tiles of the ancient roof. A lovely song sounded in Spieglein's ears, and a snow-white she-cat walked gleaming across a neighboring ridge. Instantly Spieglein forgot the death-prospect he lived under and answered the beauty's love-song with his finest tom-song. He hurried toward her and was soon locked in fierce battle with three rival toms, whom he beat courageously into wild flight. Then he ardently and devotedly courted the lady and spent day and night with her, never thinking of Pineiss or showing himself at the house. He sang like a nightingale through the beautiful moonlit nights, chased after his white beloved over rooftops, through gardens, and more than once tumbled in heated love-play or combat with rivals down high roofs and fell to the street — only to pick himself up, shake his fur, and begin the wild hunt of his passions anew. Quiet

hours and loud, sweet feelings and angry quarrels, charming conversation, witty exchanges, the schemes and jests of love and jealousy, caresses and brawls, the power of fortune and the suffering of ill-luck — none of it let the lovesick Spieglein come to himself. And when the moon's disk grew full, he was so worn down by all these excitements and passions that he looked more wretched, thinner, and more bedraggled than ever.

At that very moment Pineiss called from a roof-turret, "Little Spieglein! Little Spieglein! Where are you? Come home a bit!"

Spieglein parted from the white sweetheart, who went her way contentedly and coolly mewing, and turned proudly toward his executioner. Pineiss descended into the kitchen, rustled the contract, and said, "Come, little Spieglein, come, little Spieglein!" And Spieglein followed and sat down defiantly before the master in the witch-kitchen, in all his thinness and dishevelment. When Herr Pineiss saw how shamefully he'd been cheated of his profit, he leaped up as if possessed and screamed furiously, "What do I see? You rogue, you conscienceless scoundrel! What have you done to me?" Beside himself with rage, he grabbed a broom to strike Spieglein; but Spieglein arched his black back, made his fur bristle upward so a pale light crackled over it, laid his ears back, hissed and glared at the old man so fiercely that he sprang back three steps, full of fear and horror. He began to worry he faced a sorcerer-master who was mocking him and could do more than he himself.

Uncertain and subdued, he said, "Is the honorable Herr Spieglein perhaps of the craft? Has a learned master of magic perhaps pleased to disguise himself in this outward form, since he commands his bodily substance at will and can grow as stout as seems pleasant to him — not too little and not too much — or suddenly become as thin as a skeleton to escape death?"

Spieglein calmed again and spoke honestly, "No, I'm no sorcerer! It's only the sweet power of passion that's brought me down and taken your fat for my pleasure. But if we want to begin our business anew now, I'll be brave about it and dig in! Just set a really fine, big bratwurst before me, for I'm quite exhausted and hungry!"

Then Pineiss furiously grabbed Spieglein by the scruff, locked him in the goose-stall — which was always empty — and yelled, "Now see whether your sweet power of passion helps you out again, and whether it's stronger than the power of sorcery and my lawful contract! Now it's eat-or-die, bird!" At once he roasted a long sausage that smelled so delicious he couldn't help licking both ends a bit himself before pushing it through the bars. Spieglein ate it from front to back, and as he contentedly cleaned his whiskers and licked his fur, he said to himself, "Upon my soul! Love is a beautiful thing after all! It's pulled me out of the snare again this time. Now I'll rest a little and try to regain reasonable thoughts through contemplation and good nourishment! Everything has its season! Today a bit of passion, tomorrow a little prudence

and rest — each is good in its way. This prison isn't so bad at all, and surely something profitable can be thought up in here!"

But Pineiss now pulled himself together and prepared every day, with all his art, such delicacies in such charming variety and wholesomeness that captive Spieglein couldn't resist them; for Pineiss's supply of voluntary and lawful cat-lard diminished daily and threatened soon to run out completely, and then the sorcerer would be a defeated man without this chief ingredient. But the good sorcerer, in nourishing Spieglein's body, nourished his spirit again with it, and there was absolutely no getting rid of this inconvenient addition — which is why his sorcery proved incomplete here, too.

When Spieglein in his cage finally seemed fat enough, Pineiss delayed no longer. Before the attentive cat's eyes, he arranged all his instruments and made a bright fire on the hearth to render out the long-awaited profit. Then he sharpened a large knife, opened the prison, pulled Spieglein out after locking the kitchen door securely, and said cheerfully, "Come, you rascal! We'll cut your head off first and then strip off your pelt! That will make a warm cap for me — something I, simpleton that I am, hadn't even thought of! Or should I skin you first and *then* cut off your head?"

"No, if it please you," said Spieglein humbly, "better to cut the head off first!"

"You're right, poor fellow!" said Herr Pineiss. "We won't torment you needlessly! Fair is fair!"

"That's a true word!" said Spieglein with a pitiful sigh, laying his head resignedly to the side. "Oh, if only I'd always done what was right, and hadn't carelessly neglected such an important matter, I could die now with a better conscience — for I die gladly. But a wrong weighs on me and makes this otherwise welcome death difficult; for what does life offer me? Nothing but fear, care, and poverty — and for variety, a storm of consuming passion, which is even worse than quiet, trembling fear!"

"Well, what wrong? What important matter?" asked Pineiss curiously.

"Ah, what good does talking do now?" sighed Spieglein. "What's done is done, and now regret comes too late!"

"You see, you devil, what a sinner you are?" said Pineiss. "And how well you deserve your death? But what in blazes have you done? Have you stolen something from me, embezzled, ruined something? Have you done me some heinous wrong I know nothing about — don't suspect, don't imagine — you Satan? These are fine stories! Good that I'm finding out! Confess at once, or I'll flay and boil you alive! Will you speak or not?"

"Oh no!" said Spieglein. "I have nothing to reproach myself for regarding you. It concerns the ten thousand gold guilders of my late mistress — but what good is talking! — Though — when I think about it and look at you, perhaps

it's not quite too late after all — when I observe you, I see you're still quite a handsome and vigorous man, in your prime years. Tell me, Herr Pineiss! Have you never perhaps felt the desire to marry, honorably and advantageously? But what am I chattering about! How would such a clever and accomplished man come to such idle thoughts! How would such a usefully occupied master think of foolish women! Though admittedly, even the worst of them has something about her useful to a man — that can't be denied! And if she's even halfway decent, a good housewife is perhaps white of body, careful of mind, agreeable in manner, true of heart, thrifty in management but lavish in caring for her husband, entertaining in words and pleasant in her deeds, ingratiating in her actions! She kisses the man with her mouth and strokes his beard, she embraces him with her arms and scratches him behind the ears as he wishes — in short, she does a thousand things not to be scorned. She keeps herself quite close to him or at a modest distance, according to his mood, and when he goes about his business, she doesn't disturb him but meanwhile spreads his praise within and beyond the house; for she lets nothing come against him and praises all that concerns him! But most delightful is the wonderful nature of her delicate bodily existence, which nature has made so different from our being — despite apparent human resemblance — that it creates a perpetual sea-wonder in a happy marriage and actually harbors the most cunning sorcery of all! But what am I babbling like a fool on death's threshold! How would a wise man fix his attention on such vanities! Forgive me, Herr Pineiss, and cut off my head!"

But Pineiss cried vehemently, "Stop at last, you chatterbox! And tell me: where is such a woman, and does she have ten thousand gold guilders?"

"Ten thousand gold guilders?" said Spieglein.

"Yes indeed," cried Pineiss impatiently. "Didn't you just speak of them?"

"No," answered Spieglein, "that's another matter! Those lie buried in a certain place!"

"And what are they doing there, whose are they?" screamed Pineiss.

"They belong to no one — that's precisely my burden of conscience, for I should have placed them! Actually they belong to whoever marries such a woman as I've just described. But how can one bring three such things together in this godless town: ten thousand gold guilders, a white, fine, and good housewife, and a wise, righteous man? Therefore my sin is not actually so great, for the task was too hard for a poor cat!"

"If you don't now," cried Pineiss, "stick to the matter and explain it comprehensibly in order, I'll preliminarily cut off your tail and both ears! Now begin!"

"Since you command it, I must tell the tale," said Spieglein, settling calmly on his haunches, "though this delay only increases my suffering!" Pineiss stuck

the sharp knife into the floorboards between himself and Spieglein and sat down curiously on a little barrel to listen, and Spieglein continued:

"You know, Herr Pineiss, that the good woman, my late mistress, died unmarried — an old maid who did much good quietly and lived to trouble no one. But it wasn't always so peaceful and quiet around her, and though she was never evil-natured, she once caused much suffering and harm; for in her youth she was the most beautiful young lady far and wide, and whatever young lords and bold fellows lived in the region or passed through fell in love with her and wanted desperately to marry her. Now she had great desire to marry and take a handsome, honorable, and clever husband, and she had her pick, since natives and strangers competed for her and more than once ran each other through with rapiers to win precedence. Bold and timid suitors came courting, cunning and true-hearted, rich and poor — some with a good and respectable business, others who lived elegantly as gentlemen on their incomes. This one with these virtues, that one with those: eloquent or silent, one lively and charming, another seeming to have more substance within though he looked somewhat simple. In short, the lady had as perfect a selection as any marriageable woman could wish. Yet besides her beauty she possessed a handsome fortune of many thousand gold guilders, and these were the reason she never managed to make a choice and take a husband, for she managed her property with excellent prudence and intelligence and placed great value on it. And since people always judge others by their own inclinations, it happened that as soon as a worthy suitor approached and pleased her halfway, she immediately imagined he desired her only for her wealth. If one was rich, she believed he wouldn't want her if she weren't also rich, and of those without means she took it as certain that they had their eyes only on her gold guilders and meant to enjoy them. And the poor lady, who herself placed such importance on earthly possessions, was unable to distinguish these suitors' love of money and property from love of herself — or, when it truly might exist, to overlook and forgive it. Several times she was as good as engaged, her heart finally beating stronger; but suddenly she believed she detected from some sign that she was betrayed and they thought only of her fortune, and she broke the whole thing off immediately and withdrew, full of pain but implacable. She tested all who didn't displease her in a hundred ways, so that great skill was needed not to fall into the trap, and at last no one could approach with any hope unless he was a thoroughly cunning and deceitful person — so that for these very reasons the choice finally did become truly difficult, because such people ultimately awaken an uncanny unease and leave the deepest uncertainty in a beauty's heart, the more cunning and skilled they are. Her chief method of testing her suitors was to put their unselfishness to the proof, leading them daily to great expenditures, rich gifts, and charitable deeds. But no matter what they did, they never struck the right note; for if they showed themselves generous and self-sacrificing, gave brilliant feasts, brought her presents, or entrusted her with considerable sums

for the poor, she'd suddenly say it was all done only to catch the salmon with a little worm, or throw the sausage to catch the bacon, as the saying goes. And she gave away both the gifts and the entrusted money to convents and charitable foundations and fed the poor; but the deceived suitors she rejected mercilessly. If, however, they showed themselves reserved or even miserly, the judgment was immediately passed on them, for she took that much worse and believed she recognized in it a base and naked selfishness and self-love. So it came that she, who sought a pure heart devoted only to her person, was finally surrounded by nothing but deceitful, cunning, and selfish suitors whom she could never figure out and who embittered her life.

One day she felt so despondent and desolate that she dismissed her whole court from the house, locked it up, and traveled to Milan, where she had a cousin. As she rode over the Saint Gotthard on a little donkey, her mood was as black and frightful as the wild stone towering up from the abysses, and she felt the most violent temptation to throw herself from the Devil's Bridge into the raging waters of the Reuss. Only with the greatest difficulty did the two maids she had with her — whom I myself knew, though they've long been dead — and the guide manage to calm her and dissuade her from the dark impulse. Yet she arrived pale and sad in the beautiful land of Italy, and however blue the sky there, her dark thoughts would not brighten. But after she'd stayed some days with her cousin, an unexpected melody was suddenly to sound, and a springtime beginning was to dawn in her of which she'd known little till then. For a young countryman came to her cousin's house who pleased her so well at first sight that one can truly say she fell in love now of her own accord and for the first time. He was a handsome youth of good breeding and noble manner, neither poor nor rich at the time, for he had nothing but ten thousand gold guilders inherited from his deceased parents, with which — having learned the merchant's trade — he meant to establish a silk business in Milan. For he was enterprising and clear in thought and had a lucky hand, as open-hearted and innocent people often do; for the young man was this too. However well-educated he was, he seemed as guileless and innocent as a child. And though he was a merchant with such an open nature — already together a precious rarity — he was nonetheless firm and chivalrous in his bearing and wore his sword as boldly at his side as only a practiced warrior can.

All this, along with his fresh beauty and youth, so conquered the lady's heart that she could barely contain herself and met him with great friendliness. She became cheerful again, and when she was sad in between, it happened in the alternation of love's fear and hope — which was at least a nobler and more pleasant feeling than that painful embarrassment of choice she'd felt before among the many suitors. Now she knew only one trouble and concern: namely, to please the handsome and good youth. And the more beautiful she herself was, the more humble and uncertain she became now that she'd conceived a true affection for the first time. But the young merchant had also never seen

such beauty, or at least had never been so close to one and treated by her so kindly and graciously. Since she was, as I said, not only beautiful but also good of heart and refined in manner, it's no wonder that the open and fresh youth, whose heart was still entirely free and inexperienced, also fell in love with her — and did so with all the force and unreserve that lay in his whole nature.

But perhaps no one would ever have known if, in his simplicity, he hadn't been encouraged by the lady's affection, which he dared with secret trembling to take for a return of his love, since he himself knew no dissembling. Yet he controlled himself for some weeks and believed he was hiding the matter; but everyone could see from afar that he was dying of love, and when he came anywhere near the lady or she was merely mentioned, one could also see immediately whom he loved.

He wasn't long in love, but began truly to love with all the vehemence of his youth, so that the lady became the highest and best thing in the world to him, on which he staked, once and for all, the salvation and entire worth of his own person. This pleased her beyond measure; for there was in everything he said or did a different manner than she'd experienced before, and this confirmed and moved her so deeply that she now likewise fell prey to the strongest love, and there was no longer any question of choice for her. Everyone saw this story playing out, and it was openly spoken of and much joked about. The lady was highly pleased by this, and though her heart wanted to burst with anxious expectation, she helped the romance from her side become a little tangled and drawn out, to really savor and enjoy it. For the young man, in his confusion, did such delightful and childlike things as she'd never experienced — each more flattering and pleasant than the last. But he, in his straightforwardness and honesty, couldn't long endure it so; since everyone alluded to it and made jokes, it seemed to him to become a comedy, for which his beloved seemed to him far too good and holy as the object. And what pleased her exceedingly made him worried, uncertain, and embarrassed about her. He also believed he was offending and deceiving her if he carried around such a violent passion for her and thought constantly of her without her having any idea — which wasn't at all proper and didn't seem right to him! Therefore one morning everyone could see from afar that he intended something, and he confessed his love to her in a few words — to say it once and never a second time if he shouldn't be happy.

For he wasn't accustomed to think that such a beautiful and well-constituted lady might perhaps not speak her true mind and might not also give, right from the first, her irrevocable yes or no. He was as delicately minded as he was violently in love, as shy as he was childlike, and as proud as he was open-hearted — and for him it was immediately a matter of life or death, yes or no, blow for blow. But in the very moment the lady heard his confession, which she'd so longingly awaited, her old mistrust overtook her, and it occurred to her at the unlucky hour that her suitor was a merchant who ultimately only wished to obtain her fortune to expand his enterprises. If he should also be a

little in love with her person besides, that would be no particular merit given her beauty, and only the more outrageous if she were to represent a mere desirable addition to her gold.

Instead, therefore, of confessing her reciprocal love and welcoming him, as she'd most liked to do, she instantly devised a new ruse to test his devotion and assumed a serious, almost sad expression, confiding in him how she was already engaged to a young man in her homeland whom she loved with all her heart. She'd wanted to tell him this several times, since she loved him — the merchant, that is — very much as a friend, as he must have seen from her behavior, and she trusted him like a brother. But the awkward jokes that had arisen in society had made a confidential conversation difficult. But now that he'd surprised her himself by opening his brave and noble heart before her, she couldn't thank him better for his affection than by confiding in him just as openly.

Yes, she continued, she could belong only to the one she'd once chosen, and it would never be possible for her to turn her heart to another man — this stood written with golden fire in her soul, and the dear man didn't himself know how dear he was to her, though he knew her well! But a dark unlucky star had struck her: her fiancé was a merchant, but as poor as a mouse. Therefore they'd made the plan that he should establish a business with the bride's means; the beginning had been made and everything excellently arranged, the wedding was to be celebrated these days — when an unexpected misfortune would have it that her entire fortune was suddenly contested and disputed and perhaps lost forever, while the poor bridegroom had to make his first payments soon to the Milan and Venetian merchants, on which his whole credit, prosperity, and honor rested — not to speak of their union and happy wedding! She'd come hastily to Milan, where she had well-off relatives, to find means and ways out. But she'd come at an evil hour; for nothing would fit or work, while the day drew ever nearer, and if she couldn't help her beloved, she must die of sadness.

For he was the dearest and best person imaginable, and would surely become a great merchant-prince if only he were helped, and she knew no other happiness on earth than to be his wife! When she finished this tale, the poor handsome youth had long since lost all color and was pale as a white cloth. But he let no sound of complaint be heard and spoke not a blessed word more of himself and his love, but only asked sadly how much the obligations of the happy-unhappy bridegroom amounted to. Ten thousand gold guilders! she answered, even sadder still.

The young sad merchant stood up, urged the lady to be of good courage, since surely a way out would show itself, and withdrew from her without daring to look at her — so deeply did he feel stricken and ashamed that he'd cast his eye on a lady who so faithfully and passionately loved another. For the poor man believed every word of her story like gospel.

Then he went without delay to his trading partners and brought them, through pleading and forfeiture of a certain sum, to undo his orders and purchases — which he himself was to pay in these very days with his ten thousand gold guilders, and on which he'd built his entire career. And before six hours had passed, he appeared again before the lady with his entire fortune and begged her, for God's sake, to accept this aid from him. Her eyes sparkled with joyful surprise, and her breast pounded like a hammer-mill. She asked him where he'd obtained this capital, and he replied that he'd borrowed it on his good name and would, since his business was turning fortunate, be able to repay it without inconvenience.

She saw clearly that he lied and that it was his only fortune and whole hope he was sacrificing to her happiness; yet she pretended to believe his words. She gave free rein to her joyful feelings and cruelly acted as if they were directed toward the happiness of now being able to rescue and marry her chosen one, and she couldn't find words to express her gratitude. But suddenly she reconsidered and declared she could accept the magnanimous deed only under one condition, since otherwise all persuasion would be useless. Asked what this condition consisted of, she demanded his sacred promise to present himself at her side on a certain day to attend her wedding and become the best friend and patron of her future husband, as well as the truest friend, protector, and advisor of herself. Blushing, he begged her to abandon this request; but in vain he applied all arguments to dissuade her, in vain he represented that his affairs now didn't permit returning to Switzerland, and that he would suffer considerable damage from such a detour. She insisted firmly on her demand and even pushed his gold back to him when he wouldn't agree. Finally he promised, but he had to give his hand on it and swear it to her by his honor and salvation. She designated precisely the day and hour when he should arrive, and all this he had to swear by his Christian faith and his salvation. Only then did she accept his sacrifice and had the treasure carried happily into her bedchamber, where she personally locked it in her travel trunk and stuck the key in her bosom.

Now she stayed no longer in Milan but traveled back over the Saint Gotthard as cheerfully as she'd come sadly. On the Devil's Bridge, where she'd wanted to leap down, she laughed like a mad woman and with bright jubilation of her melodious voice threw a bouquet of pomegranate blossoms she wore at her breast into the Reuss. In short, her joy couldn't be contained, and it was the merriest journey ever taken. Returned home, she opened and aired her house from top to bottom and decorated it as if expecting a prince. But at the head of her bed she placed the sack with the ten thousand gold guilders and laid her head at night so blissfully on the hard lump and slept on it as if it were the softest down pillow. She could hardly await the agreed day when she'd surely see him come, since she knew he wouldn't break the simplest promise, let alone an oath, even if it cost him his life.

But the day dawned, and the beloved didn't appear, and many days and weeks passed without him letting her hear from him. Then she began to tremble in all her limbs and fell into the greatest anxiety and dread. She sent letter after letter to Milan, but no one could tell her where he'd gone. Finally, however, it emerged by chance that the young merchant had had a war-garment made from a blood-red piece of silk damask that remained from his trading venture and which he'd already paid for, and had gone to join the Swiss who were then fighting the Milanese War in the service of King Francis of France. After the Battle of Pavia, in which so many Swiss lost their lives, he was found lying on a heap of slain Spaniards, torn by many mortal wounds, his red silk garment slashed and shredded from bottom to top. Before he gave up the ghost, he entrusted the following message to the memory of a Seldwyler lying beside him who was less badly mauled, and begged him to deliver it if he escaped with his life:

"Dearest lady! Although I swore to you by my honor, by my Christian faith, and by my salvation to appear at your wedding, it has nevertheless not been possible for me to see you once more and behold another partaking of the highest happiness that could exist for me. This I felt only in your absence and didn't know before what a stern and uncanny thing it is, such love as I have for you — otherwise I would doubtless have guarded myself better against it. But since it is so, I would rather forfeit my worldly honor and my spiritual salvation and enter eternal damnation as a perjurer than appear once more in your presence with a fire in my breast stronger and more inextinguishable than hellfire, and which will hardly let me feel that fire. Don't pray for me, most beautiful lady, for I can and will never be saved without you, be it here or there, and thus live happily and farewell!"

Thus in this battle, after which King Francis said, "All is lost save honor!" the unfortunate lover lost everything — hope, honor, life, and eternal salvation. Only love, which consumed him, he didn't lose. The Seldwyler came through happily, and as soon as he'd recovered somewhat and saw himself out of danger, he wrote the words of the fallen man faithfully on his writing tablet so as not to forget them, traveled home, reported to the unfortunate lady, and read her the message as stiffly and martially as he was accustomed to do when otherwise reading the muster-roll of his company; for he was a field-lieutenant.

But the lady tore her hair, rent her clothes, and began to scream and weep so loudly that it was heard up and down the street and people came running. Like a madwoman she dragged forth the ten thousand gold guilders, scattered them on the floor, threw herself full-length upon them, and kissed the gleaming gold pieces. Quite out of her senses, she sought to gather up and embrace the rolling treasure, as if the lost beloved were present in it. She lay day and night on the gold and would take neither food nor drink; unceasingly she caressed and kissed the cold metal, until in the middle of one night she suddenly rose, carried the treasure — hurrying busily back and forth — to the

garden, and there with bitter tears threw it into the deep well and spoke a curse over it, that it should never belong to anyone else."

When Spieglein had told this much of the tale, Pineiss said, "And the beautiful money still lies in the well?"

"Yes, where else would it lie?" answered Spieglein. "For only I can bring it out, and I haven't done it to this hour!"

"Ah yes, of course, right!" said Pineiss. "I quite forgot over your story! You can tell a tale not badly, you rascal! And I've gotten quite hungry for a little wife who'd be so taken with me — but she'd have to be very beautiful! But now quickly tell how the matter actually fits together!"

"It took many years," said Spieglein, "before the lady recovered from bitter soul-suffering enough to begin becoming the quiet old maid I came to know. I may boast that I became her only comfort and most trusted friend in her lonely life until her quiet end. But when she saw it approaching, she called to mind once more the time of her distant youth and beauty and suffered once more, with milder, resigned thoughts, first the sweet excitements and then the bitter sorrows of that time, and she wept quietly seven days and nights over the young man's love, whose enjoyment she'd lost through her mistrust, so that her old eyes went blind shortly before death. Then she repented the curse she'd spoken over that treasure and said to me, charging me with this important matter: 'I now decree otherwise, dear Spieglein! And give you the authority to execute my ordinance. Look about and search until you find a picture-beautiful but penniless woman who, because of her poverty, lacks suitors! If then a sensible, righteous, and handsome man should be found who has a good livelihood and desires the maiden as his wife despite her poverty, moved only by her beauty alone, then this man shall bind himself with the strongest oaths to be as faithful, self-sacrificing, and unchangeably devoted to her as my unfortunate beloved was to me, and to comply with this woman in all things his life long. Then give the bride the ten thousand gold guilders lying in the well as her dowry, that she may surprise her bridegroom with them on the wedding morning!' Thus spoke the blessed one, and because of my adverse fortunes I've neglected to pursue this matter, and must now fear that the poor soul is still troubled in her grave — which can't have the most pleasant consequences for me either!"

Pineiss looked at Spieglein mistrustfully and said, "Would you be capable, little fellow, of pointing out the treasure to me a bit and making it visible?"

"Any hour!" replied Spieglein. "But you must know, Herr City Sorcerer, that you mustn't just fish the gold out without more ado! They'd unfailingly wring your neck; for it's not entirely safe in the well — I have certain intelligence about it which, out of consideration, I may not touch upon more closely!"

"Hey, who's talking about bringing it up?" said Pineiss somewhat fearfully. "Just take me there once and show me the treasure! Or rather, I'll lead you on a good little cord so you don't slip away from me!"

"As you wish!" said Spieglein. "But take along another long cord and a dark lantern, which you can lower into the well on it; for it's very deep and dark!"

Pineiss followed this advice and led the lively kitten to the garden of that deceased woman. They climbed over the wall together, and Spieglein showed the sorcerer the way to the old well, which was hidden beneath overgrown brush. There Pineiss lowered his little lantern, peering eagerly down while keeping tight hold of the tethered Spieglein. But sure enough, he saw in the depths the gold glittering under greenish water and cried, "Truly, I see it, it's true! Spieglein, you're a magnificent fellow!" Then he peered down eagerly again and said, "Might there really be ten thousand?"

"Well, I couldn't swear to that!" said Spieglein. "I've never been down there and haven't counted! It's also possible the lady lost a few pieces on the way when she carried the treasure here, since she was in a very agitated state."

"Well, even if there are a dozen or more fewer!" said Herr Pineiss. "I won't quibble over it!" He sat down on the rim of the well; Spieglein also sat down and licked his paw.

"So there's the treasure!" said Pineiss, scratching behind his ears. "And here's the man for it; all that's missing is the picture-beautiful wife!"

"What?" said Spieglein.

"I mean, all that's missing is the one who's to receive the ten thousand as dowry to surprise me with on the wedding morning, and who has all those pleasant virtues you spoke of!"

"Hmm!" replied Spieglein. "The matter doesn't stand quite as you say! The treasure is there, as you rightly see; the beautiful woman I have — to confess honestly — already tracked down. But as for the man who'd marry her under these difficult circumstances, that's where it gets stuck; for nowadays beauty must be gold-plated on top like Christmas walnuts, and the hollower heads become, the more they strive to fill the void with some wifely property so they can better pass the time. Then with an important face a horse is inspected and a piece of velvet purchased, with running and racing a good crossbow is ordered and the gunsmith doesn't leave the house; then it's: I must bring in my wine and clean my barrels, have my trees pruned and my roof repaired; I must send my wife to the baths, she's ailing and costs me much money, and must have my wood hauled and my debts collected; I've bought a pair of greyhounds and traded my hounds, I've acquired a fine oak extension table and given up my large walnut chest; I've cut my bean-poles, dismissed my gardener, sold my hay and sowed my lettuce — always mine and mine from

morning till night. Some even say I have my laundry next week, I must air my bedding, I must hire a maid and have a new butcher, for I want to dismiss the old one; I've acquired the most delightful waffle-iron, by chance, and sold my silver cinnamon box, it was no use to me. All these, mind you, are the wife's matters, and thus such a fellow passes his time and steals the day from the Lord by enumerating all these tasks without doing a stroke of work. If it comes to the worst and such a character must perhaps humble himself, he'll maybe say: our cows and our pigs, but—"

Pineiss yanked Spieglein by the cord so he cried "Miau!" and shouted, "Enough, you chatterbox! Say immediately: where is she, the one you know of?" For the enumeration of all these glories and tasks connected with a wife's property had only made the skinny sorcerer's mouth water more.

Spieglein said, astonished, "Do you really want to undertake the thing, Herr Pineiss?"

"Of course I do! Who else but me? So out with it: where is she?"

"So you can go and court her?"

"Without doubt!"

"Know then, the matter goes only through my hand! You must speak with me if you want money and wife!" said Spieglein coolly and indifferently, and busily passed both paws over his ears after wetting them a bit each time.

Pineiss considered carefully, groaned a little, and said, "I see you want to cancel our contract and save your head!"

"Would that seem so unreasonable and unnatural to you?"

"You'll deceive me in the end and lie to me like a rogue!"

"That's also possible!" said Spieglein.

"I tell you, don't deceive me!" cried Pineiss commandingly.

"Good, then I won't deceive you!" said Spieglein.

"If you do!"

"Then I do."

"Don't torment me, little Spieglein!" spoke Pineiss almost tearfully, and Spieglein now replied seriously:

"You're a remarkable person, Herr Pineiss! You hold me captive on a cord and yank it till my breath stops! You've let death's sword hang over me for more than two hours — what am I saying! For half a year! And now you say: don't torment me, little Spieglein! If you'll permit me, I'll tell you briefly: I can only be glad to fulfill that loving duty to the dead after all and find a suitable man for the aforementioned woman, and you seem to me to suffice in every respect. It's no easy thing to place a woman well, however much it may seem

so, and I say again, I'm glad you're willing to undertake this! But nothing's for nothing! Before I speak another word, take another step — indeed, before I even open my mouth once more — I first want my freedom back and my life secured! Therefore take away this cord and lay the contract here on the well, here on this stone, or cut off my head — one or the other!"

"Why, you madhouse escapee, you hothead!" said Pineiss. "You firebrand, it can't be meant so strictly? This must be properly discussed, and in any case a new contract must be drawn up!"

Spieglein gave no more answer and sat there motionless — one, two, three minutes. Then the master grew anxious. He pulled out his wallet, fished out the contract with a sigh, read through it once more, then laid it hesitantly before Spieglein. The moment the paper lay there, Spieglein snatched it up and swallowed it; and though he had to choke mightily on it, it seemed to him the best and most wholesome meal he'd ever enjoyed, and he hoped it would agree with him long and keep him plump and lively. When he'd finished the pleasant repast, he greeted the sorcerer politely and said:

"You'll unfailingly hear from me, Herr Pineiss, and wife and money shall not escape you. In return, prepare yourself to be properly in love, so you can indeed swear and fulfill those conditions of unbreakable devotion to the caresses of your wife — who's as good as yours already! And herewith I thank you provisionally for the care and nourishment received, and take my leave!"

Thus Spieglein went his way and rejoiced over the sorcerer's stupidity — for Pineiss believed he could deceive himself and all the world, since he didn't want to marry the hoped-for bride selflessly, from pure love of beauty alone, but knew beforehand about the matter of the ten thousand gold guilders. Meanwhile Spieglein already had a person in mind whom he intended to foist upon the foolish sorcerer in return for his roasted fieldfares, mice, and sausages.

Opposite Herr Pineiss's house stood another house whose front side was whitewashed most cleanly and whose windows always gleamed freshly washed. The modest window curtains were always snow-white and as if just ironed, and equally white was the habit and the head-and-neck cloth of an old beguine who lived in the house — so that her nun-like headdress covering her breast always looked as if folded from writing paper, so you could have written on it right away. At least you could have done so comfortably on her breast, since it was as flat and hard as a board. As sharp as the white edges and corners of her clothing, just as sharp were the long nose and chin of the beguine, her tongue and the evil glance of her eyes. Yet she spoke little with her tongue and glanced little with her eyes, since she didn't love waste and used everything only at the right time and with deliberation. Three times daily she went to church, and when she crossed the street in her fresh, white, rustling fabric with her white pointed nose, children ran away fearfully, and even grown people gladly stepped behind house-doors if there was still time.

But she stood in great repute for her strict piety and reclusiveness, and particularly in high esteem with the clergy — though even the priests preferred to communicate with her in writing rather than orally, and when she confessed, the pastor always shot out of the confessional dripping with sweat, as if coming from a baking oven. Thus lived the pious beguine, who understood no jest, in deep peace and remained untroubled. She also meddled with no one and let people go, provided they went out of her way. Only on her neighbor Pineiss did she seem to have cast a special hatred; for whenever he showed himself at his window, she threw him an evil look and instantly drew her white curtains, and Pineiss feared her like fire and dared make a joke about her only in the very back of his house when everything was well locked.

But as white and bright as the beguine's house looked toward the street, so black and smoky, uncanny and strange did it look from behind — where, however, it could scarcely be seen at all except by the birds of heaven and the cats on the roofs, because it was built into a dark corner of sky-high fire-walls without windows, where no human face ever showed itself. Under the roof there hung old torn petticoats, baskets, and herb-sacks; on the roof grew proper yew trees and thorn-bushes, and a great sooty chimney jutted uncannily into the air. Out of this chimney, in the dark night, a witch not infrequently rode up on her broom — young and beautiful and stark naked, as God created women and the devil likes to see them. When she rode out of the chimney, she sniffed with the finest little nose and with smiling cherry lips in the fresh night air and rode along in the white gleam of her body, while her long raven-black hair fluttered behind her like a night-banner. In a hole in the chimney sat an old owl, and to this owl the freed Spieglein now made his way, a fat mouse in his mouth that he'd caught along the way.

"Good evening, dear Frau Owl! Diligent on watch?" he said, and the owl replied, "Must be! Good evening likewise! You haven't shown yourself in a long time, Herr Spieglein!"

"Had its reasons, I'll tell you about it. Here I've brought you a little mouse, plain and simple as the season gives, if you won't scorn it! Has the mistress ridden out?"

"Not yet, she wants to go out only toward morning for an hour. Thanks for the fine mouse! You're always the polite Spieglein! I've set aside a poor sparrow here that flew too near me today; if you please, taste the bird! And how has it gone with you?"

"Rather strangely," replied Spieglein. "They wanted to do me in. Listen, if you please." While they now pleasantly took their evening meal, Spieglein told the attentive owl everything that had befallen him and how he'd freed himself from Herr Pineiss's hands. The owl said, "Then I wish you a thousand times luck — now you're a made man again and can go where you will, having experienced many things!"

"We're not done yet," said Spieglein. "The man must have his wife and his gold guilders!"

"Are you mad, to do good to the rogue who wanted to skin you?"

"Well, he could have done it lawfully and by contract, and since I can repay him in the same coin, why should I refrain? Who says I want to do him good? That tale was a pure invention of mine — my mistress who rests in God was a simple person who in her life was never in love nor surrounded by admirers, and that treasure is ill-gotten goods she once inherited and threw into the well so she'd suffer no misfortune from it. 'Cursed be whoever takes it out and uses it,' she said. So it stands regarding doing good!"

"Then the matter is indeed different! But now, where will you get the appropriate wife?"

"Here from this chimney! That's why I've come, to speak a sensible word with you! Wouldn't you like to be free again from the bonds of this witch? Think how we can catch her and marry her to the old villain!"

"Spieglein, you need only approach and you wake profitable thoughts in me."

"I knew well you were clever! I've done my part, and it's better if you also add your mustard and harness fresh forces — then it surely can't fail!"

"Since all things come together so beautifully, I need not ponder long — my plan has long been made!"

"How do we catch her?"

"With a new snipe-net of good strong hemp cords; it must be braided by a twenty-year-old hunter's son who's never looked at a woman, and the night-dew must have already fallen on it three times without a snipe being caught — and the reason for this must three times be a good deed. Such a net is strong enough to catch the witch."

"Now I'm curious where you'll get such a thing," said Spieglein, "for I know you don't chatter empty words!"

"It's already found, as if made for us. In a forest not far from here sits a twenty-year-old hunter's son who's never looked at a woman — for he was born blind. Therefore he's good for nothing but braiding nets, and some days ago he completed a new, very beautiful snipe-net. But when the old hunter wanted to spread it for the first time, a woman came along who wanted to tempt him to sin. But she was so ugly that the old man ran away full of terror and left the net lying on the ground. Therefore a dew fell on it without a snipe being caught, and thus a good deed was to blame. When he went the next day to spread the net again, just then a rider came by who had a heavy saddlebag behind him. In this was a hole from which a gold piece fell to the earth from time to time. So the hunter left the net lying again and ran eagerly after the

rider, gathering the gold pieces in his hat until the rider turned around, saw it, and full of fury aimed his lance at him.

Then the hunter stooped, frightened, offered him the hat, and said, "Pardon, gracious lord, you've lost much gold here, which I've carefully gathered for you!" This was again a good deed, since honest finding is one of the most difficult and best. But he was so far from the snipe-net that he left it lying in the forest the second night and took the nearer way home. On the third day finally — namely yesterday — as he was on his way again, he met a pretty godmother who used to flatter the old man and to whom he'd already given many a little hare. Over this he forgot the snipe entirely and said in the morning, "I've given the poor little snipe their lives; one must be merciful even to animals!" And for the sake of these three good deeds, he found himself now too good for this world and went early this morning into a monastery. So the net still lies unused in the forest, and I need only fetch it."

"Fetch it quickly!" said Spieglein. "It will be good for our purpose!"

"I'll fetch it," said the owl. "Just stand watch for me in this hole, and if the mistress should call up the chimney asking whether the air is clear, answer by imitating my voice: 'No, it doesn't stink yet in the fencing-school!'"

Spieglein stationed himself in the niche, and the owl flew quietly over the city toward the forest. Soon she came back with the snipe-net and asked, "Has she called yet?"

"Not yet!" said Spieglein.

Then they spread the net over the chimney and sat down beside it, quiet and clever. The air was dark, and a light morning breeze was blowing in which a few constellations flickered. "You'll see," whispered the owl, "how skillfully she whooshes up through the chimney without getting her gleaming shoulders black!"

"I've never seen her so close," Spieglein replied softly. "If only she doesn't catch us!"

Then the witch called from below, "Is the air clear?"

The owl called, "Quite clear, it stinks gloriously in the fencing-school!" And immediately the witch came riding up and was caught in the net, which the cat and owl hastily drew together and tied. "Hold tight!" said Spieglein, and "Tie well!" said the owl. The witch wriggled and raged mouse-quiet like a fish in a net, but it helped her nothing, and the net proved itself excellently. Only the handle of her broom jutted through the meshes. Spieglein wanted to pull it out gently but received such a blow on the nose that he nearly fainted and saw how one mustn't come too near even a lioness in a net. Finally the witch held still and said, "What do you want from me, you strange creatures?"

"You shall release me from your service and give me back my freedom!" said the owl.

"Much cry and little wool!" said the witch. "You're free — open this net!"

"Not yet!" said Spieglein, still rubbing his nose. "You must pledge to marry the City Sorcerer Pineiss, your neighbor, in the manner we'll tell you, and never leave him!" Then the witch began again to wriggle and hiss like the devil, and the owl said, "She won't agree to it!" But Spieglein said, "If you're not quiet and do everything we wish, we'll hang the net with its contents there on the dragon-head of the roof-gutter, facing the street, so people will see you tomorrow and recognize the witch! So say: would you rather be roasted under Herr Pineiss's supervision, or roast him by marrying him?"

Then the witch said with a sigh, "So speak, how do you mean the matter?" And Spieglein set everything out for her gracefully, how it was meant and what she'd have to do.

"That's still bearable, if it can't be otherwise!" she said and submitted under the strongest formulas that can bind a witch. Then the animals opened the prison and let her out. She immediately mounted the broom, the owl sat behind her on the handle and Spieglein farthest back on the bundle of twigs and held on tight, and thus they rode to the well, into which the witch descended to bring up the treasure.

In the morning Spieglein appeared at Herr Pineiss's and reported that he could see and court the aforementioned person; but she'd already become so poor that, entirely abandoned and cast out, she sat before the gate under a tree weeping bitterly. At once Herr Pineiss dressed in his threadbare yellow velvet doublet, which he wore only on solemn occasions, put on his better fur cap, and girded himself with his sword. In his hand he took an old green glove, a little balsam bottle in which there'd once been balsam and which still smelled a bit, and a paper carnation, whereupon he went with Spieglein before the gate to court. There he found a weeping woman sitting under a willow tree, of such great beauty as he'd never seen; but her garment was so shabby and torn that, however modestly she might behave, always here or there the snow-white body shimmered through a bit. Pineiss opened his eyes wide and could scarcely bring forth his courtship for violent rapture. Then the beauty dried her tears, gave him her hand with a sweet smile, thanked him with a heavenly bell-voice for his generosity, and swore to be forever faithful to him.

But in the same moment such jealousy and envious rage over his bride filled him that he resolved never to let her be seen by any human eye. He had himself married to her by an ancient hermit and celebrated the wedding meal in his house with no other guests than Spieglein and the owl, whom Spieglein had begged permission to bring. The ten thousand gold guilders stood in a bowl on the table, and Pineiss reached in from time to time and rummaged in the gold. Then he looked again at the beautiful wife who sat there in a sea-blue velvet dress, her hair braided with a golden net and adorned with flowers, her white neck surrounded by pearls. He wanted to kiss her

constantly, but she knew how to hold him off bashfully and chastely with a seductive smile, and swore she wouldn't do this before witnesses and before nightfall. This only made him more enamored and blissful, and Spieglein seasoned the meal with lovely conversation, which the beautiful wife continued with the most pleasant, wittiest, and most ingratiating words, so that the sorcerer didn't know what was happening to him for contentment.

But when it had grown dark, the owl and cat took their leave and withdrew modestly. Herr Pineiss accompanied them to the front door with a light and thanked Spieglein once more, calling him an excellent and courteous gentleman. And when he returned to the room, the old white beguine, his neighbor, sat at the table and looked at him with an evil glance. Horrified, Pineiss dropped the candlestick and leaned trembling against the wall. He hung out his tongue, and his face had become as wan and pointed as the beguine's. But she stood up, approached him, and drove him before her into the bridal chamber, where with hellish arts she put him on a torture such as no mortal had yet experienced. Thus he was now indissolubly married to the old woman, and when it became known in the city, people said, "Look how still waters run deep! Who'd have thought the pious beguine and the City Sorcerer would marry! Well, it's an honorable and righteous pair, if not very lovable!"

But Herr Pineiss now led a miserable life. His wife had immediately taken possession of all his secrets and ruled him completely. He was permitted not the slightest freedom or recreation; he had to practice sorcery from morning to evening for all he was worth, and when Spieglein passed by and saw it, he said kindly, "Always industrious, industrious, Herr Pineiss?"

Since that time they say in Seldwyla: He bought the lard from the cat! — especially when someone has acquired an evil and disagreeable wife.