

skin will stiffen and crack, and split from top to bottom to reveal nothing but dead, seized-up metal inside him. He will never work again.'

'But why didn't you tell me this would happen?'

'You were in such a hurry that you didn't ask.'

'Can't you just wind him up?'

'Impossible.'

'But what can we do?' said Prince Otto in his rage and despair. 'Is there nothing that can save his life? I must have an heir! The survival of the Royal Family depends on it!'

'There is one thing,' said Dr Kalmenius. 'He is failing because he has no heart. Find him a heart, and he will live. But I don't know where you'll find a heart in good condition that its owner is willing to part with. Besides—'

But Prince Otto had left already. He didn't stop to hear the rest of what Dr Kalmenius was going to say. That's often the way with princes; they want instant solutions, not difficult ones that take time and care to bring about. What the great clockwork-maker had been going to



say was this: 'The heart that is given must also be kept.' But quite possibly Prince Otto wouldn't have understood anyway.

He rode back to the palace, turning the problem over in his mind. And what a dilemma! To save his son, he had to sacrifice another human being! What could he do? And whom could he ask to make such a great sacrifice?

And then he thought of the Baron Stelgratz.

Of course! There was no-one better. Baron Stelgratz was an old, trusted adviser, a staunch friend, faithful, brave, and true. The little prince loved him, and he and the baron used to play for hours at mock-battles with Prince Florian's toy soldiers, and the good old nobleman would teach him how to handle a sword or fire a pistol, and tell him all about the animals of the forest.

The more Prince Otto thought about it, the better a choice it seemed. Baron Stelgratz would leap at the chance to give his heart for the family. Better not tell him yet, though; better wait till they were at Dr Kalmenius's workshop; then he would see the necessity quite clearly.



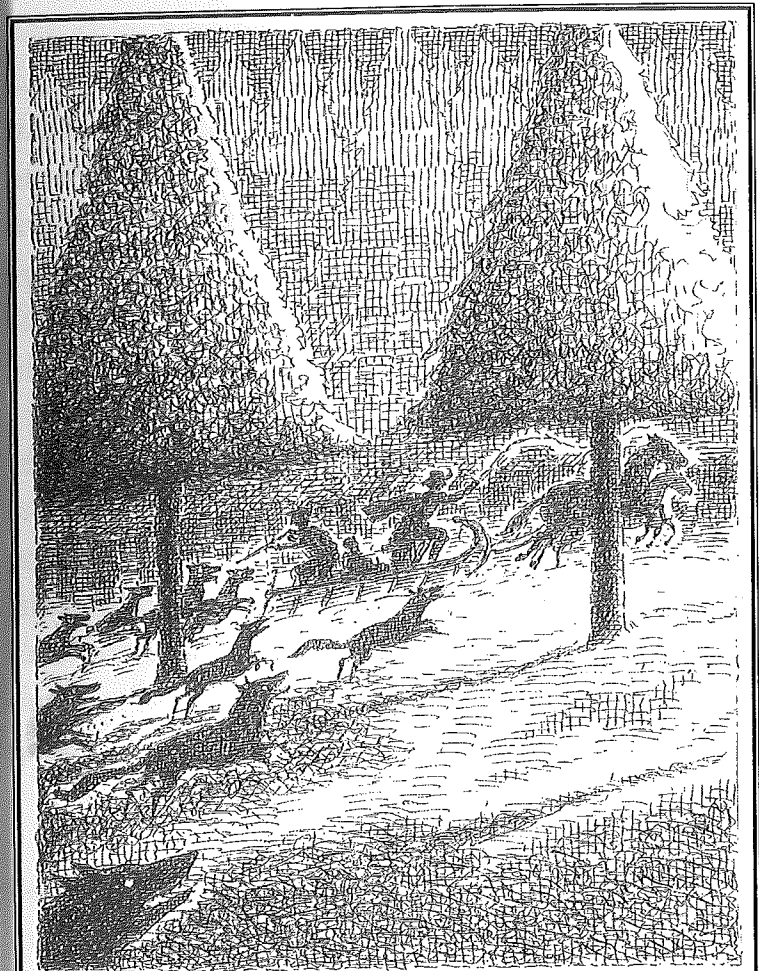
When Prince Otto arrived back at the palace he found that the little prince had got worse. He could hardly walk without falling over stiffly and his voice, which had been so full of life and laughter, was becoming more and more like a musical-box; he said very little, but he sang the same few songs over and over. It was clear that he wouldn't last very long.

So Prince Otto went straight to the princess and persuaded her that a few days' hunting some brisk exercise in the forest, would do the little child a power of good. Furthermore, he said, Baron Stelgratz would come too; no harm would come to Florian in the baron's company.

So Prince Otto wrapped the little boy up well and set him in the sledge with Baron Stelgratz beside him, and off they set.

But on the way through the forest, as darkness was falling, the sledge was attacked by wolves.

Maddened by hunger, the great grey beast poured out of the trees and sprang up at the horses. Prince Otto lashed his whip furiously and the sledge leapt forward, with the wolve



THE ONLY THING TO DO WHEN YOU'RE CHASED BY WOLVES IS TO THROW THEM SOMETHING TASTY, AND HOPE YOU GET AWAY WHILE THEY EAT IT. BARON STELGRATZ KNOWS THIS. HE'S JUST FIRING HIS LAST BULLET. HE KNOWS THAT TOO.



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tearing after. Prince Florian sat beside the baron, gripping the side of the sledge, and watched fearfully as the wolf-pack raced closer and closer. Baron Stelgratz emptied his rifle at the pack of leaping, slaving beasts, without deterring them in the least, and the sledge bumped and swayed from side to side on the rough track. At any moment they might crash and then they would all perish.

‘Highness!’ cried the baron. ‘There is only one thing to do, and I do it with all my heart!’

And the good old man threw himself off the sledge. To save his friends, he sacrificed himself

Instantly the wild wolves turned on him and tore him to pieces, and the sledge drove on into the silent forest, leaving the snarling, howling beasts far behind.

And *now* what could Prince Otto do?

Drive on, was the only answer; drive on! And hope to find some lonely huntsman or woodcutter, and compensate their family later on. But not a single human being came into view. Behind Prince Otto, the little child, wrapped in furs, was huddled alone on the bouncing seat of



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the sledge, stiffening, growing colder, changing back into a machine minute by minute. Occasionally the movement of the sledge would shake a little song out of him, but he spoke no more.

Finally they arrived at the mines of Schatzberg, and the house of the clockwork-maker.

And there was only one solution. Prince Otto realized that he had to sacrifice himself, and he was ready. The dynasty was more important than anything else: more important than happiness, than love, than truth, than peace, than honour; far more important than his own life. Prince Otto would give up his heart, cold, fanatical, and proud as it was, for the sake of the future glory of the Royal House.

‘You’re quite sure this is what you want?’ said Dr Kalmenius.

‘Don’t argue with me! Take out my heart, and put it in my child’s breast! It doesn’t matter if I die, as long as the dynasty lives!’

The problem now was not the heart, it was the return: how could the child drive back on



his own? So, for an extra payment, Dr Kalmenius agreed to animate the dead body of Prince Otto with a small degree of purpose - just enough to drive the sledge back to the palace.

The operation was performed. Prince Otto's heart was detached from his breast with subtle instruments, and transferred into the weak and failing body of the silver boy. Instantly, a bright flush of health took the place of Prince Florian's metallic pallor, his eyes opened, and a lively vigour spread through all his limbs. He was alive.

Meanwhile, Dr Kalmenius prepared a simple piece of clockwork apparatus to put in the breast of Prince Otto. It was very crude; when it was wound up, it would make his body drive to the palace. That was all it would do. But it would do it for a long, long time. If Prince Otto's body had been taken to the other side of the world, he would have set off at once for home, though the flesh rotted and fell off his bones, and would never stop until many years later, when his skeleton drove the sledge into



the courtyard, with the clockwork ticking in his ribs.

So Dr Kalmenius placed the sleeping body of Prince Florian in the sledge, well wrapped up against the cold, and put the whip into the hand of his dead father, who began at once to lash and lash and lash; and the horses, foaming with terror, began their mad gallop homewards.

And a strange homecoming they had of it. You might have heard the tale of how the sledge drove in at the palace gates, and how the Royal Physician found the clockwork heart. The servants whispered about the dead man whose arm wouldn't keep still, and rumours and guesses flew through the palace and the city like shuttles in a loom, weaving a story of corpses and ghosts, of curses and devils, of death and life and clockwork. But no-one knew the truth.

So time passed. They searched for the baron, they mourned for Prince Otto, Princess Mariposa wept very fetchingly in her widow's black, and Prince Florian grew. Five more years went by, and everyone said how handsome the little prince was, how merry and good, how



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lucky they were to have such a child as the heir of the family!

But as the winter of the prince's tenth year set in, the dreaded symptoms returned. Prince Florian complained of pains in his joints, of a stiffness in his arms and legs, of a constant chill; and his voice lost its human expressiveness and took on the tinkling sound of a musical-box.

Just as before, the Royal Physician was baffled.

'He has inherited this disease from his father,' he said. 'There can be no question about that.'

'But what disease is it?' said Princess Mariposa.

'A congenital weakness of the heart,' said the physician, sounding as if he knew. 'Combined with inflammatory oxidosis. But if you remember, Your Highness, we cured that last time by means of healthy exercise in the forest. What Prince Florian needs is a week at the hunting lodge.'

'But last time he went with his father and Baron Stelgratz, and you know what happened then!'



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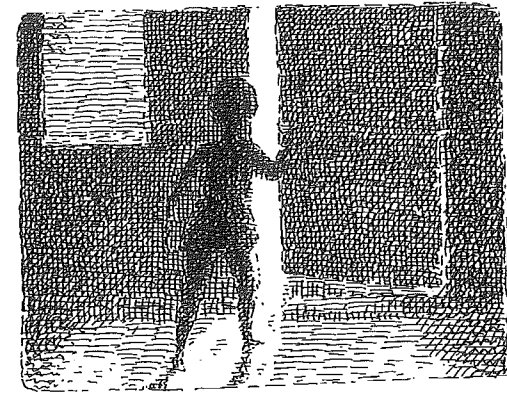
'Ah, medical science has advanced wonderfully in the past five years,' said the physician. 'Have no fear, Your Highness. We shall arrange a hunting trip for the little prince, and he will come back glowing with health, just as he did before.'

But it seemed that the courtiers had less faith in the advance of medical science than the physician, for they all remembered what had happened last time, and none of them wanted to risk a journey through the forest, even if it was to save Prince Florian. This one had gout, that one had an urgent appointment in Venice, another had to visit his aged grandmother in Berlin, and so on, and so on. There was no question of the physician himself going; he was needed every moment at the palace, in case of an emergency. And Princess Mariposa could not possibly go, because the winter air was so bad for her complexion.

Finally, because there was no-one else to do it, they called up one of the grooms and offered him ten silver pieces to take little Prince Florian to the hunting lodge.



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PART THREE



Sir Ironsoul stopped at once, with a whirr and a click. His sword was inches from Gretl's throat. The prince's song rang out sweetly through the parlour.

Gretl could only stare: in horror at Sir Ironsoul and his sword, in wonder at the prince.

'Where did you come from?' she said. 'Are you the little prince in the story? I think you must be. But how cold you are! And who is this? How sharp his sword is! I don't like him at all. Oh, what must I do? I feel I'm supposed to do something, but I don't know what it is!'

There was no-one to help. She was alone

