

The carters went home, but I was burning with curiosity to learn how it happened that the innkeeper had been struck, though I heard only the sound of it and hadn't seen anyone do it. On our way home, I kept on asking the carter what he knew about it and begged him to give me the explanation.

"I cannot tell you, son," he said. "It's a secret which must not be revealed."

However, I was itching to find out the truth and never missed asking him about it whenever I had a chance to talk to him.

Finally, hearing certain rumors, I began to think that he had a devil and said so.

"Well, son," he said, "I shan't have it for very much longer; I'm going to get rid of it."

One day, it was on a Sunday—being a farmhand it was his free day—he up and goes to the woods, taking a hand drill with him. He made for the forest, which lay a mile and a half across the boundary of our village. When he reached the thickest part of the wood, he took his drill and began boring a deep hole into a birch tree—a black birch it was. I was still a young boy at that time, and I was trailing him with one of my buddies, though we kept a good distance between him and ourselves. When we saw him working on the tree, we drew back so that he would not see us. When the hole was deep enough, we saw him draw forth a small box from his pocket. He pushed the box into the hole and then from another pocket he pulled forth a sort of plug which he fitted tightly into the hole. This done, he took to his heels and ran for dear life back to his village. An infernal din and racket came from the tree as he was running away from it. As soon as he got across the boundary and reached the edge of his village he collapsed on the ground. "Thank God! I'm safe now!"

From the tree a voice called after him, "You doggone skunk! You can call yourself lucky to have escaped me by running away, or I'd have fixed you."

But the carter had crossed the village boundary and was safe. The devil had no power over him beyond the edge of the woods. That's how he got rid of the devil.

## • 55 • *Knowledge Obtained at the Crossroads*

I've heard this from János. He served on the squire's manor. There was a carter on this manor. He always drove a fine big horse. János slept in the stable, together with this carter, and had noticed that the man had never once fed or curried the horse.

He thought it was odd and asked the carter about it. "How is it that you never curry the horse?"

All the carter did to the horse was to pass his hand over its back, and that very minute the horse would go off like the wind or pitch off its rider. The carter used this horse to carry water to the threshers. János used to go with him and help with the casks.

One day there was a quarrel between the bailiff and the carter. The dispute arose just before they got ready to go to the threshers. Until that day they had always taken five casks of water. This time, the carter said that they would take only two. János wondered why and asked the carter about it.

"Never mind, Jancsi. The two casks will do."

When they went to the stable to harness the horse, they found it in such poor state that they could hardly manage to get him out of the stable.

"What's the matter with the horse? What the dickens has come over this doggone beast?"

Well, when they had filled the two casks with water and wanted to set off, the horse was not able to pull the cart. The bailiff saw that and stepped to the carter and said he was sorry for his harsh words.

János saw that the carter had a piece of rag in his hand and that he passed it along the sides of the horse. And when he led the horse back into the stable, and passed the rag once more along its back, suddenly it seemed to come to life and it looked as fiery as a *töltő* horse.

János would have liked to obtain such secret knowledge as the carter possessed and asked the man to let him in on it, so that he too could make use of it at home with his horses.

"Well, I can tell you how to go about it, but I'm sure you'd back out before you had gotten through with it."

"I don't think so. Just let me hear it!"

"Well, then go out to the crossroads, and there you will learn what you want to know. But mind that you go three nights in succession."

And János had made up his mind that he would go to the crossroads. He knew the place, it was where a crucifix stood by the roadside. But before going he wanted to talk it over with the old shepherd, a wise old man, who served on a nearby farm.

When the shepherd heard what János had in mind to do, he said to him, "I see, old boy, you've already made up your mind to go. But be careful and do not bring yourself to ruin. If you really want to go, you must take along a piece of blessed chalk, and when you come to the crossroads, you must draw a big circle around yourself. And should you drop terror-stricken on the ground, take care that you remain inside the circle. And then you'll see who it is that comes to meet you."

János took leave of the shepherd and went to see his foster mother. He told her about his intention of going out to the crossroads. She was all against it at first, but finally she gave him a piece of blessed chalk and a bunch of protective grass (being the village midwife and medicine woman, she possessed these things).

So János set off one night, and when he came to the crossroads he drew a big circle with the chalk around himself.

The first night he did not see anything in particular. Nor on the second night. On the third night—it was about midnight—he beheld a big snarling dog running straight up to him from the direction of Olaszi. But the dog dashed past the circle. Then suddenly, the sound of trampling reached his ears; a herd of fillies came running up to where he stood. He thought that they would run him down. But when they reached the circle, they turned and took off in another direction. Then he saw a big vicious bull making for him, with his horns ready to butt him.

"The beast will toss me up and send me flying straight out of this circle," he thought to himself. But when the bull reached the circle, it gave an angry roar and then turned and ran away. Soon he beheld a regiment of soldiers drawing closer and closer. A whole army it was, with the artillery, the infantry, and the bussars marching straight in the direction where he stood. But they too passed by. And then a fine glass coach came driving up, pulled by six fiery horses. There were gentlemen sitting inside the coach, and what fine looking gents they were.

"Hullo, Jancsi!" And they reached their hands out to him when the coach stopped at the circle.

"Come on, friend! Step out of the circle and come nearer to us, as you were so eager to make our acquaintance."

"I won't step out of the circle, because I know very well what you're after."

"Oh, do not fear us, Jancsi. Come here and let's make friends."

But when their time was up, they bawled at him, "Just wait and see, you doggone scoundrel! We'll fix you for having bluffed us."

János went home and went to bed. But every night thereafter he was taken by them and carried to the Mancsalka (a hill at the edge of the village, known as the Evils' Haunt). There they had their midnight merriment. They pressed János to repudiate God and the Blessed Virgin, and to give up going to church.

"I wouldn't do it for any horse," he said.

And he went to his foster mother to seek her advice, because he felt terribly ill. And finally he made a clean breast of it all and told the old woman how he had been dragged away to Mancsalka Hill night after night, and how he had been tortured there and made to suffer such agonies that now he had come to the end of his rope.

After that she went to see him as often as she could and, sitting at his bedside, she prayed for him. But as soon as she went away, he was dragged again and again to the hill.

"Oh, you good-for-nothing lad. So that's why you've asked me for a piece of blessed chalk," she said scornfully.

And as she couldn't think of any other way to help him, she

went to the priest and told him about János' trouble. The priest was horrified to hear about it and said he should confess his sins, as that was the only thing that might help him. So János confessed to the priest, and after that the devils tortured him no more, and he was left in peace.

János died last year. He told me himself about these things and said that every word of it was true, and that it had all happened in his lifetime. He also said that he wouldn't swear to its verity, but it was up to anyone to try it for himself, if he thought it wasn't true.



## SECTION C

### WITCHES

#### • 56 • *The Witch that Came with the Whirlwind*

There might be a witch in the whirlwind. My grandfather told me about it. They were harvesting wheat. He and his partner were having their midday meal, sitting under a shock of wheat. Well, to make it short, as he was sitting there and eating, a nasty whirlwind came sweeping along, knocking over a group of shocks. When it reached the shock under which he was sitting, my grandfather threw his knife straight into the center of the whirlwind. And immediately he made a search for his knife. But there was no knife. What had happened to it? Where had it gone? For all he knew, it had vanished into thin air. It was no use wasting his time looking for it.

When winter came, he went to the village one day to visit his

friend with whom he had harvested wheat. His friend offered him a snack. "Try this cold bacon, partner."

"Thanks, partner, I'll try it."

"Well, help yourself."

He pulled the plate to him. "Would you like a knife?" his friend's wife asked him, and gave him a knife.

He takes a good look at the knife. "I say, missus, this is my very own knife."

"To be sure, it isn't yours."

"Why, certainly it's mine."

"Well, how did you lose it?"

He said, "When we were out harvesting the wheat at this and that field, a terrible whirlwind came on. I was nearly swept away by it. So I threw my knife into the whirlwind. And since then it has been lost."

"Well," she said, "I tell you what. Never do it again. See! Here's the mark of your knife on my heel. I took your knife away on that day."

That's why I say that there's a witch in the whirlwind.

#### • 57 • *The Man Who Understood the Language of Animals*

There was an old woman. There was a young man called Jancsi. He was in her service. The old woman had a daughter. She had land and jewelry, and plenty of both.

The old woman said to Jancsi, "Go, my son, and plow the fields on the day before St. George's Day. After you have plowed a while, bring me a frog. But it must be the first frog turned up by the plow. And take care that you do not lose it."

Jancsi brought her the frog. Then he kept watching her because he wanted to learn what she'd do with it. She tore the frog apart. She swallowed one half immediately, and cast the other half under her bed.