Liputto



Stories of Gnomes and Trolls

by

Jakob Streit

illustrated by

Susanne A. Mitchell

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Waldorf Publications
Research Institute for Waldorf Education

Published by:

Waldorf Publications at the
Research Institute for Waldorf Education
38 Main Street
Chatham, NY 12037

Title: *Liputto: Stories of Gnomes and Trolls*
Author: Jakob Streit
Translator: Nina Kuettel
Illustrator: Susanne Aléthea Mitchell
Editor: David Mitchell
Layout: Ann Erwin
Proofreader: Nancy Jane
Cover: Hallie Wootan

Original edition © 1999 AWSNA
ISBN# 1-888365-26-9

2nd Edition © 2016 Waldorf Publications
ISBN# 978-1-936367-95-5

Curriculum Series

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Contents

The Net Troll 7

The Net Troll and the Dragonfly 9

The Net Troll Goes after Butterflies 13

The Net Troll Goes after a Frog 15

The Story of Little Gnome Liputto 17

Liputto and the Trampled Violet 20

Liputto and the Lame Butterfly 22

A Little Bird Falls out of the Nest 23

Liputto Saves a Bunny 26

Little Brother and Sister on the Cliff Top 30

Liputto and the Silver Cup 35

Liputto Goes to the Children 38

Liputto Goes to School 42

Further Roaming 45

Back at the Waterfall 49

When the Cup Was Lost 53

The Dream of the Cup 59

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The Net Troll

There was once a very peaceful, blue-green bit of water that was a pond. A goldfish was swimming in it in the sunshine. When rays of sun fell on his scales, they lit up like gold. Then, little mosquitoes came and flew over the glittery fish—up and down. They hummed, "It's nice here! The heavenly sun shines above, and below shines the little water sun!" When the goldfish swam on, the mosquitoes flew after him. If one listened very closely, the delicate humming of the mosquitoes sounded like music.

Near the pond there was a cave. In the cave there lived a troll with sticky fingers. He was forever wanting to put more and more things into his cave. If he saw a pretty flower, then he would tear it off and throw it in his cave without even admiring it properly. If he saw a shiny bug—whoosh!… into the cave it went.

One day the troll discovered the beautiful goldfish in the pond and grunted loudly, "I want to catch him. Him I have to take into my cave!"

The little mosquitoes overheard him. They talked it over together to decide how they could protect the goldfish.

The troll went to the big spider who was to weave a very strong net for him. Somewhere he found a glass that humans had thrown away. He brought it into the cave and filled it with water. After he got the net from the spider, he crept to the pond.

But the mosquitoes called to the goldfish, "Hide! Dive down deep! The Net Troll is coming! He wants to catch you!" The little fish dove down to the bottom of the pond into the green water-moss. When the Net Troll got closer, the goldfish was gone.

And so it went for a few days. The Net Troll didn't notice what the mosquitoes were telling the little fish. Eventually he became angry and wouldn't leave the fish in peace.

One day when the mosquitoes were dancing over the goldfish, it started to rain. To stay dry, the mosquitoes had to fly under the leaves of a tree. When the Net Troll came sneaking up, they were not there to warn the goldfish, "Hide yourself!" The troll threw his net into the water, and the little fish was flopping inside. The troll pulled out the net, grabbed the goldfish, and started to put it in his pocket. Just at that moment a mosquito shot down from the oak tree and—ping!—bit the troll hard on the hand. Startled, he let go of the fish, and it fell back into the water. Plumps! Soosh! It disappeared and dived deep, deep down to the bottom.

The mosquitoes said to one another, "We can't let the Net Troll capture our little goldfish. Some of us should always be dancing over the pond, even when it's raining. Rain drops aren't so bad." As long as the mosquitoes danced, the Net Troll couldn't harm the little fish.



The Net Troll and the Dragonfly

One day a dragonfly sat upon a green lily pad on the pond where the goldfish lived. The white lily smelled wonderful. The dragonfly got up and flew over the flower, beating its wings to spread the perfume through the air. When it was tired, it rested again upon the green leaf.

Just then the goldfish swam up. He raised his head a little out of the water and spoke to the dragonfly, "Do you know the Net Troll? He's always trying to catch me. Until today, the mosquitoes warned me when he was sneaking up to the pond. But now they've flown over to the marsh. Could you, dear dragonfly, be my lookout and tell me when the Net Troll is coming?"

The dragonfly answered, "Yes, that I will! I have time for that. I don't like the Net Troll either. He tried to throw his net over me once. But I was able to get away from him— lightning fast."

That afternoon the dragonfly noticed the Net Troll crawling near, so it flew to the goldfish. It sank so low that its filmy wings touched the water and made tiny waves. The little fish knew: *Now I have to hide!* The Net Troll didn't find the fish no matter how many times he sneaked around the pond and peered into the water.

One day the dragonfly thought: *Today I want to fly a little ways over to the marsh to play with the reeds in the wind.*

As soon as it was gone, the Net Troll came sliding craftily up to the pond. Nobody was there to warn the fish. He threw the net, and the goldfish was flip-flopping inside once again. This time the Net Troll quickly stuck the fish into his dark pocket. The little fish felt weak and sick in the air. He could do nothing but shudder a little bit.

When the troll got to his cave, he plopped the goldfish into the water in the glass bowl and put a flat stone on top. Then he lay down

flat on his belly on the floor in front of the glass bowl and stared at the little fish. The troll was fascinated to see the little fish wiggling in the water and bumping its head against the glass wall again and again. After the troll had leered long enough, he trotted into the nearby woods.

A little while later the dragonfly returned to the pond. Even though it searched and searched, there was no goldfish to be found.

A frog croaked, "The troll took it."

The dragonfly thought: *I know where his cave is. I'm going to go look!*

It flew to the cave as fast as lightning. The troll was away. The dragonfly flew carefully inside and saw the imprisoned fish. But it couldn't slide the heavy stone off the glass bowl. The dragonfly thought: *I'll go get the big raven, Craw-Craw. He's very strong. He can help.*

The dragonfly flew to the oak tree where Craw-Craw often rested. Yes, he was there! The dragonfly buzzed around his head and beak.

"Craw, craw," it called, "Can you come and help me? The troll has locked up the goldfish in his cave. We have to free it!"

Craw-Craw answered scratchily, "Count me in. I'm coming! Troll wanted to throw his net over me once, but it was too small. I was able to get away."

The dragonfly and the raven flew together to the troll's cave. Umpff and harrumpff! And Craw-Craw tipped the flat stone.

The dragonfly called out, "Little fish, the raven will bring you back to the pond. Don't be afraid! He doesn't swallow fish."

So the goldfish let himself be taken into the raven's beak. Craw-Craw flew to the pond and plumped him down into the water. Oh, how glorious it was to be back swimming around in the lovely, green pond.

When the troll got back to his cave, he noticed right away what had happened. Angry, he threw the glass bowl out of the cave, and it shattered on a rock. But he never did find out how the goldfish got away.



The Net Troll Goes after Butterflies

From then on the Net Troll left the goldfish alone. He didn't have a glass bowl anymore to keep it in. One day, as he was nodding his head back and forth for a long time, a thought came into it: *I'll take my net on a butterfly hunt and catch beautiful butterflies!* He wanted to stick them onto the walls of his cave with honey. But first he had to find some honey.

He knew of a hill where some bumblebees had bored out holes for their nests. He hid in the grass. After the bumblebees had flown out in the morning, the troll swiped the honey out of the nests with a few acorn shells he had brought along to keep it in. When he got back to his cave, he smeared the honey on the walls. Then he took his net and shuffled out to the meadow.

The first thing he caught was a yellow butterfly, and he took it back to his cave and pasted it onto his wall. "I have to have lots, lots more. That will make my dark cave pretty!" he said gruffly.

Soon he caught a white butterfly, a blue one and a beautifully patterned one. All were glued onto the wall.

The troll saw a bee sitting on a bloom. A monarch butterfly was just going to that flower when—swish! The butterfly was in the net. The troll waddled back to his cave, and the bee followed him. It watched as the troll fastened the butterfly onto the wall with the honey. It saw the other butterflies captured there. The bee was horrified to see what was happening. The troll grinned and counted how many he already

had on the wall. There were five. They tried to move their wings to free themselves. It was no use! The honey held them fast.

The little bee quickly flew back to its hive and told the queen bee everything. The queen advised, "Take a group of your bee sisters with you to the cave, suck up the honey and then the butterflies will be able to fly again and get away."

The bees gathered together quickly and flew with the messenger bee to the troll's cave. The mischief-maker was still sitting inside and tickling the butterflies with a blade of grass while they could only flutter helplessly. My goodness, what a buzzing noise there was when all the bees flew into the little cave. The troll tried to scare them right out again but—pick-pick-pick!—he got a few stings and went screaming out of the cave.

Now the bees could lick the butterflies off the walls undisturbed. Half dazed, the freed butterflies crawled out of the cave. Their wings dried as soon as they were outside in the sunshine. They thanked the bees and flew out into the bright world. The bees slurped up the last drops of honey from the acorn shells and then flew home to tell the queen that everything had turned out all right.

On that evening the troll didn't have the nerve to go back to his cave at all, so he spent the night in the roots of a tree stump.

The Net Troll Goes after a Frog

The next day a very bored Net Troll was sitting in his cave. He pulled a few hairs out of his beard and began to braid them. Then a thought occurred to him: *I could tie up something in the cave with this hair rope.* But what? He sneaked over to the pond and gazed around. A little green frog with yellow-gold eyes was sitting on a lily pad.

"I'm going to catch him!" whispered the troll.

Through the reeds the troll drew closer and tossed the net. The little frog was trapped inside. It was not long before it was sitting as a prisoner in the troll's cave with one foot bound tight to a wooden peg. The troll was tickling the frog with a little rod, just for fun, until the miserable little frog could only hop from side to side.

The dragonfly saw what the troll had done. Just then a bee and a butterfly were sitting together on a lily pad. They were talking about the terrible troll cave. The dragonfly joined them and told what had just happened. The three talked over what they could do to defend themselves against the awful deeds of the troll.

Suddenly, the bee had a good idea. "I saw a strong hedgehog over by the forest flowers. He's full of sharp quills. He could stop up the cave so that the troll would never be able to go in it again." The others thought this was an excellent suggestion. The bee found the hedgehog and buzzed the message into his ears.

After they had told him everything, the hedgehog shuddered and said, "Just let me at him! I'll get rid of that troll all right. Show me the way!" He trotted along behind the flight of the bee, the butterfly and the dragonfly.

The entrance to the troll's cave was low. The hedgehog crawled inside and filled up the whole opening.

The troll was startled when the cave suddenly became so dark, and he shouted, "Get away from here, you putrid porcupine!"

That didn't bother the hedgehog. He retorted, "You get away from here right now, or I'll spit sharp spines into your belly!"

The troll began to quake with fear. The hedgehog cleared the way for him. The troll leaped away in big bounds and was never seen again. The hedgehog then bit through the hair rope and let the little frog loose. The frog thanked the good hedgehog and jumped back to the pond as fast as he could.

The hedgehog also chewed up into tiny pieces the net that the troll had left and then he lay down right there to rest. He thought: *This cave will make a nice refuge for winter. I think I will stay right here.*

The next morning when the sun came up, the little frog was sitting on the lily pad and the bee and the butterfly were on the white lily blossom. The goldfish swam around in circles. The little frog told how the hedgehog had gotten rid of the Net Troll and chewed up his evil net. Now there was peace and quiet again at the green pond. And every once in a while the little frog sounded a happy, croaking song from the reeds.

When autumn came, the hedgehog stuffed the cave full of leaves and had a nice winter sleep inside.

But where were the bees in winter? They slept in their hive nestled up close to their queen.

And where was the dragonfly? The butterfly? They entrusted themselves to Mother Earth, so that in the new summer they could become young again.

Where did the little frog spend the winter? He dug himself deep into the mud of the pond to sleep the winter through, so that come spring he could croak away fresh and new!

The Story of Little Gnome Liputto

Liputto was a mountain flower-root gnome. He had lived in the mountains for many years. In the summer he helped the mountain flowers to grow. When they bloomed, he pulled the sunlight down through the roots into the earth. That's how there came to be sundrops in the earth that were like little jewels. Liputto and many other gnomes carried the sundrops deeper into the earth and divided their rays so that everything shone brightly down there in autumn and winter. Mother Earth needs many sundrops so in the spring everything can grow and bloom nicely.

The gnome master told all this to Liputto, "Blue flowers drip blue light into the deep, red flowers, red light—all the colors of the rainbow."

Every year when winter came, a colored ring would appear on Liputto's gnome cap. Those who had worked for the mountain flowers for seven years wore all seven colors of the rainbow on their caps. Liputto was now on his seventh ring and was happy that when the spring came, he would get a roaming cap and be able to wander around for a year. Then he could be in the earth or on top of it, invisible to humans, and roam all over for a whole year!

In spring Liputto went to the gnome master to trade in his rainbow cap for a blue roaming cap.

The master spoke, "Liputto, be careful not to lose the roaming cap. As long as you have it on your head, no human can see you. Take it off or lose it, and you will be visible to humans. The blue cap makes you invisible. Only the animals can always see you, even when you're wearing it. Where do you want to go?"



Liputto answered, “First, I want to get to know lots and lots of animals on the earth and look around a little bit to see what the people do.”

The gnome master said, “Animals won’t do you any harm, but don’t ever take your cap off when you’re around people. If they see you—you never know what will get into their heads. The most beautiful wanderings are to be had underground. There you will see pretty crystals, jewels, gold, and silver!”

As Liputto took off his rainbow cap and received the blue one, he looked a little sadly at the beautiful rainbow colors.

The gnome master comforted him, “The elves scrape off the delicate color dust from the rainbow cap to give to the butterflies. Next summer they will be fluttering in the sunny world with your colors on their wings.”

Liputto wasn’t really sure how it all worked, but now he was happy to have his roaming cap.

Liputto and the Trampled Violet

Liputto started out with joyful spirits into the spring. He was so happy that every so often, in the forest, he would toss his cap high in the air. At the edge of the forest he stepped out of the undergrowth, stood still and listened to the world. What was that? Next to the path he heard a quiet, mournful voice.

"Oh, the pain! These human feet! Oh, the pain! These human feet!"

Liputto looked closer and beheld a little plant with trampled petals. It was the violet.

Liputto asked, "What's wrong? You're completely flat!"

The violet answered, "A human foot came by here and stepped on me."

Liputto bent down and said, "I'll help you! I'm good at stroking leaves and roots and putting them right."

With his nimble fingers he began to loosen the earth and press the leaves. He fetched water from a little stream and gave the plant a drink.

Liputto asked, "What smells so nice here?"

The violet said, "My blooms are releasing their perfume as a thank you, dear gnome."

Liputto wanted to get very close to the little violet with his nose. He took off his cap and laid it on the ground next to him. His nose got a little blue from smelling. It was fabulous! He didn't notice that the human foot was coming back down the path. Not until it was almost upon him did he hear stamping and shuffling. Forgetting to put his cap on, he looked at the foot. It was actually two feet, and above them were long, brown legs, and further

up a blue jacket, and on the very top was a round head with curly, brown hair. It had its mouth wide open and was staring, shocked, with its round eyes. The boy stood there as if rooted to the spot. Liputto now realized that the boy could see him. He quickly grabbed for his cap and put it on, and – quick as a blink – he was invisible.

The farmer boy in the brown pants and blue jacket looked all around. He didn't see any gnome, and yet he had been so close just a second ago! How strange!

That evening, before he went to bed, the boy told his mother, "Mother, today I saw a real gnome at the edge of the forest, as true as my name is John!"

The farmer's wife knew very well that gnomes and elves existed, because as a girl she had caught a glimpse of one every now and then."Yes," said his mother, "You were lucky! They seldom show themselves these days."



Liputto and the Lame Butterfly

The next day Liputto wandered further out into the meadow. What was that flailing in the grass? It was a yellow butterfly. From time to time it would tiredly move its wings, but it couldn't fly.

Liputto went up to it and asked, "What's wrong? You're completely lame!"

The butterfly whispered, "I can't go on! The rain washed the color dust off my wings, and so I fell in the grass. I'm so weak!"

Liputto said, "Wait, I'll help you."

He went and found a blooming dandelion, brushed some of the yellow pollen onto his fingers, and dabbed it onto the butterfly's wings. Then he said, "Now, drink some of the honey out of the flower. Honey makes you strong!"

The butterfly put out his little tongue and dipped it into the dandelion bloom. It sipped and sipped. Liputto held it up in his hand. The butterfly's wings vibrated faster and faster until suddenly it lifted into the air and flew around Liputto three times. "Thank you! Thank you!" said the butterfly. Then it happily flew away over the meadow flowers. Liputto said to himself, "I had no idea there was so much to do in the world! I'm going back to the forest now."

A Little Bird Falls out of the Nest

In a tree in the forest was a bird's nest. Baby birds were sitting inside. They had hatched out of the eggs a few days before. The three oldest had some downy feathers by now, but the youngest was a late hatching and was still completely naked. Not one single feather was showing on his skin. When the father or mother bird brought food, then all four chicks stretched their necks and held their beaks wide open. Then it happened. The oldest acted so foolishly at feeding time that the littlest one got a shove and fell out of the nest. Fortunately, it landed on soft moss. There the naked, little bird lay and shivered. The parents stopped the feeding at once. They hopped around the little one on the ground, peeping and calling in their fear, but they couldn't really do anything to help. There was such a noise! In the nest above the chicks peeped, "We're hungry! Bring us something to eat!" And below the parents cheeped, "How shall we get the baby back up there? We're not strong enough! When the wild cat comes, she'll eat it! Peep, peep, peep!"

At just that moment Liputto came walking through the forest. What was all that noise—such unhappy twitterings? He stood still and listened. He walked toward the sound and then scampered over to the mother bird. "What's going on here? What's wrong that you're screeching so?"

She pointed her beak at the naked, baby bird lying in the moss and told Liputto just what had happened. "We can't take him up again, and gnomes don't climb trees either. Our youngest is lost when the wild cat comes! Peep, peep, peep!"

Liputto squinted up to the nest. No, he had never climbed a tree. Suddenly, he saw a brown squirrel sitting on a nearby branch. Whenever anything happens in the forest, it's always the squirrels who are the first to

know because they're so curious. Liputto waved at the squirrel, and it came over. He said, "Tell me, bushy tail, would you like to help me?"

"What should I help you with?" the squirrel asked.

"See the baby bird there? I'd like to take him back up to the nest. I'll hold on to your tail, and you pull me up!"

When the parents heard that, they began to twitter for happiness.

The squirrel suggested, "I'll take the baby between my teeth like a pine cone and take him up that way."

The parents both shouted at the same time, "No, you'll bite it, you'll bite our child! Peep, peep, peep!"

Liputto bent down to the ground, took the poor little thing in his hand, and said to the squirrel, "Bushy tail, I'm light as a feather. Do it like I said! I'll hold onto your tail. Get ready and pull me up, but carefully, please!"

The squirrel had never climbed a tree so slowly and sedately as he did now with Liputto. The bird's parents accompanied them, flying from branch to branch forgetting their peeping. When they arrived at the nest above, Liputto set the baby bird in with the other chicks.

The father bird said to the oldest, "If you ever jump around like that again at feeding time, I'll give you a peck!" The oldest was ashamed of himself, and from then on he was more careful of his little brother.

The squirrel asked Liputto, "Shall I take you back down?"

"No," he answered. "I can slide down by myself."

Before the parents could even thank him properly, the squirrel scurried away from branch to branch and tree to tree. They thanked Liputto and stuck two feathers into his blue cap—one from the mother bird and one from the father.



Liputto Saves a Bunny

Mother rabbit had three little bunnies in her nest in the forest undergrowth. The fox came and took two of them. Now she had only one left.

She said to her baby, "Come with me into the world! Here we get no rest from the fox. Always hop very close to me, so that I don't lose you, too."

The bunny asked, "Is it far to the world?"

Mother rabbit answered, "It is not far to the big forest clearing. There are no trees, so the fox won't go there."

They hopped and hopped and hopped and finally came to the meadow. The grass was high. Many kinds of flowers were shining in the green grass.

Mother rabbit said, "You will have to hide in this grassy place. Be completely still and don't move from this spot until I get back!"

"Mother, where are you going?"

"There's a field of carrots in front of the forest. I'll bring you back something good!"

Mother rabbit pressed her paw down on the young one's head so that it nestled down deep. She said, "Stay like that, ducked out of sight, so the fox doesn't find you." The mother hopped away. She turned around once to look and was satisfied when she couldn't see her youngster hiding in the tall grass being perfectly still.

Liputto saw the mother rabbit just as she was coming out of the meadow. He thought: *Maybe she has a nest full of babies in the tall grass.* He followed the rabbit's tracks back to the meadow, because he was curious and he just loved to look at bunnies. Sure enough, he discovered the little rabbit lying in the grass as still as a brown board.

He quietly spoke, "Bunny, where did your mother go?"

The little rabbit didn't answer and didn't move. But his ears were shaking a little from fright. Liputto looked at the little animal from all sides and then went back to the forest.

He sat down on a rock on the forest path, and suddenly he heard a terrible sound. A farmer was coming closer with his grass mower. What a noise: rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat. Liputto didn't like this noise, and he quickly hid himself in the forest undergrowth. The machine clinked by, and it stank horribly. Liputto suddenly had a thought: *The farmer is going to mow the grass in the meadow. The poor bunny!*

He sprang after the machine with long steps. It was just ahead of him and had already started to mow on the meadow's edge: rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat!

Liputto ran to the bunny in the meadow and called, "Bunny, come with me, come quickly! The big grass-eater is on its way!"

But the little rabbit pulled in his fur a little more, laid his ears down completely flat, and closed his eyes. He pressed his little head down to the ground and didn't move. Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat, whirred the machine as it came closer.

Liputto raised one ear of the bunny and yelled, "Come with me, I'll take you to your mother. Come! The rat-a-tat-tat will cut off your ears!"

Now the little rabbit pulled himself together and asked, "Do I still have my ears? Yes? If you'll take me to my mother, then I'll come along!"

Liputto took one rabbit ear in his hand in order to guide the little bunny better. At that very moment the mowing machine with its knife-sharp teeth drove right by them. The bunny was so startled that he made a wild leap, and Liputto lost his grip on the ear. The bunny ran straight through the meadow into the forest, and Liputto chased behind. He was having quite some trouble following him, but managed just in time to see him disappear under a fern bush. The little rabbit's heart was hammering hard. Liputto went to him and petted him until his bristled fur was once again lying smooth.

In the meantime, the mother rabbit had eaten quite a few carrots from the farmer's field. She took a small one between her teeth to take it to her baby in the forest meadow. When she got there the carrot dropped right out of her mouth from astonishment. The whole meadow had been mowed, and the mower had already returned to the farm. The mother rabbit jumped back and forth over the mowed grass, searching for her young one. She called and coaxed, but no little bunny answered. Then she began to race all over the grass, sniffing here and there, but there was no sign of the little bunny. Not knowing what else to do, the mother rabbit sat down in the grass. She stretched out her legs, and her eyes were wide and unblinking. So she lay, sad and defeated.

This whole time, back in the fern bush, Liputto was wondering: *Where can I find the mother rabbit?* When the little bunny was completely calm again, he said, "Stay here and don't move! I'm going to go look for your mother and bring her back here."

Liputto had just crawled out of the bush when he ran into the squirrel.

He asked, "Have you seen a mother rabbit?"

"Yes, she was hopping toward the meadow just a minute ago."

Liputto knew what to do. He found her in the meadow, stretched out on the grass as if she were dead.

"Mother rabbit," he said, "Your little one is alive. I rescued it from the horrible mower. It's in the forest hidden under a fern bush."

The mother rabbit slowly lifted herself onto her paws. She raised her head and perked up her ears. “Good gnome,” she said, “Tell me once again.”

Liputto repeated his words. He continued, “Come on, I’ll take you to him!”

He took the mother rabbit to the concealed fern bush. She smelled her little one and quickly slid inside to him. Everything was quiet. After a little while Liputto peeked under the fern. There lay the mother rabbit, and the bunny was drinking milk from her, while she washed his fur with her tongue.

When she noticed Liputto, she said, “Good, dear gnome you’ve saved my last little bunny! How shall I thank you? Would you like to have a drink of some of my milk?”

Liputto smiled and shook his head. “No, good mother rabbit, I belong to the little people of the forest, and we don’t need earthly food.”

Then the mother rabbit told him about her misfortune with the fox. Liputto said, “Not far from here is a peat forest. There’s a lot of water in the ground, and foxes don’t like that. There’s not one single fox there!”

Liputto led the mother rabbit and her young one to the peat forest. They passed by the meadow. Suddenly, the rabbit stood still and sniffed the air. She jumped a few times. What had she found? The lost carrot. She put it in front of her bunny’s nose. So they took a carrot-break.

Towards evening they all three arrived at the peat forest, and Liputto took his leave. He watched as mother and little bunny disappeared in a hollow under some big roots. From then on the little bunny lived without fear, and he grew into a big, fast rabbit.

Little Brother and Sister on the Cliff Top

Once there was a family with Mother and Father, little Brother and Sister, twins, and they lived happily together. When they played, the brother would often be the horse, and the sister would be the princess and ride on him. Another time, the sister would be the donkey, the brother the farmer, and he would ride on her.

One day Brother and Sister were sitting at the table eating when Father said to Mother, "The spring has pushed the snow way on top of the mountain. In the mountain forest the first little blue wild-flowers are growing now, and up around the cliffs the primroses are blooming."

Mother answered, "Oh, I love the blue wildflowers. They have such lovely star-shaped eyes, and the primroses smell wonderful! It makes me want to be a butterfly and fly right up there."

That evening as the twins were lying in bed in the dark room, the boy said, "Sister, our mother has her birthday the day after tomorrow. We want to do something nice for her. I know just what!"

Sister asked, "What do you know?"

Brother replied, "Tomorrow afternoon we'll go together to the forest and pick a bouquet of blue wildflowers for Mother. They have such beautiful star-shaped eyes."

Sister said, "But we have to go to kindergarten tomorrow afternoon!"

Brother retorted, "It doesn't matter! Our teacher's so nice, she'll understand that we need the afternoon for Mother's birthday. Just please don't say anything. It'll be our secret."

Sister thought it was great to have a secret.

The next afternoon both children set out for the forest. Sister said, "Look, there's fog coming down from up there!"

Brother answered, "It's okay. We'll still be able to find the flowers."

When they came to the mountain forest, they rested by a big boulder. They didn't notice that Liputto, the gnome, was sitting on top of the boulder, because he had on his cap that made him invisible. Sister was a little bit afraid. The sun wasn't shining, and the pine trees looked dark and mysterious. She started to sing a song she had learned in kindergarten. She sang about the spring and all the birds that had already come back. Brother sang along. Liputto found it glorious! Unnoticed, he slipped down beside them.

Suddenly, Brother shouted, "I see blue over there by the big pine!"

He sprang to the tree and started picking the little wild-flowers. There were enough for his sister as well. In no time they both were carrying a blue bouquet in their hands. When soon they came to stony ground again, there were no more flowers to be found.

Sister said, "I don't want to climb further up into the forest. Let's go back!"

Brother said, "There aren't so many trees further ahead. That's where the cliffs start, and the yellow primroses might be growing there. Mother says they smell so nice!"

Sister remained silent and tried to keep up with her brother's pace. All at once the wind blew a patch of fog downward, and it sank into the forest. Sister said, "Take my hand. It's getting cold!"

The fog was getting so thick that they lost sight of the path. This time Sister pleaded, "We should go back! I'm getting scared!"

"No," Brother said, "The fog will clear soon. Our blue bouquet needs some of the yellow primroses, and they smell so good!"

Liputto had been following the children and had overheard everything they said. He saw that they were headed straight for the point of a cliff overlooking the valley far below. *They could have an accident*, thought Liputto. *I'm going to have to take off my cap.* He rushed past the children, stopped right in front of them, and took off his blue cap. As he did so, he held up one little finger which meant: *Watch out! Be careful!*

Since Sister was always looking at the ground and Brother always looking ahead, he saw Liputto first. He stood stock still and pointed his finger. "Look, Sister!" he whispered.

She raised her head, her eyes widened, her mouth fell open, and she looked at the little man standing in the fog. Liputto's smile was so friendly that the children were not afraid. Now the gnome shook his index finger back and forth as if to say: *No further!* He stepped up close to the boy and put out his hand.

The boy thought Liputto was asking for the flowers and so offered him the bouquet. Liputto wagged his finger again: *No!* and pointed to the boy's other hand. When the little boy gave him his hand, Liputto took it and led him back to safety, while the little girl held on tightly to her brother's jacket. So the little gnome hiked back down the mountain with the two children.

Sometimes the fog was so thick that they could only go very slowly forward, step by step. If the children had been alone, they would surely have lost their direction and fallen over the cliff. As the fog lifted, all at once they saw they were back on the path! Liputto still held his blue cap in his hand the whole time.

When they reached the edge of the lower forest, Liputto let go of the boy's hand. He nimbly climbed onto the big boulder by the end of the path. The whole time he hadn't said one word. But now, he pointed to his mouth and then pointed to the little girl. With one hand he was cheerfully keeping time in the air.

Little Brother understood what he meant and said to his sister, "He wants to hear singing!"

As the children began singing, "All the birds are already here …," Liputto danced around on the boulder and flapped his arms like little wings.

Suddenly, they heard a far-off cry. The song stopped. Was that Mother's voice they heard? The little gnome put his cap back on and…he was gone!

During all this time something was going on down in the village. When the two children didn't show up at kindergarten as usual, the teacher sent a message home to Mother to ask if they were ill and had stayed home.

When their mother realized the children hadn't shown up at kindergarten, then she was on her way. She met a farmer's wife just coming in from the field.

She said to Mother, "I saw your children wandering toward the forest all alone!"

Since Father wasn't at home, Mother hurried to the forest full of anxiety. Yes, it was her call that the children had heard. They answered, jumped for joy, and ran down the hill. But how surprised they were to see the worry and tears on their mother's face. She took the children in her arms and said just two words, "Thank God!"

All three wandered together down to the village, hand in hand. Only then did Mother notice that each child was carrying a bouquet of blue wildflowers.

Little Brother gave it away. "Mother," he said, "You'll get these tomorrow for your birthday. Look, their eyes are like little stars! We didn't go as far as the primroses. The fog came."

In the evening Mother tucked her children in bed. They said their little children's prayer:

"Oh, angel, guardian angel mine,
Who serves the Lord so faithfully,
Protect me please until the time
The breath of life has gone from me."

Then Mother said, “Children, today your guardian angel was really looking out for you. We should especially thank him!”

Brother looked at Sister, Sister looked at Brother, and said, “Mother, a little gnome brought us out of the fog today.”

Little Brother added, “When he gave me his hand, it felt like I was holding onto a tattered towel, and his hands were cold.”

Mother thought: *What are they imagining here?*

Little Sister finished by saying, “And then we had to sing him a song, and he danced on top of the boulder.”

Mother laughed and said, “Sleep well, you’ve already started dreaming!”

So the brother and sister had their lovely secret, because they could see that one couldn’t really tell the story to grown-up people. And in the summer, in the forest, the two children often kept their eyes open for the little man, but Liputto had already moved on.

Liputto and the Silver Cup

After Liputto had returned the two children safely to their mother, he went up into the mountains. There was a waterfall high up there rushing down. He lay down close to it on soft moss. He looked at the tumbling water. At the bottom little clouds of fine spray were twirling in the air. He observed the water-drop game a little while and caught a glimpse of the delicate water elves. They floated up and floated down, turning around in sparkling circles.

Dusk was settling in. The moon came up. Liputto lingered by the waterfall and watched the rows of water elves. All at once a bright form stepped out of the rocks. Was it a fairy?

She held a tiny silver cup in her hand. She glided up to him and said, "Dear Liputto, the forest elves have told me how you helped the plants and animals, about the little bird that had fallen from its nest, and about the lost bunny in the meadow grass. You even saved human children from falling off a cliff! I give you this little cup as a reward. It holds many liquid drops inside that have been made from the light of the sun, moon and stars. You can do a lot of good in the world with this cup. Be very careful with it! Never give it into the hands of strangers. If you do, a nasty troll could work evil with it.

"Pay attention! With this cup you will become a sandman for children. No door will be closed to you. When children are sleeping or dreaming, go to them. If you put a little silver drop on their hand, then the next morning they will have nimble hands willing to work. Give them a drop on their heart, and the next day they will want to create things good and beautiful. And if you put a drop on their head, they will have good thoughts."



Liputto asked, What happens when the cup is empty?"

The fairy answered, "Then when the moon is shining, you come back here and call me. You can tell me what you did with the drops, and I will fill the cup again."

After she finished talking, the fairy turned the silver cup over to Liputto. Liputto took the cup in his hand and felt that it was very warm. The fairy waved good-bye with a shimmering hand and was gone. Liputto gazed at the magic cup for a long time and thought: *Now I really do have to go to the humans!*

Liputto Goes to the Children

For two days Liputto walked through the lonely mountain regions. On the evening of the second day, he came to a green valley. As it was growing dark, he looked down and saw lights twinkling in the distance. *Ah-ha*, he thought, *Those are people's houses. The children will be getting ready for bed now. I could give away a few drops from the silver cup tonight.* No sooner said than done!

The first house he came to was a farm house. The three children were already asleep in their beds—two boys and a little girl. Liputto stepped unnoticed into the living room. Father and Mother were talking.

Mother said, "I wasn't very happy with Nathaniel and Oliver today. While you were away, they fought half the day and hardly did any of their chores. Before it was over, Nathaniel hit Oliver in the head with a pitchfork that he was waving around. Oliver was bleeding. I had to bandage his head. It's nothing serious, but he could have easily poked out an eye!"

Father wrinkled his forehead and said, "I have a good mind to haul Nathaniel out of bed right now and give him a good talking to! Such foolishness!"

Mother shook her head and answered, "No, Father, let him sleep now. Sometimes a good night's sleep puts everything right again. They were at least decent help with the milking."

Liputto had heard enough. The children were sleeping in a little room upstairs. He silently climbed up to the bedroom. Nathaniel was asleep with his mouth open. His hands were balled-up fists on top of the

blanket. *Yes*, thought Liputto, *He's still upset about what happened*. Liputto dipped his finger into the silver cup and put a little drop on Nathaniel's fist. Liputto could see how both hands gradually relaxed and opened. Nathaniel's mouth closed, and he moaned softly. Liputto laughed and thought: *He's a little ashamed of himself in his sleep*.

The Liputto stepped over to Oliver. His forehead was bandaged. Liputto dipped his finger in the cup and sprinkled a drop in the middle of his forehead. The sleeper shook his head two or three times, and then his lips formed a smile. Liputto thought: *Now he's having a nice dream!*

He went to Zoë's bed. The moon was shining a little on her face. Liputto thought: *She looks like a sleeping angel. She's in good hands and doesn't need any of my silver drops*. As he was watching over her, he saw her little red mouth, and then he just couldn't resist. He dipped his finger into the cup and let the drop of light fall on little Zoë's lips. Then he hummed softly, "Li, li lu looo!"

Liputto thought: *Tomorrow I'll see what effects the drops have on Nathaniel, Oliver, and Zoë.*

Liputto had spotted a large potted plant downstairs in the living room. He went down and curled up under the leaves. Gnomes can rest quietly and doze, but they don't sleep deeply like human beings.

Early in the morning Nathaniel woke up when he heard Father going out to the barn. Father was always the first one up. Nathaniel swung out of bed and put on his pants, jacket and shoes. Outside in front of the house, he dunked his head under the spring fountain and washed his hands. He showed up beside his father and said, "I'm up early today! I'll feed the cows, and then you can milk right away."

"Fine," answered Father. He thought: *Nathaniel wants to make up for his bad behavior yesterday.*

Nathaniel had no sooner given the cows hay when he grabbed a bucket and carried water to all the animals. Without being asked, he began cleaning out the stalls, and Father could only stare in disbelief.

Liputto was tickled to watch what happened the whole time without being seen himself. He had set himself between the horns of a cow. That was a good seat. He was happy about Nathaniel's enthusiasm. But now he wanted to see what Oliver was up to.

When Nathaniel bounded down the stairs, the noise of the creaking wood had awakened Oliver. He got dressed quickly and went down to the kitchen. Liputto heard how he declared to his mother. "I'm making breakfast today! Let me fry the potatoes!"

Mother asked, "How's your head?"

Oliver answered, "It doesn't hurt anymore. I want the bandage off!"

Mother responded, "After breakfast, before you go to school." While Oliver worked in the kitchen, she began to prepare the day's laundry.

They all heard jubilant singing coming from the little room upstairs. It wasn't long before Zoë came down, singing, with her doll in her arms and still in her nightgown.

She went up to Mother and asked, "Mother, do the animals like it when we sing?"

"Of course," answered Mother, "They say that when you sing to the cows, they give more milk."

In an instant Zoë had on her boots and had gone outside to the barn—complete with doll and nightgown. Mother thought: *What a singsongy day that child is having. She must be singing her own made-up songs, because I've never heard them before.*

Father enjoyed listening to his little daughter sing while he milked the cows. As the cows' tails were switching back and forth, Zoë called out, "Look, Father, they're moving their tails in time to my music!" From the barn she went to the chicken coop and sang to the feathered population. The rooster crowed suddenly right in the middle of a song. Zoë thought: *Finally somebody is singing along!* Mother called Zoë in to breakfast.

When the family was all settled down at the table, Liputto found a place on the kitchen cabinet.

Father said, "Nathaniel has never helped me in the barn as much as today. He's going to get strong arms and legs."

Mother added, "And Oliver had the wonderful idea to make breakfast for everyone since it's laundry day!"

Little Zoë said, "And the songs came to me one after the other. I'll bet the cows gave a quart more milk today and the hens lay extra eggs. Singing is just as important as cooking and cleaning the stalls!"

Everyone laughed, and Mother added, "Yes, Zoë, sing as much as you like. It's not only good for the animals but for us people, too. Singing makes for a light heart!"

Oliver remarked, "When we're singing in school and someone acts up, instead of singing along, the teacher gets mad. Then he stops the singing, and we have to write something instead."

Liputto wondered: *What is that …write … instead of sing? And what is school? I'd like to have a look at that.* He followed the conversation closely.

Suddenly, Mother exclaimed, "It's already late! Boys, get yourselves ready for school! Quickly!"

Liputto thought: *I'm going to follow behind and see what it is.*

Liputto Goes to School

Liputto was amazed at how many children were walking toward the big house down in the valley. As he stood by the front entrance, Nathaniel and Oliver disappeared through the door. Almost all the children scraped their shoes in front of the door; some went in without scraping. Liputto thought: *That must be the schoolhouse greeting.* So he scraped his feet as well.

Suddenly, a shrill bell rang. A little girl was the last one to hurry in. Liputto shrugged through the door with her. In a long hallway, the girl took off her shoes and put on slippers. She hung her jacket up on a hook.

A man was standing in the classroom door and shook the girl's hand. He said in a friendly tone, "Good morning, Francine! A little late today?"

Liputto would have also liked to shake hands with the friendly man, but he was invisible to him. He slipped between the man's legs and into the classroom.

Liputto had never seen so many human children together in one place. The air was crackling! Now all stood up, folded their hands, and the room became wonderfully still. Suddenly everyone was talking all together in loud voices. They were saying the morning verse! It rang very nicely in his ears. The teacher started to lead the children in a song about the sun. It too sounded wonderful. The children sat down again, and in short time it was so quiet you could hear a mouse scurrying.

And then the man asked, "Who can tell us about a very nice dream today?" Liputto thought: *He must be the children's teacher*.

And what do you know, Oliver raised his hand.

"I dreamt something funny last night. Just as I was going to sleep, a little man holding a silver cup came up to me. He dipped his finger inside and sprinkled a drop on my forehead. The drop turned into a small boat. Instead of oars, it had wings on the sides. I could move them just like oars. The boat lifted, with me inside, over the clouds and clear up to the stars. I was able to gather stardust from every star and put it in the boat. The boat became heavier and heavier with the star dust, and pretty soon it sank back down to earth. I landed inside Mr. Schlumpf's bakery. He said, 'What wonderful flour you have! I'll bake you a loaf of bread from it. Help me with the kneading!' He threw some water in the boat, and we kneaded and kneaded the flour until it turned into dough. The dough was such a huge lump that Mr. Schlumpf complained, 'My baking oven is much too small!' Then I woke up laughing."

All the children laughed, too. The teacher said, "That's a very funny story. Let's all write down Oliver's dream. When you're finished, you may go get a piece of paper and make a drawing to go with it."

Liputto couldn't believe his eyes when he saw that everything was suddenly very still, and every child was scratching around on sheets of something. He went closer. What were those twisty, magic symbols for? Suddenly, he had an eerie feeling. He sprang through the open window onto the gables, slid down the drainpipe and landed in the school yard. School wasn't for Liputto, no, sir. He'd much rather go back to the flowers, the trees, and the animals!



Further Roaming

Liputto wanted to go back to the farm one more time to look in on little Zoë, because he loved small children. He thought: *I could take off my cap so she could see me, and we could play.*

From far away he could hear the little girl singing. She sat under an apple tree and was rocking her doll to sleep. Liputto removed the cap from his head and walked up to her. The singing stopped, and Zoë looked at Liputto with wide-open eyes. Her gaze rested on the silver cup.

"Did you bring me something to drink, little man?" she asked with no hint of shyness.

Liputto answered, "It's not a drinking cup. It's a roaming cup."

"But it doesn't have any feet to walk with!"

"I am its feet," Liputto said.

Zoë asked, "Can you sing me a song?"

Liputto had never sung a song. He shook his head, embarrassed.

"Then I'll sing to you," said the little girl, and she began:

"Butterfly fly, li-la-la
Little bee hum, bzz-bzz-bzz
Sparrow-bird fly, zzoo, zzoo, zzoo
The rooster crows, cock-a-doodle-doo!"

Liputto thought it was wonderful the way the music sounded forth from the little girl's mouth. He slowly put his cap back on and

disappeared. Zoë stopped singing and looked around, "Where are you, you cute little man? Gone away with the roaming cup!" She started singing again right away:

"Little man, all alone
In the big, wide world you roam,
Silver cup, silver cup
Glitters you all up."

She sang the song over and over. And Liputto was listening. For the first time in his gnome life he wished he could be a human child and play and sing with little Zoë. Should he throw away his cap and try to become human?

Just then a tender voice came out of his cup, "Liputto, come to the waterfall by the gorge! A human child is in danger!"

Zoë didn't see that Liputto waved goodbye, as he hurried up the valley, back in the direction of the waterfall.

As he drew near the waterfall, he stopped suddenly. There was the boy, lying on the side of a mountain. It was the goat-herder. He lay there, very, very still. He must have taken a wrong step on the rock outcropping above and fallen. Some blood was flowing from a wound on his head, but he was breathing. The goats were peacefully grazing beside him. Liputto sat down next to him, and every so often he let a drop from the cup fall onto the wound. The blood began to clot. Liputto thought: *I'll let him see me. I want to talk to him.* He removed his cap. A long time went by before the boy regained consciousness. He stared into Liputto's face with big eyes and pressed his lips together, in pain.

"Does it hurt?" asked the gnome.

"A little. Who are you?" the boy whispered.

Liputto was very still for a moment. No gnome had ever yet told his name to a human child. Hesitating, he finally decided to answer, "Liputto is my name."

The boy repeated in a soft voice, "Liputto? Nice!"

Liputto heard his name spoken by a human voice for the first time. It was alarming, but somehow he liked the sound. Suddenly, he knew that he must help this boy, to stay by his side until he could walk away on his own two feet. He began to form soft circles with his hand in the air above the boy's head. While he was doing that he whispered, "Just rest, go to sleep." He chanted the words until the boy was once again in a deep sleep.

In his long life as a gnome, Liputto had made friends with a healing-herbs gnome and had learned a lot from him. He knew, for instance, that humans can be more easily helped when they're asleep than when they're awake. Liputto could see inside the head of the sleeping boy and watch how the accident had caused such a fidgeting and flittering there that he was reminded of an ant hill. But the longer he made the gentle circles in the air and put a drop from the silver cup every now and again on the wound, the more peaceful the boy's breathing became. After a while, the flittering gave way to a steady shine. Liputto knew: *The boy has made it! He won't have any permanent injury from the fall! But I have to get back to the waterfall soon and look for the silver fairy. My little cup is almost empty.*

The goat-herder had a hole in one shoe, and his big toe was sticking out. When Liputto saw it, he couldn't resist having a little fun. So he took the last drop out of the silver cup and put it on the big toe. He thought: *He'll get good walking and climbing legs from that. And he can well use them among the boulders and cliffs with his goats.*

The boy slept on. Liputto kept watch beside him. He had put his cap back on, because Liputto knew that if the boy called him three times by his name, then he would have to go with him.

It was getting towards evening. A big goat came up close to the boy. Her udders were full, and she wanted to get home to be milked. She sniffed around his head, chewed on his hair and let out a "mah-ah, mah-ah." The boy woke up.

"Okay, okay, Mootly, I'm coming!" Then he rubbed his forehead and looked all around. "Libudo, where are you?"

That's good, thought the gnome. *He's already half forgotten my name. I'm free!*

The goat-herder stood up and steadied himself against the mountain side. He took a few steps. Yes, he was okay! His legs could carry him once again. He looked around one more time. "Too bad Libudo isn't here. He was so nice…or did I dream it?"

The goat nudged his hand with her head. The boy stuck two fingers in his mouth and let out a loud whistle. There came the goats springing out from all the rocks so that their little bells chimed wildly. Before heading down the mountain, the boy did gathered up a few stones and put them one on top of the other until he had built a little tower. Then he said to himself, "I want to come back here. This is where I saw my first gnome!"

A little while later Liputto looked down the mountain-side from where he was climbing above. He saw the boy with the goats heading toward the valley, back down the path which would take them to the cottage and to milking. The goat-herder still had a slight limp, but that was all.

Back at the Waterfall

While Liputto was climbing up to the waterfall, he noticed something glittering through a crack through the rocks. He looked inside and saw that it was the entrance to a crystal cave. He slipped inside. What a fantastic glow and delicate ringing from all sides—from above, underneath and everywhere.

Liputto knew: *If I linger here, I'll forget about the world, the fairy, and my silver cup for a long, long time.* Crystals can work magic on gnomes and hold them fast in their spell. So, he made the effort to climb back out through the crack in the rocks. But he would remember where it was, because someday he would return.

It was dusk when Liputto arrived at the waterfall, and the water elves were floating in the last rays of light among the swirling drops. Just as the sun went down, the silver fairy appeared out of the rocks and waved to Liputto.

She said, "Your little cup is empty. Tell me what you did with the drops! But first, tell me how the goat-herder is, whose fall was reported to me by a flower-elf."

Liputto told how the boy had lain there miserably, how the inside of his head was fluttering, and how the silver drops had helped, and finally how the gentle circles had brought rest until the steady, shining light returned. The fairy praised the gnome, and then Liputto continued to tell her about the farmer's children and the school and especially about little Zoë. When the fairy heard how Zoë had sung to the cows and the chickens, she laughed silver-clear.

"Give me your little cup! I'll fill it up again. Just make sure that an awful troll doesn't get hold of it. It can increase the power of good and evil alike. Wait here until I return!"

The fairy went inside the rock-face with the cup, and then she appeared at the waterfall so the elves could help her work the magic that would refill the cup with silver drops.

Liputto found a resting place by a big boulder, and his eyes gazed up at the starry heaven. He didn't notice that all the while two nasty trolls had been creeping around the area. It was the Net Troll! and he had found a pal, the Hook Troll. The Net Troll had made for himself a stronger net. The Hook Troll was holding a sharp hook in his hand that he used to swipe things with. Net Troll listened to what the fairy said to Liputto. He looked at the far-off silver cup with envious eyes. Quietly, scratchily, he spoke to Hook Troll, "I wonder what's in the cup?"

Hook Troll whispered back, "We'll wait and then steal it!"

They crawled back to their hideout under a big rock, not far from Liputto, to watch what would happen. They had to wait a long time until the moon-and-night elves had distilled the silver drops for the cup.

It was already almost morning. The moon and stars paled, when the fairy finally emerged from the cliff face. She glided to Liputto in a delicate veil of fog, gave him the cup, stroked his hands, and wished him a good journey. Liputto bowed deeply and thanked her. He waited until she disappeared back into the rocks.

When he looked into the cup, it shone so bright in his eyes that right away he had a good thought: *Today I'll take a plant tour and spray some drops here and there in the meadows and forests.* Everything should grow well then: the grass for the cows, the healing herbs for people and animals, the berries for the birds, nuts and fruits on the trees and bushes! Liputto discovered that he could get very tiny drops out of the cup with a blade of grass. He dabbed them on the mountain herbs: arnica, silver-mantle, thyme, and many, many others.

Always hidden, and at a little distance, the two trolls stole along behind Liputto. Net Troll snarled, "Stupid, that the cliff lady touched his hands! We can't get near him as long as he has the cup in his hands. As soon as I get close to him, my eyes itch."

Hook Troll complained, "And I get dizzy! Just before when I wanted to sneak up close to him, I fell on my nose!"

"Just wait," croaked Net Troll. "He will have to put the cup down sometime. When he does, we'll get it."

On the way back to the valley, Liputto walked past the place where he had discovered the fascinating crystal cave. He thought: *I'll go in just once more to make sure I will remember where it is. During the longest winter nights, I'd like to rest in there and soak in new energy from the radiant Earth.* So Liputto went sideways into the cave.

Net Troll snarled, "Silly guy, now we have to climb in after him. What kind of detour is this?"

Liputto set the cup down carefully on a stone in front of the cave entrance and slipped inside. The two trolls on his tail saw that and started cheering, "The fellow set down the cup and disappeared! We can get it!" A few zig-zag jumps, and they were standing by the cup. Net Troll grabbed it, and they hurried into the deeper forest with their booty.

Meanwhile, Liputto was admiring the brilliance of the crystals inside the cave for a long time. The floor was made of smooth stone and arched above was the crystal sky. Liputto lay down, looked around, and was amazed by the glittering display. He didn't notice how much time was going by. When he finally got up and squeezed back through the crack entrance, he saw by the sun that evening was drawing nigh. Liputto stared down at the stone where he had set the cup. But, where was it?

"Is there something wrong with my eyes?" He felt the stone and all around it with his hands. The cup was missing! Could it have fallen down? He looked desperately on all sides. The cup had disappeared!

A mountain finch settled on a rock nearby. Liputto asked, "Finch, have you seen my silver cup?"

The finch twittered, "I saw two trolls. One was carrying something that sparkled."

Liputto's legs were shaking with fear. He had to sit down. The worst had happened! And if these were two evil trolls, what mischief would they get up to?!

"Finch, tell me, what did they look like? Where did they go?"

The finch tweeted, "One carried a net, the other a sharp hook, ugly guys. They went towards the lower mountain forest!"

Liputto froze. His legs were almost paralyzed. Only with a great effort could he put one foot in front of the other and slowly start out for the lower forest.



When the Cup was Lost

Liputto had never felt so sad and defeated. *Why did I leave the cup on the stone? What horrible things will the trolls do with it? I'll never be able to show my face at the waterfall again.* So the thoughts ran through his head. *Shall I sink deep, deep down in the earth and try to forget what's above? No! I have to try to get the cup back, even if they rip me to pieces!*

In the meantime, the two rogues had disappeared into the deep forest. Once the Net Troll sniffed inside the cup and burnt his nose. "Ow, oww!" he screamed, "That's strong juice!"

Hook Troll carefully stuck his finger inside. "Ouch!" he screeched, "It burns! There's strong magic in there!"

They sat down on a rock in a small forest clearing in order to think about what they could do with the cup and the magic juice inside. Hook Troll had a thought. He said to Net Troll, "Look at the poisonous belladonna plant over there! We should put some of her poison-juice in the cup and mix it up. That way the poison will get much stronger, and then we can make some bad magic! That would be great fun!"

Net Troll thought this was a fabulous idea. They put the cup down on a rock and went right away to get some of the black, poisonous berries. When they pressed the juice into the cup, the inside of it began to brew and bubble and foam. The two trolls had to step back from the spray coming out on all sides.

Net Troll clapped his hands and called out, "It's doing something! It's doing something!" Such a smoky stink spread over the forest meadow that all the birds and animals fled.

But Hook Troll called out, “It stinks good, it stinks glorious!”

But look at that: A whole legion of dark trolls rose out of the earth. They started dancing around wildly in the smoke and the foam. Net Troll and Hook Troll were doubled over from laughing. The biggest, darkest troll cried out, “Inhale the stink, lick up the foam; it’ll make you stronger! Everyone come here and dance!” So the twisted, noisy, frenzied dance continued around the cup until it was completely black.



Liputto entered the lower forest just as the party was at its highest, fevered pitch. He heard the trolls yelling and squealing. He went valiantly toward the voices but stayed hidden in the bushes. He was shocked and dismayed to see the trolls reeling around in the stink and the smoke. He saw the black cup on top of a moss-covered stone. There was just a very little foam coming out, because it was nearly boiled dry. The moss and grass around it were also black.

Liputto gathered all his courage. He ran into the midst of the dark trolls, grabbed the cup, and emptied it onto the stone. He fastened both hands around the cup and pressed it close to his chest. From all sides the dark trolls came menacingly toward Liputto. They threw him to the ground and trampled on him. But they couldn’t get at the cup because Liputto held it so tightly to his chest.

By the time the nasty fellows had stomped out their anger, it was night time in the forest. The dark trolls moved into the darkness. Net Troll and Hook Troll went with them. The forest was silent again.

An ancient Tree Spirit came out of a mountain ash tree. He had watched it all but could come out of his tree only when the moon shone. Slowly and a little stiffly, he moved into the meadow. He wanted to see if the trolls had ripped the poor little gnome to tatters.

No! He was alive! Liputto had fallen against the stone, and this had been some protection. In the darkness, many of the trolls had trampled upon the stone and thought it was the gnome’s back. The Tree Spirit crouched down to him. He brushed over Liputto’s body and limbs with his orange-berry

hands from head to toe. Slowly, the gnome came to. He nodded his head a little; he wiggled his foot. Sighing deeply, he turned onto his side. The blackened cup was still pressed tightly under his chin.

The Tree Spirit spoke with a deep, tree-bark voice, "Poor little gnome, why did you want to hold on to the black cup?"

But Liputto remained silent. He wasn't able to recover his voice yet. The Tree Spirit now very tenderly brushed over his head, chest and limbs. When he brushed against the cup, the gnome twitched and again held it very tightly. The stinky odor still hung over the meadow. A couple of night elves floated down on a moonbeam, but when they drew near the blackened earth, they went right back up again.

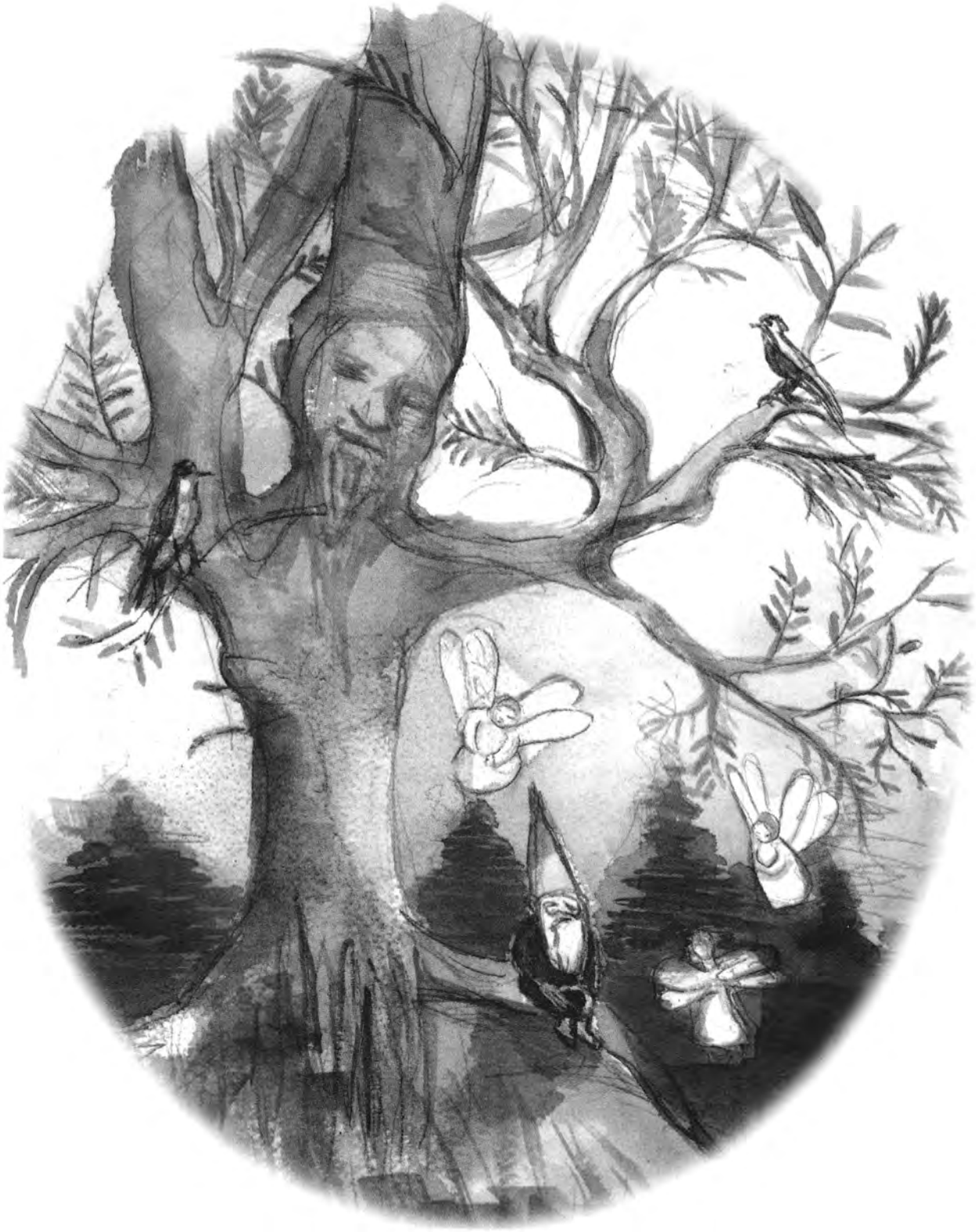
The Tree Spirit called to them, "Elves, come here! Have mercy on the poor little creature."

The elves glided closer. They were half curious to know who was calling them and what kind of creature it was they were supposed to help. One whispered, "That's the good Liputto, the one that our fairy gave the silver cup to. Oh, no! What's wrong? The cup is all black!"

The Tree Spirit moved over and made room for them. One elf floated to Liputto's head, another to his feet, and still another sat on his chest, which was fine because elves are light as a feather. As they began to hum a little song, they poured a little life-energy into his limbs. The elf at Liputto's head pulled his beaten, bent nose back into shape. The elf at his feet shook out his legs. The one on his chest loosened his cramped fingers from around the cup and began to polish it. The Tree Spirit stood up and looked on the scene in open-mouthed amazement.

Liputto slowly awakened as from a bad dream. He stretched his trembling hands and fingers into the air. Softly, hesitatingly, he asked, "Where's the little cup?"An elf put it into his hand.

Liputto said sadly, "It doesn't shine any more. It's lost all of its brilliance!" He hung his head and mourned. Now the elves wanted to know what had happened to him and the cup.



The Tree Spirit interrupted, "Come over to my old mountain ash tree. The ground doesn't stink over there. And I can't be away from my tree for very long, or its leaves will all fall off."

With a long, somewhat unsteady gait, the Tree Spirit stepped forward, and the elves and Liputto followed behind. The Tree Spirit slipped into his tree, leaving only his head hanging out a little way. Liputto sat down on a gnarled root. He had regained his voice and so told the long story, beginning at the crystal cave and ending with the terrible trolls.

When he was finished, he thanked the Tree Spirit for his help and the elves for their kindness. But he continued sadly, "The cup is dark and will stay dark. I'll never again be able to go before the silver fairy to ask for the magic drops and bring them to the plants, animals and people."

Then the deep, ancient voice of the Tree Spirit was heard, "God's sun energy has been magically placed in the Earth. It blazes in crystals and jewels, and it enlivens plants and trees. If you gather some of this light into your cup, then the darkness can be transformed by the Earth-sunlight. Try it!"

Liputto immediately thought of the hidden crystal cave. He said, "Dear Tree Spirit, you have given me new hope and courage. Yes, I'll take my dark, little cup and go on the long journey to gather light-energy from the crystals and precious stones."

An elf added, "Don't forget, you can get sunlight from the flowers as well. Whatever beauty your eyes look upon will shine right into your little cup."

The Tree Spirit continued, "When the birds sing in my branches, that is also bright, light-energy. Let their singing resound in your little cup! Rest in my roots tonight. They bring up the sap of life from deep in the earth, and that will make you completely well again."

The elves whispered, "Good night, Father Tree Spirit. We're going to go sail in the moonbeams again. Good night, dear Liputto. We'll see each other in the spring time, after you've made the Earth-sun journey with the cup, and when it's ready to shine again."

After these words, the elves rose back up to the heights. And Liputto crawled down into the tree roots. He wrapped himself around the cup. And while he was dozing, he felt the quiet trickling of the ash sap as it flowed up through the roots. And he felt how it began to flow within him and give him renewed strength.

The Dream of the Cup

On this occasion, Liputto was so tired he fell fast asleep. At once he found himself back in the crystal cave. He moved his hands lightly over the smooth surface of the crystals and brushed their edges. He whispered, "How beautiful! I love you!" When a few drops of light from the ceiling dropped into the little cup, the inside of the cup grew silvery.

The dream took Liputto to the blooming mountain meadows. He admired the lovely flowers and the colorful butterflies. A tear of admiration fell from his eyes into the cup every so often. And look at that! Some dark scales began to fall away from the outside of the cup, and underneath it shone just as silver as before.

Next the dream led Liputto into the forest. He came upon a rabbit and then a squirrel. The Tree Spirits all smiled and winked at him. Four birds on a high branch were singing so gaily that he stayed still to listen. The echo of the birdsong rang in the cup. It delicately trembled in his hand, and more of the dark dust fell away.

All at once the goat-herder boy and little Zoë were with him. They laughed for happiness to see him again, and the little cup laughed along. That was enough to make the rest of the dark soot covering the cup to fall away completely. The cup shone bright silver!

Three elves floated down to Liputto from above, scooped him up, and carried him through the air to the waterfall. The moon was shining. The fairy stepped out from the rock and waved him to her once again. As Liputto put the cup into her hand, he noticed a narrow, dark ring on the cup's upper rim. The fairy passed her hand over the dark ring, and it was transformed into gold. "Look, how lovely!" she cried, "a silver cup with a golden band!"

When Liputto awakened out of his dream, immediately he looked at his cup. It was still black! But the sun was just coming up in the sky. He got up, even thought his limbs still ached from the troll trampling. Full of curiosity, the Tree Spirit stuck his head out of the tree trunk.

Liputto called to him, "Farewell, good Tree Spirit! Thank you for your help! I will be off on my journey. A dream showed me how I can make the cup silver again. Today I will go to the crystal cave. That's where I will begin! When my cup is silver again and I am returning from the fairy at the waterfall, I will stop here to show you that it has a golden rim."

Liputto waved and then he was on his way. The Tree Spirit rocked back and forth in the mountain ash, so glad that Liputto was so cheerful and courageous as he continued his roaming in the world.



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