

cowardly boy, men, and place him against yon linden tree. Put an apple on his head. Tell, if you can shoot the apple from your son's head, you shall go free. But . . . if any harm comes to the boy or you miss the apple, you will *both* die," shouted the governor.

A gasp of horror floated through the crowd as Walter heard people cry, "The wretch . . . knave . . ." But Gessler only smiled an evil smile as he pointed to the linden tree.

At last Tell found his voice. "You cannot ask this of me, Governor," he pleaded. "This is an innocent lad, and my first-born. He has done no harm to anyone."

"But I thought you were such a great bowman, Tell," retorted the governor. "I see you are just a bag of wind with the face of a lion and the heart of a deer."

At these stinging words, Walter shouted in his high boyish voice so that all heard, "Father, I am not afraid. I will stand at the linden tree and they need not bind me. I will stand as still as a rock. You will hit the apple, Father. You always hit the chamois right in the heart. Shoot, Father, I am not afraid."

"See the boy, Gessler, how he believes in his father!" shouted a woman shrilly. The soldiers seized Walter and bound him to the linden tree, while mothers clutched their children to them fiercely, as if to shield them from the evil bailiff. Walter stood silently as a guard placed a large apple upon his head. He could see the townsfolk brandishing sticks and threatening the knights. A boy threw a stone and a horse reared.

Gessler commanded, "Quiet, you people of Altdorf. Quiet." Then looking down at Tell he said, "This is your chance, fool, to show how skilled you are with the bow."

The soldiers freed the mountaineer. He slipped his bow from his shoulder and raised it. He placed the arrow. Then standing quietly he gazed at his son tied to the linden tree.

Suddenly a monk, his head lowered, walked slowly toward Gessler. As he reached the governor, he raised his head. "Governor," he pleaded, "This is a simple man of the mountains. He knows not what he does. He means no harm. He loves his son, as all good men love their sons. Do not, I pray you, put him to this test of skill. Take council with your knights. Tell is not a dastardly fellow, only an unlettered one. By the Holy Mary, do not do this cruel thing."

But Gessler only scowled at the monk and replied, "Father, I must do this. I must prick this windbag. The people *must* obey their earthly masters as they do their heavenly master."

The holy man withdrew in silence, fingering his rosary and praying. William Tell knelt on the ground. He raised his heavy crossbow again to his shoulder and took careful aim. Not a sound was heard. Even the dogs stopped barking: the horses prancing. The mountaineer was about to press the trigger of his crossbow, when the sight of his slender son, standing so quietly at the linden tree, overcame him. He put down his bow and groaning aloud, he pleaded, "My lord, have pity. Spare my son. I cannot do this to an innocent, trusting child. I cannot. I cannot. Have pity on us, my lord."

"Ho, ho, so it is 'my lord' at last, Tell. So you cannot. The strong mountain man cannot. He trembles like the leaves of that linden tree yonder. See how pale he is! What a rare sight! Tell, the great windbag, is trembling like a frightened woman. Where is your boasted skill with the bow, Tell?"

As Walter heard these bitter words, he shouted above the din, "Shoot, Father, shoot. I am not afraid. God is watching over us."

Walter's voice seemed to bring back his father's courage. He took another arrow from his quiver and slipped it into his girdle. Then he quickly raised the heavy crossbow to his shoulder as muscles rippled on his brown arms. He sighted the apple on his son's head. He pulled

back the drawstring. Many of the townsfolk were now on their knees praying. Gessler eyed every move that Tell made. Then, with a grim smile and almost without warning, the great bowman quickly and surely squeezed the trigger of his faithful bow. The arrow sped like a ray of light. Walter suddenly felt the apple on his head split, tremble and then fall to the ground. The nose of the arrow buried itself in the old gnarled trunk of the ancient linden tree.

A great sigh of relief, like a sudden wind, passed over the heads of the people. Then all at once sounds of jubilation burst forth as the people saw that Walter was safe from harm. "The mighty Tell, Tell the hero," the people shouted, surging toward the bowman as he stood there, his dark body glistening with sweat, proud and erect. The people tried to reach him to carry him on their shoulders like the hero he was, but soldiers barred their way. Women cried, others prayed, while still others shouted. Their happiness made Gessler even more angry.

When guards unbound Walter, he picked up the two halves of the apple and ran toward his father, crying, "See, father, you cut the apple in two pieces."

A soldier blew on a horn to quiet the happy crowd and in the silence Walter heard Gessler shout, "You *did* hit the apple, Tell, and not your son. You *are* a bowman as men say. But what of that second arrow you thrust so quickly into your girdle?"

William Tell, feeling suddenly weak and tired, just looked at the governor and said, "That is the custom of bowmen, Governor."

"Answer me, Tell, I want the truth. Why was the second arrow hidden in your girdle? Tell me and I will spare your life."

William Tell was a simple, trustful man of the mountains. He believed Gessler's words, for the word of a knight was supposed to be truth itself. So he replied honestly, "Had I killed my son, Governor, this arrow would have found your heart."



Gessler suddenly flushed with anger. "Oh, so *that* is the truth, at last," he growled. "I promised to let you live, and that I will do on my word as a knight. But I will put you where you will never again see the sun rise in the mountains nor the moon set behind the peaks. Drag this man to the boat on the lake, soldiers. We will take him to the dungeon of the Castle of Kussnacht."

Walter was pushed from his father's side as the angry people of Altdorf followed the soldiers dragging Tell away. The boy was knocked down in the dense crowd and lay in the dirt, crying. Then at last the shouting and the noise faded away as Walter got slowly to his feet. Through his tears he saw the market place was now completely empty. The pole and the ducal hat lay on the ground. Then Walter saw Grandfather Furst hastening toward him. The old man clasped the crying boy to him and said soothingly, "Don't cry, Walter, we will go home. Mother is waiting for you."

"But, Grandfather," gulped Walter when he could talk once more, "what will they do with Father? Are they going to kill him now after he hit the apple? Gessler promised not to. Will they put him in prison?"

"Quiet, lad," soothed grandfather. "Your father is a brave man. They will not dare to kill him now. The people would revolt. Instead they may keep him a while in prison. But never fear, you will see him again soon."

Walter and his grandfather half ran and half walked up, up, up the mountain trail toward home. Great dark clouds gathered overhead. Soon the rain fell in torrents. They reached home at last, wet and shivering. When Walter saw his mother, he ran and buried his face in her skirts like a small boy, for he was frightened and very, very tired. Hedwig put him to bed and while Grandfather Furst told her the story of the sad day, he sobbed himself to sleep.

Waiting

RAIN poured down upon the land of Uri all that night. The angry winds knocked down a tall pine tree near the hut, just missing it. Boulders slid down the mountainside as smaller rocks rolled about on the roof of the hut. A mountain stream just beyond the goat pen overflowed its banks. When dawn came, the Tell home was damp and cold as rain had leaked through holes in the roof and had dripped down the chimney. The wood in the fireplace was wet and would not burn. It was almost as cold within the house as without. Nevertheless Grandfather Furst, who had stayed all night, was up early to milk the goats, so that Walter and Rudi could stay in bed where it was warm.

Soon after breakfast a few neighbors began to come. Others followed, and before long Walter and Rudi wondered if *all* the people of Burglen

were trying to crowd into the single smoky room. More came constantly. They had heard rumors of the shooting at Altdorf and like all country people were curious to know more. They especially wanted to know what had happened to William Tell, now their hero.

A neighbor brought Hedwig a hindquarter of venison. Another, a flagon of sweet cider. Then little Marie, a playmate of the Tell boys who also herded goats on the mountainside, handed Walter a pair of woolen socks. She had knit them herself during the long hours of herding. "They'll keep you warm, Walter," she said, "now that it is wintertime. My, you must have been scared yesterday when the soldiers bound you and you had to stand and be shot at," she whispered to him.

"No, I wasn't scared a bit," replied Walter. "I knew all the time that Father couldn't miss."

Rudi only peered at the crowd of people from behind the bed curtain. He was still a little boy and shy of strangers. As each neighbor entered the hut, Grandfather began again the story of the exciting morning in Altdorf. Walter noticed how red in the face his grandfather got during each account and how excited he grew as the day went on. There never seemed an end of the people coming and going. It was like a great church festival or a wedding.

But the hours passed and the rain finally stopped. The boys ran to look after the goats, glad to be out of doors, and away from the hut so full of smoke and neighbors. Just then Walter noticed Ulrich, the baker's son, puffing up the hill. When he reached the door Walter asked him, "Have you learned anything about my father?" But the boy did not answer and rushed into the cabin, full of importance. Walter and Rudi followed on his heels.

"You must have more news," Walter heard his grandfather exclaim to Ulrich.

"I have," grasped the boy breathlessly, for he was tired from running.

"Out with it lad, out with it. Don't stand there like a dumb ox."

Grandfather was irritated by the boy's slowness. Ulrich only walked over to the smoking fireplace and warmed his hands as if he had no news at all. Then he said, "Wolfgang, the fisherman, on the Lake of the Forest Cantons, saw it himself."

"Saw what, Ulrich?" questioned Hedwig, eagerly, taking the boy by the shoulders.

"He told Rudenz, the herdsman, and Rudenz ran all the way up to Burglen to bring my father the news," replied Ulrich.

"What news, silly?" asked an old crone, peevishly.

The people all waited breathlessly while the baker's son enjoyed keeping them waiting. "Well," drawled Ulrich, at last, "Wolfgang was pulling in his nets yesterday when the storm broke. He saw a large boat tossing about on the lake. The waves were high. At first Wolfgang could not see who was in the boat because it was pitching very much. But as it whirled nearer, he saw there were soldiers in the boat, and then . . ." Ulrich hesitated and waited for all eyes to be centered on him. "And then . . . he saw William Tell was steering."

"William Tell steering the governor's boat . . . impossible!" exclaimed the people as in one voice. Walter shoved his way through the packed crowd until he stood just beside the baker's son.

"No, he was not mistaken," Ulrich continued. "He knows Tell. Tell *was* at the tiller. Gessler was there too and he was holding his belly, for he was seasick. Rudenz could make nothing of this strange sight. He did not know what had happened in Altdorf at all. And as he watched . . ." Here Ulrich lowered his voice and the people crowded closer to him. "As he watched," he repeated, "Tell steered the boat toward a rocky ledge below Axenstein. Just as the prow touched the rock, Tell jumped, and then, quick as a flash of lightning, he kicked the boat back into the water and ran into the shelter of the forest like a doe."

A great shout filled the cabin. "That Tell, oh that Tell. Praise be

to the Blessed Virgin." Women wept and Hedwig fell to her knees and bowed her head.

"Did the soldiers shoot at him?" asked Grandfather.

"No, Wolfgang says no," replied the boy, delighted at the excitement he had caused. "They were too surprised and too seasick. The soldiers were pea-green with sickness. The boat tossed about like a mad thing. Wolfgang could not see much of them for the rain, but he *thinks*," and here the boy waited for his audience to look at him, "he *thinks* the boat sank and all in it were drowned!"

"Drowned—the governor drowned!" exclaimed the people in joy. "May Gessler and his knaves lie tonight in the deep waters of the lake. May God have pity on their black souls," said Grandfather crossing himself.

"If it were only true," sighed Hedwig, "if it were only true." As she said this, she put her arms about Walter and Rudi and they sat together on a bench by the fire. Walter stared into the embers. It seemed he could see in them a rocking boat full of men. Then his father jumped from it to shore and kicked the boat back into the water. Where was his father now, he wondered, looking up from the fire. Was he hiding in the cold, wet forest? Was he sitting in some friendly woodcutter's hut, warm and secure? If he only knew!

"Tell is like a cat," said one of the neighbors. "He will find his way home," said another quietly to Hedwig, patting her on the shoulder, for Tell's wife was weeping again.

In a moment Walter heard her whisper something to Grandfather, for he raised his hand and said, "Hush all. Friends, we know you have come to comfort us, but Hedwig is weary and would be alone. I ask of you to leave us in peace. We will send Walter and Rudi to the village if we learn anything new."

Walter nodded. The people understood, for they walked out quietly and at last the hut was empty of all but the Tell family.

"Mark my word, Daughter," said Grandfather sighing and sitting wearily on a bench, "every woman's son will be coming here now with a new rumor until at last we learn the true story. Each man adds a little to what he has heard, and the story grows like a snowball. We can but wait and pray."

"Let us eat now, the boys are hungry," said Hedwig as she brought a big bowl of whey left after making goat's cheese. They all pulled up to the table and as they were eating, Prinz barked. Someone knocked timidly on the door.

"Come in, friend," said Grandfather wearily, thinking it was just another curious neighbor. The door opened slowly. There stood Klaus, the hermit, the man of God, in his long dark robe. Klaus had heard of Tell's escape from a passer-by and had come to comfort the herdsman's family.

"I learned of your sorrow, Hedwig," he said quietly, "and would pray with you for your husband's return. He is indeed a brave man, and you have a brave son, too," he added putting his hand on Walter's head. Together they all knelt on the floor as Brother Klaus prayed, "May the good Lord who watches over the weak, the pure, the innocent now watch over brave William Tell. Bring him home safely and keep him from all harm. Amen."

Afterwards Brother Klaus shuffled from the hut quietly and disappeared in the darkness. When Walter closed the door after the holy man, his heart too was comforted. Soon they all went to bed. Hedwig let Prinz sleep inside by the fire this one night. She was the last one of the family to close her sad eyes. The fire flickered on the hearth and the wind whistled among the pine trees. A goat bleated sadly now and then. Water dripped down the chimney as regularly as the ticking of a clock. The church bells tolled and tolled the passing of the hours, while the family of William Tell slept restlessly.

Just as dawn was breaking, Walter Tell awakened, for Prinz was

jumping against the door and whining. Walter heard footsteps. A grayish light came through the single window. And then all at once the door burst open, and in the dim light of the new day, Walter saw his father. He stood in the doorway trembling, his tunic torn, and streaks of dried blood running down his arms like dark rivers. He was drooping with weariness, and covered with mud and dirt.

“My husband, oh my husband!” cried Hedwig, jumping from her bed. She ran and clasped Tell around the neck and sobbed on his breast. “You have come at last, at last. How anxious we have been. Oh, my husband!”

Grandfather had awakened too and was staring sleepily at Tell.

“I am spent,” sighed Tell at last. “Let me sit. I have walked through the night and have not slept, so it seems, for years.”

“Yes, yes, take off those muddy clothes, my husband. I will bring you dry ones,” uttered Hedwig, tears of joy in her eyes, as Walter and Rudi, now fully awake, danced about their father.

“Father, Father, how did you get away?” they cried. “Did the boat really sink, Father? Tell us, tell us, how did you get away?”

“Children, children, be quiet,” said Hedwig to them sharply. “Don’t you see your father is sick and must eat and rest and be quiet? Later he will tell you.”

The boys stared at their father with anxious eyes. He looked wounded. His face was drawn and haggard like that of an old man.

William Tell put on dry clothing, washed the blood from his arms, and the mud from his face and neck. Then he sat down and ate and drank until he could eat and drink no more. After his meal he seemed to grow younger with the minutes. Soon he lifted Rudi on his lap, while Walter stood beside him, his hand upon his father’s shoulder. All were waiting.

Courage

TELL began, "Gessler's soldiers bound me with iron chains. I fought with all my strength and it took five of the rascals to hold me. They dragged me along. The people of Altdorf ran cursing after them, throwing stones. A horse reared and struck a little maid. Gessler and his knights rode ahead of us and did not look back. How I hated that tyrant! If I had been free, I would have cut his heart to ribbons with an arrow."

"You would, Father, you would too," echoed Walter proudly.

"What happened then, Father?" asked Rudi, tugging at his father's beard.

"Be quiet, Rudi, and stop pulling at my beard or I'll put you down," scolded Tell.

"Rudi, Rudi, be good," said Hedwig soothingly.

William Tell continued, "When we reached the lake, the guards threw me into the bottom of a large boat tied at the water's edge. The sky was very dark and it was raining across the lake. The wind blew, too, and there were whitecaps on the water. Those white-livered soldiers were fearful when they saw high waves. They knew about the Lake of the Forest Cantons and how dangerous it could be in time of storm."

"Were they all foreigners, the soldiers, I mean?" asked Walter.

"Yes, most of them were," answered his father, "but one, Peter by name. He was a good and kind man. When he saw that the chains were cutting my arms, he loosened them a bit. Peter once lived in Burglen as a lad. Do you remember him, Hedwig, Peter, the tanner's son?"

"Oh yes, Peter," mused Hedwig, "of course I remember him well. When I was young I used to play with him in the village fountain. I did not know he had become a soldier for the governor. I would have thought better of Peter. He was such a sweet lad."

"Men do many things, Hedwig, that they do not wish to, just to live," answered Tell sharply. "Don't blame Peter. He was poor and had no trade. Men like Peter become common soldiers. You remember how many of our lads go abroad when they are grown and hire out to kings and dukes all over Europe."

"Of course," sighed Hedwig, putting her arms protectively about Walter as if he too might some day become a soldier. "But Peter was such a sweet lad, just like Walter and Rudi are now."

Walter felt uneasy. He thought it might be nice to become a soldier some day when he grew up and wear a helmet and carry a long spear. Yet he knew his mother would never want him to.

Tell continued, "I saw that the soldiers feared the lake. It is a long way to Kussnacht by boat. They whined that the lake was dangerous in storm. There were many hidden rocks, men said, where boats had sunk. But stubborn Gessler commanded, 'Enter the boats, men, and let us be off!'

“The Austrians took their places at the oars and one handled the tiller. When we started out, a stroke of lightning flashed on the mountaintop above the Rootli. A sign—I thought—a sign. None of those stupid foreigners knew a thing about the Lake of the Forest Cantons. It takes years to know the whims of the lake. Peter knew these whims and he was pale, not from sickness, but from fear.”

“Once, Father, I was fishing on the lake and a storm came up and I saw whitecaps just as you say. We brought our boat to shore at once,” Walter exclaimed.

“Let Father go on with the story, Walter, and don’t interrupt,” Hedwig scolded.

“The boat skipped about on the water like a cork,” continued William Tell. “No one could stand. Had I been free of the chains, I could have managed it but those numskulls thought they knew it all. How the wind blew! The waves were higher than this hut, my sons, much, much higher. The rain made a gray blanket about us so we could not see. I lay at the bottom of the boat soaked with water. I was shivering as with ague. The soldiers grew pale. They retched and belched. The good cider and deerflesh they had eaten at the Inn at Altdorf that morning spilled from them into the water.

“Peter knew we might sink at any moment. He stared at Gessler and then I heard him plead, ‘My Lord, there is a man in this boat, the prisoner, who knows the Lake of the Forest Cantons as if he had drawn every rock and current on parchment. Please have pity and save us all. For the Virgin’s sake, let William Tell take the tiller. He alone can guide us to safety. He has known this lake and its moods since he was a lad.’

“Gessler looked startled. He stared down at me in the bottom of the boat, wet, shivering and bleeding. Peter pleaded again. Several of the Austrians, afraid for their lives, pleaded with him too. Gessler was sick

himself. He belched and retched and was the color of mustard. Suddenly after a fit of dizziness, he commanded, 'Unbind the prisoner. Steer the boat, Tell, and steer it to safety or your life is forfeit.' "

"Ha, ha," laughed Grandfather, "what chance had the tyrant to do anything about your life if he himself lay at the bottom of the lake?"

"Yes, that was the joke of it," laughed Tell, "but no one saw a joke just then. They were all too sick and frightened. They unbound me quickly. I grabbed the tiller. The waves were now mountain-high and the wind blew us this way and that way. But in just a little while I had that boat under control and it was pitching in the direction I wished it to go. For I had a plan and the plan did not include Gessler and his milksop crew."

"What was the plan, Father?" inquired Walter breathlessly.

"Now if you will only wait, Walter, your father will tell you," said his grandfather. "Go on, William."

"As we drew into quieter waters near shore, I steered the boat toward that flat rock below Axenstein," continued the mountaineer. "I heard Gessler say happily, 'We will soon land, men. Then we will rest in the forest until the storm is over. Toward evening we will row to Kussnacht.'"

"I smiled to myself. They would never rest in that forest. In a moment the prow of the boat struck solid rock and I jumped ashore. When I felt the rock under my feet, I kicked the boat with all my strength. It whirled around and a crazy current caught it. In no time at all it was far out in the lake. As I ran for the shelter of the forest, I heard the soldiers cursing me. They would have shot at me, but the boat was rocking too much. I yelled, 'We'll meet again, Gessler!' Then I hid behind a tree. I was sorry that I could not take Peter with me."

"Yes, Peter was such a sweet lad," murmured Hedwig.

"Father, didn't any of the soldiers shoot at you?" asked Rudi.



"Rudi, Father just said they didn't," quieted his mother. "They were too sick. Don't ask any more silly questions."

"What then, Father?" asked Walter.

"Well, boys, you should have seen that boat! As I peered from behind a tree in the forest, what a rare sight I saw! Gessler was leaning over the side of the boat. He was very sick. The wind had blown his elegant hat from his head. It swirled around in the water and then it sank. But I could not afford to gloat over his misery any longer—I had much to do and quickly. I sat down on a log for a few moments, thinking. Perhaps the currents and the winds between them might sink Gessler and his soldiers. But I could not be *sure*. If they should escape drowning, I would be a hunted man forever. A price would be posted in every village for my capture. I could never live in my own home again."

"Really, Father, couldn't you sleep in your own bed as you always do?" asked Rudi.

"No, little Rudi, I would have to sleep in the forest with a rock for a pillow.

"And if Gessler could not find me, he might pour his wrath upon you, my dear Hedwig, or on you, my Father, or on my two sons. You remember how he blinded Arnold's old father when he could not catch Arnold?" said William Tell.

"That is true," nodded Grandfather.

"And so," continued Tell, "I made up my mind. I would waylay Gessler. If the boat should finally weather the storm, he and his knights would very likely land near the road that leads to the Castle of Kussnacht. I would wait for him as he rode along the 'Hollow Way' as it is called, to his castle. It was damp and cold in the forest. I walked all afternoon and all that night without food or rest. Toward dawn I came to the hut of Nicholas, your old friend, Father."

"Yes, Nicholas, the woodcutter, a good man," answered Grandfather, smiling.

"He was good to me," replied Tell. "He gave me bread and meat. He warmed me at his fire. After a few hours I started out again. I walked and walked. My legs were scratched in the dense thickets. See," and Tell pointed to his legs.

"Oh, Father, you *are* scratched up," said Rudi and Walter, touching their father's scarred legs gently.

"I didn't notice the scratches very much," continued Tell, "I was so anxious to reach the Hollow Way. I saw bear and deer and fox too, but did not stop for I had much bigger game than they in mind. When I finally reached the sunken road, I was cold and very hungry but did not dare to make a fire. I hid in the gaping hole of a huge pine tree away from the wind and waited and waited. I waited long. Many times I thought I heard sounds of horsemen, but they were sounds of nature: the wind, rocks slipping, frogs croaking. I must have slept, for suddenly I awoke as I heard a new sound, a horse neighing. I listened. The sound came faintly again. It seemed nearer. Then I heard a dog bark and a horse's hoof strike a rock far-off."

"My, Father, you must have been scared then," chimed in little Rudi.

"No, Son, I was too anxious to be scared. I got my bow ready and I waited. The mother doe was not more silent than I was. Soon came more sounds: a shout—a horse's neigh—pounding of hoofs. I was sure now and I was ready. I peered from behind a tree, and at last I saw something moving. Men on horseback. It might be another party of horsemen I thought. Perhaps not Gessler at all. I must wait and be sure before I struck. It was hard enough for me to kill Gessler in cold blood, even after what he had done to me, but I must not kill the wrong man."

"How long did you wait, Father?" sighed Walter, his eyes big with suspense.

"Not long I guess, Son, not long. Soon I saw horses and riders. As they came nearer and nearer they would suddenly disappear, for the

road wound around big rocks and trees. But soon I could not doubt. The first horse approached me and I saw the knight riding; it was indeed Gessler. But how the bluster had gone from him! He rode wearily, a tired man. I had the arrow in place, the thong tight. My fingers were on the trigger as I waited. I had waited so long for this moment to come that I was a little nervous. I must get Gessler with the first arrow! I could not gamble on a second one. My fingers quivered as the horseman came nearer and nearer. He suspected nothing. Then the road curved. Between two great rocks rode Gessler toward me. Now he faced me. I whispered to my bow, 'bow be strong, arrow be swift!'

"Oh, Father!" exclaimed the two boys.

"Yes, the arrow was swift, my sons. Gessler never knew what hit him. He slumped to the ground like a sack of meal as his horse reared. His terrified soldiers stopped and dismounted quickly. They rushed to the aid of their dead lord. It was too late. But I had no time to watch their terror. I ran back through the forest and by nightfall I reached the hut of Kunz."

"So the governor is really dead," sighed Hedwig.

"Yes, Gessler is dead. He died as any man dies, poor or rich, great or lowly. He is as dead as that log yonder," said Tell, looking into the smouldering fire.

"Kunz was happy when I told him of Gessler's end," continued Tell. "He slapped his thighs and bellowed. His daughter had suffered at the hands of one of Gessler's soldiers, so you know how he felt. He brought forth a bottle of rare old wine and we drank to the freedom of Uri."

"And of Schwyz and Underwalden, too," added Grandfather.

"Yes, to the freedom of us all," replied Hedwig.

"Alight with wine and food, I hastened homeward," said Tell. "I did not feel tired. Perhaps I was wrought up over what had happened. I walked and walked. No man saw me but Kunz. I told no man of

Gessler's death. I slipped through Altdorf and Burglen like a shadow and not even a dog barked."

Walter and Rudi sighed. The story was over. They looked up into their father's face and their eyes were shining. "But, Father," asked Walter, "won't the soldiers look for you now? Will you have to hide in the forest in the daytime and sleep among the rocks at night as Arnold did?"

"No, Son, I do not have to hide now," replied Tell, stroking Hedwig's hand, for she was trembling. "Now that the governor is dead, those weak-kneed soldiers of his have no one to command them. They will hide from us like rats in a hayrick. They may even run away to Austria in the dark of the night. They love their own skins too much to venture into our mountains to search for me. We mountain folk can shoot."

"Still no one can be *too* sure," sighed Hedwig, still fearful. "It is true no man saw you shoot Gessler, but Kunz knows it. He may tell others for he is happy. The story may be all over Uri soon."

"Well, what if it is?" answered Tell proudly. "Remember Uri is big and it takes time to get a story all over Uri. And the New Year comes soon."

"It is as you say, Hedwig," added Grandfather. "The soldiers may guess who killed the governor, but the New Year comes soon now and we will revolt. We will revolt together."

Walter glowed at the thought of the New Year and the revolution.

"Already the herdsmen in the mountains are gathering wood," continued Grandfather. "You should see the huge pile on Hockalp, boys. In a few days the people of Uri will drive the rascals out."

"But, Father, what will the king do when he learns that Gessler is dead?" asked Walter, worried about his father.

"Do? It will take a long time before the news reaches him, Son. Austria is very far away. When Albrecht hears about Gessler's death,

he may be too busy with other people and their revolts against him. No one likes Albrecht. And by that time we will be free."

Walter was silent as he thought, If only Mother would let Rudi and me go to Hockalp on New Year's morn. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see the huge fires blaze on the mountaintop and to watch the great peaks lit up by all of the signal fires!

He turned to his mother and said, "Mother, Rudi and I are going out." She hardly heard him she was so thoughtful. When the boys were outside, Walter whispered to Rudi, "Rudi, let's go up to Hockalp and see if there really is a pile of logs there as Grandfather just said." They ran breathlessly up the mountain trail.



The Dawn

“WHAT a good lad you have been today, Walter,” said Hedwig Tell. “You have kept the water pail full of water. You have carried in wood and the fire has always been blazing.” Hedwig Tell was weaving linen on the loom. She continued, “And not once today, Son, have I heard you quarreling with Rudi. You are both growing up.”

Her words of praise made Walter a little uncomfortable. He *had* tried to be helpful all day, but yet he had a special reason for doing so. He wanted to go to Hockalp that night. This was the last day of the year 1290. With the dawn of the new year perhaps three brave little cantons would free themselves of Austrian tyranny. He wanted to be there.

Walter leaned on the loom and watched the shuttle dart back and

forth. Then he said, "Mother, ever since Father and Grandfather left yesterday for the town, Rudi and I have been playing we were grown-up men and tried to take their places."

"Oh so *that* is it!" smiled his mother. She leaned over and felt playfully of Walter's shoulder blade. "What! Do I feel angels' wings sprouting from your shoulders, my son?"

Walter grinned. He loved his mother to joke with him. Then she began to weave again. The shuttle made a homely rhythm that Walter loved as it flew across the warp. After a long silence, the boy said, "Mother, please stop weaving for a moment. I want to ask you something." His eyes were shining and he was eager and anxious. His mother laid down the shuttle and waited for him to speak. Rudi was playing on the floor with a toy cow his father had carved for him. Suddenly Walter burst out, "Mother I'm eleven years old and soon will be twelve. You know what's happening tonight on Hockalp. The signal fires . . . Mother can't I go up on Hockalp at midnight? Please, please, Mother!"

Rudi bounded up from the floor and asked eagerly, "Can't I go along, Mother, can't I go with Walter?" Rudi had the keenest ears for things he was not supposed to hear.

"You'll freeze up there, Rudi. It's cold at midnight, you know," warned his brother.

"Oh I'll not freeze a bit. I'll put on that bear coat that's so warm and my fur mittens. I'll not freeze, will I, Mother?"

"Quiet children, don't tease," she scolded. She laid her shuttle down and gazed through the window, as if she were looking at something far, far away. The boys stared at her silently. After a long pause she said, "Yes, you may both of you go. But if I let you go, Walter, you must take good care of Rudi. Don't let him get lost or chilled. Will you?"

"No, I won't, Mother, I promise. Marie will be there, too, and we will both take care of Rudi, if you'll only let me go."

"Yes, Son, you may go. There may never again in your lifetime be another night like this one in the land of Uri. It will be a night I want you to remember when you are old. I want you to know while you are young, my son, that brave men will risk all they have for a belief. Now let us eat, and when it grows late, put on your bearskin capes and woolen socks. It will be bitterly cold at midnight on Hockalp."

Several hours later the Tell boys climbed the trail through darkness and snow, wrapped in bear-fur coats. Prinz barked at their heels.

When Walter and Rudi reached Hockalp, they were puffing and panting, for the trail was steep. Many mountain folk stood about a huge pile of logs, hugging themselves to keep warm. They were all very quiet. The dark forest rose about them. The night was crystal clear with the stars like diamonds. Walter found Marie and her grandfather together. The children chased each other and threw snowballs, and so were warm.

Suddenly Walter noticed Klaus, the hermit, standing near. As the boy stopped and stared at him, Klaus knelt in the snow and raised his hands to the sky. Soon all of the herders were kneeling in the snow, even the children. There was a long, long silence as they waited.

And then Klaus prayed, "Dear Lord, Father of all men, look down upon us this great night. Be with us when the bells ring, when the signal fires burn. Help us throw from our shoulders the yoke of the tyrant. But, good Lord, let no blood flow this night in the land of Uri. Even in this, our greatest hour, help us to remember that all men, even evil men, are our brothers. Keep our hearts pure, our arms strong. For the Virgin's sake. Amen."

A deep chorus of "Amens" rose to heaven. And then Walter heard

a sound he had always loved, the deep notes of the great alphorn. Its slow, sad melody rose and fell, echoing from the mountain peaks, growing ever fainter and fainter. Someone played a flute. As the two melodies joined, Walter heard the tolling of distant bells. From far off they came, from valleys below. The bells of Burglen, of Altdorf, of distant Brunnen. Tolling, tolling, deep and sad, they joined with the lovely sounds of alphorn and flute.

“Rudi, listen, it’s midnight now. Listen to the bells and the flute and the alphorn.” Walter held his brother tightly by the hand. “Look Rudi, they’re going to light the fires now, look!”

As the boys watched, little flames like orange flowers blossomed at the base of the woodpile. The flames grew larger. Then all at once a red tongue of fire roared up into the dark sky. The children ran from the fire and held their hands before their faces.

“Look, Marie, look, Rudi, at the other fires,” shouted Walter. All about them now on the highest mountain meadows, danced fires, here, there, everywhere.

“Are they going to burn down the mountains?” asked Rudi, frightened of the many fires he saw all about him.

“Of course not, Rudi, don’t be scared. The mountains can’t burn down, they’re wet with ice and snow,” soothed Walter.

Now began singing. To the sounds of the flute, the deep alphorn and the distant bells, the people held hands and marched slowly around the fire. They sang an ancient song. It seemed to Walter as he listened that it was a song such as patriots might sing as they carried upon their shoulders the body of some dead hero. He felt a great joy within him. His throat felt tightened and tears were on his cheeks. Only the tears were those of happiness. For at that moment, Walter Tell, a simple mountain lad, seemed to know why thirty-three men had met on that mountain meadow and had sworn an oath to fight and to die together.

Why his own father had stood so fearlessly before Gessler that autumn day in Altdorf. Why he himself had such faith in his father that he was not afraid of anything, even dying. Now he knew why his mother had wished him to be on the alp that night of nights. He felt this only dimly, but he felt it nevertheless. He knew what the wise have always known, that man lives by faith, and that faith can be stronger than fear. . . .

He marched and sang with the others and his heart was full to bursting. And the bells tolled, the fires blazed, and the stars looked down. He forgot all about Rudi, he was so carried away by the beauty and solemnity of that glorious night.

Then someone shouted, "Look—down in the valley—look!" And as they looked, a sudden flame rose against the dark hills. Walter heard heavy sounds as if a giant blacksmith were hitting an anvil with great hammer blows. "The castle of Zwing-Uri is afire," called one. "The castle of Zwing-Uri is falling. Gessler's castle has been captured."

At the word *Gessler*, the people stopped marching. The flute and the alphorn ceased. Then, as if led by a conductor, the people burst suddenly into song again; a song of joy and triumph and liberation. The mountain folk clung to one another as they sang. Some danced as though they had wings upon their feet. The wind was bitter, the snow icy, yet Walter Tell felt neither tired nor cold. He ran and danced with the others, uplifted by the beauty of the music, and the wonder of this night.

The fires dimmed, but on and on the herdsmen danced and sang. The sky in the east lightened with the promise of day. Then Walter felt Marie tugging at his fur cape. "Walter, where is Rudi? I haven't seen him for a long time."

"Oh, Marie, I forgot him! He was here a little while ago. The music was so beautiful and the dancing, I guess I just forgot. And I promised Mother to watch him too. Let's look for him. He may be asleep somewhere."

The two children left the crowd and began to search for the little boy. They could not find him. Then Walter whistled a call that Prinz knew. The herd dog came bounding to him from a hole in a big pine tree. "There he is over there," shouted Marie, "in that tree, see, Walter."

And there lay Rudi, snuggled like a little squirrel in the hole of the tree. With Prinz for a pillow he had kept warm through the night.

"Rudi, Rudi, wake up boy, you'll freeze," shouted Walter, shaking his brother.

"Where am I?" wailed the little boy, "I'm cold, where am I?"

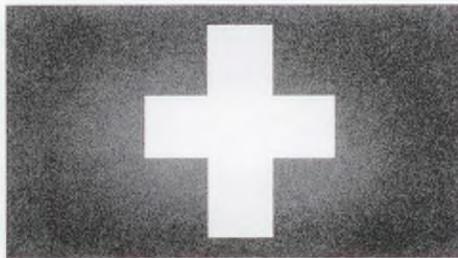
"On Hockalp, Rudi, and this is the New Year. Come, we must go home and you can get warm in bed."

Taking his brother by the hand, Walter half carried and half dragged Rudi down the slippery trail. The fires faded on the mountaintops. The noise of falling timber ceased. The alphorn stopped its sad music. So did the tender little flute. The people began to wander to their homes. And soon came dawn, the dawn of the year 1291. Switzerland was born.



The next day when William Tell and Grandfather came home, they told the Tell family of their adventures in Altdorf. They said that the bailiffs and their knights had fled the land. The castle of Zwing-Uri was now but a pile of black ashes. They heard that the castle of Underwalden was burned to the ground, too. The tyrants had run away and so Uri, Schwyz and Underwalden were free at last. Yet in all of this turmoil few people had died and little blood had been shed.

And so began the little country of Switzerland. As years, decades and centuries passed, other cantons joined with the three. Today twenty-two cantons form the Swiss Republic which we know.



As the years passed, William Tell became an old man with a white beard. He could no longer climb the mountains to hunt for the chamois and the deer, for his eyes were not so keen as they had once been. He lived in the same hut where he had always lived. Whenever he went to Burglen or Altdorf, the people doffed their hats to him as he walked the cobblestone streets or sat in the inn. The people of his canton knew well that they owed a part of their freedom to brave William Tell and to his son Walter.

Walter Tell grew to be a large man like his father, with great brown arms and a dark beard. He too became skilled with the crossbow. He became a hunter of chamois and deer like his father and knew the best

places to find game in the Alpine forests. When the time came for him to marry, he chose Marie as his bride. And as the years passed, two sons and two daughters were born to them. He named the oldest William after his own father.

On cold winter evenings, when the hours passed slowly, Walter and Marie would gather their children around them, and tell them stories of the days when they were young. Often the children asked for the story of Gessler and their grandfather and father. For were not their very own father and grandfather now heroes of Switzerland?

Sometimes Walter would relate the story of how those thirty-three men had met on a mountain meadow and vowed to fight together against their tyrants. Then, just before they went to bed, the girls would plead with their mother to tell them how she, their Uncle Rudi and their own father watched the signal fires burn and heard the bells toll on that now distant dawn of 1291.



And so it happened, since children everywhere like the same stories, that other people told their children the story of William and Walter Tell. It spread from one person to another. Before long people in other lands learned too of the great bowman of Uri. Years passed. Centuries passed. This old story was told by father to sons, by mother to daughters. And now today the story of William Tell is the story of one man's revolt against tyranny. It is just as true now as it was in those old days of the thirteenth century, the story of *The Apple and the Arrow*.

THE END