

CHILDREN'S PAGE

THE SHEPHERD AND THE DWARF

A great many years ago there lived a poor shepherd who had seven sheep, which he grazed on a high mountain slope. One day he was leaning on his crook and thinking of his children at home, for times were hard, and he was very poor.

Speaking quietly to himself, he murmured, "My poor children, if only I could give you enough to eat every day!"

Scarcely had the words left his lips when a little dwarf stood before him, with a red cap and a long straggly beard. "Come with me," said the dwarf, "and I will show you something worth seeing." So the shepherd followed him.

Now the dwarf was holding a root in his hand, and the shepherd went after him until he came to a halt at the foot of a steep cliff. Three times he raised the root and struck the rock, and it split open with a clap of thunder, revealing a deep dark cave. The dwarf stepped inside, followed by the shepherd.

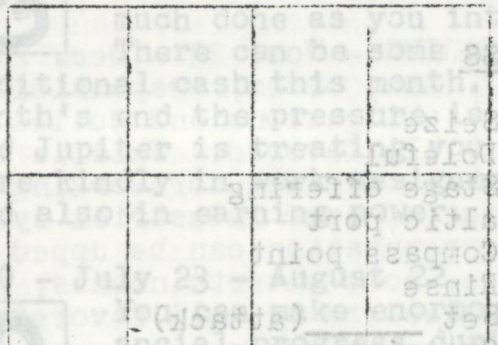
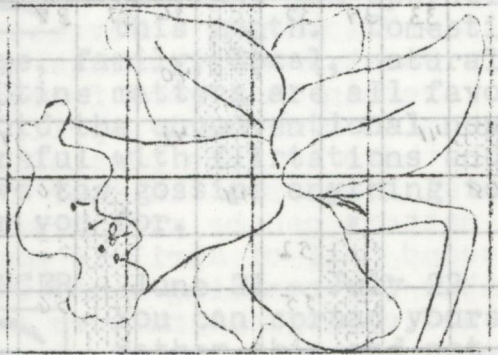
At the back of the cave burnt a fire, where many sooty-faced dwarfs were at work, forging all sorts of costly and beautiful things out of gold - crowns and chains, rings and bowls, cups and bangles. The shepherd's eyes almost popped out of his head at the sight of so much gold. "Take as much as you want," said the dwarf, "but don't forget the most important thing of all." So saying, he laid the root on the ground and vanished.

The shepherd had no need to be told twice, but stuffed all his pockets with gold and set off home. The moment he set foot outside the cave, the rocks clapped together with another peal of thunder.

The gold enabled the poor shepherd to buy food and shoes and clothing for his children for some time, but at last these good times

came to an end. Day after day he wandered up and down the cliff face looking for the entrance to the cave, but the mountain remained closed for ever, for he had forgotten the most important thing of all - the magic root.

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