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MASTER FLEA

E. T. A. HOFFMANN

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horsemanship, he brought the wild animal so to his reason, that it trembled and panted, and recognized his master in Peregrine. Upon his dismounting, Alina led the conquered horse into his stable.

This somewhat violent riding, which had caused an outrageous noise in the room, and indeed through the whole house, was now over, and Peregrine seated himself at the table, that he might quietly take a nearer view of the other splendid presents. With great delight he devoured some of the marzipan, while he set in motion the limbs of the different puppets, peeped into the various picture books, mustered his army, which he with reason deemed invincible, since not a single soldier had a stomach in his body, and at last proceeded to the business of the chase. To his great vexation, he discovered that there was only a hare and fox hunt, and that the stag and wild boar chase were altogether wanting. These, too, ought to have been there, as none better knew than Peregrine, he himself having purchased the whole with unspeakable care and trouble.

But, hold! It seems highly requisite to guard the kind reader against the awkward mistakes into which he might fall, if the author were to go on gossiping at random, without reflecting that though he may know the meaning of these Christmas-Eve arrangements, it is not so with his reader, who would wish to learn what he does not comprehend.

Much mistaken would he be who should imagine that Peregrine Tyss was a child, to whom a kind mother, or some other well-affectioned female, called in romantic fashion Alina, had been giving Christmas boxes—nothing less than that!

Mr. Peregrine Tyss had got to his six-and-thirtieth year, and herein had passed almost the best of life. Six years before, he was said to be a handsome man; now he was with reason called a man of gentlemanly appearance, but at all times—then, as well as now—it was the cry of all, that he lived too much to himself, that he did not know life, and was manifestly suffering under a diseased melancholy. Fathers, whose daughters were just marriageable, thought that to get rid of this melancholy, the good Tyss could do nothing better than marry; he had a free choice, and had little reason to fear a negative. The opinion of the fathers was at least correct in regard to the latter point, insomuch as Mr. Tyss, besides being, as before said, a man of gentlemanly appearance, possessed a considerable property, left to him by his father, Mr. Balthasar Tyss, a very respectable merchant. Maidens who have got beyond the heyday of love—that is, who are at least three or four-and-twenty years old—when such highly gifted men put the innocent question of “Will you bless me with your hand, dearest?” seldom do otherwise than answer, with blushing cheeks and downcast eyes, “Speak to my parents, sir; I shall obey them—I have no will,” while the parents fold their hands and say, “If it is the will of Heaven, we have nothing against it, son.”

But Mr. Peregrine Tyss seemed inclined to nothing less than marriage, for besides that he was in general averse to society, he showed more particularly a strange idiosyncrasy towards the female race. The mere proximity of any woman would bring the perspiration on his forehead, and if actually accosted by a tolerably handsome girl, he would fall into an agony that fettered his tongue, and caused a cramp-like trembling through all his limbs. Hence, perhaps, it was that his old servant was so ugly, that, in the neighbourhood where Mr. Peregrine Tyss lived, she passed for a wonder in natural history. The black, rugged, half-grey hair accorded well with the red bleary eyes, and just as well agreed the thick copper nose with the pale blue lips, in forming the image of an aspirant to the Blocksberg;¹ so that two centuries earlier, she would hardly have escaped the stake, instead of being, as now, esteemed by Mr. Peregrine,

¹ The *Blocksberg*, or *Brocken*, is the name of the highest part of the Hartz mountains, where the German witches celebrate their saturnalia. —Translator

