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# SELECTED NARTÆ TALES

*Translated by Walter MAY*



## WÆRXÆG AND HIS SONS

### THE BIRTH OF ÆXSAR AND ÆXSÆRTÆG

*Wærxæg* was in those days among the eldest of the Nartæ. To him were born two sons, twins. One came at the first cock-crow, the other before the morning star *Bonværnion* had appeared in the sky, at the second cock-crow. The rays of the risen Sun glanced into the hearts of *Wærxæg*, and he felt how dear to him were these two new-born babes. So that the day of their birth should bring the newcomers happiness, *Wærxæg* prepared a feast, consisting of game caught in the hunt, to regale his guests.

*Wærxæg* invited the heavenly smith *Knyrdalægion*, and the ruler of the deep seas *Donbettyr* and highly-esteemed Nartæ, *Boræ* and others, were called to that rich feast. *Knyrdalægion* took a fancy to *Wærxæg*'s sons and named them so: the elder he called *Æxsar*, and the younger *Æxsærtæg*.

Why did he give them these names? Speaking of a brave man one says «*æxsar*». The first brother was such a brave young fellow, and so received that name. But the second brother was even bolder, and so he was called «*æxsærtæg*» which means «bravest».

To celebrate the naming of the new-born, *Knyrdalægion* presented *Wærxæg* with a magic flute *udævdz*, which he had forged himself from tempered steel at his

heavenly forge. The Nartæ placed wonderful flute *udævdz* on the festive table, and it began to play on its own accord, merrily and resoundingly:

«Take a cup of mead!  
Take a cup of mead!  
Drink it down indeed!  
To please the God!»

For seven days and seven nights *Wæræg's* guests feasted, and when the feast was over *Kwyrdalæg* leapt onto the crest of a fiery storm-cloud, and like wide-winged *Pak'undzæ*, flew off them to the heavens. *Donbettyr* changed into a pearly, fiery fish, and disappeared into the sea depths. The Nartæ, as befits those who spend their life on campaign, went off on a dangerous expedition.

*Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* grew with each passing hour. In one day grew they two inches, in a night a whole hand's breadth! They were a mischievous pair. They made for themselves bows and arrows, and there was not a bird who could fly over their heads. They shot them down immediately, and they fell like stones to the earth. The whole world soon knew that the Nart *Wæræg* had two gallant grown-up twin sons *Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg*.

### ÆXSAR'S SWORD

*Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* soon grew up, and there came the day when they decided to go on campaign for a year. They made all their gear ready, and set off on the road. They came to a place where the road divided into three, and agreed thus: «We shall take one side-road each, and the middle road will be our place of meeting. Let us both put one of our own arrows we have beneath this stone by the wayside. Whoever returns, let him come to this stone and see whether his brother's arrow is still there».

*Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* then parted, travelling different roads. A year passed by, and *Æxsærtæg* returned to the agreed spot, lifted the stone and saw that *Æxsar's* arrow still lay there, covered with moss and mould. *Æxsærtæg* was at once disturbed. What had happened to his brother? He set out at once on the road which *Æxsar* had taken. He travelled a long time through forest and field, and over mountains, and towards evening he came to the Black Ravine. There he stayed for the night, and saw in his dream that his brother had been taken prisoner.

At once *Æxsærtæg* jumped up and went on further. Again he travelled all day, and towards evening he came to the White Ravine. He rested once more for the

night in a forest grove, and had only just fallen asleep when he saw the same troubled dream as on the first night. Again he jumped up, and still full of alarm he went on further. From morning till eve he travelled, and now before him he saw the Red Ravine. But how could he help feeling hungry after such long travels? He could not sleep but went in search through the whole grove, hoping to find some wild game to shoot. Suddenly he saw a lake, and on the shore stood a tent. In the tent from time to time some strange incomprehensible light appeared, and then disappeared.

«That tent is put there for some purpose,» he thought, «maybe I can find out here what has happened to my brother?»

He stepped a little nearer to the strange tent and began to peer ahead through the flap. He saw that inside the tent an iron door had been made on the floor, which opened and closed by itself, and each time it opened a light was seen nearby. *Æxsærtæg* was amazed. What kind of wonder was this? The next time the light appeared, he loosed an arrow in that direction. Straightway he then heard a piercing cry – such a shriek that the trees bent down, and the lake seethed up and hurled waves ashore, and the beasts sleeping for the night in the grove were scared, and began to run away, bumping into one another in their haste. A little time passed, and all grew still. The lake gathered its waves together, the trees straightened up, and beasts quietly returned to their rest.

It began to grow light. As soon as dawn became clear, *Æxsærtæg* saw an old woman come out of the tent. She had one crooked eye quite sightless, and in the other seeing eye stuck the arrow he had shot. She was moaning and groaning. *Æxsærtæg* came nearer and saw that she carried his brother's towel in her hand. He asked straightway:

«Who are you, old woman? How do you come to have my brother's towel in your hand?»

«Ah, young man, I don't know who you are, but if you call yourself *Æxsar's* brother, then you are my brother as well. I am one of the *Nartæ*. When he set out for the under-water dwellers, the *Bycenægtæ*, he left me his towel and said sternly «Take care of it, my sister. If blood appears on it, that means that I am in difficulties, but if no blood appears, then you need not worry about me!» I have just seen blood on the towel. That means that he is in great trouble, your brother *Æxsar*, and he has probably fallen prisoner in the hands of the *Bycenægtæ*. Now I have been blinded, and I don't know what I can do».

«Is there no remedy that would give you back the sight of one eye at least?» asked *Æxsærtæg*.

«If someone gathered some drops of morning dew and mixed them with doe's milk, and sprinkled it on my wound, then I should see!»

*Æxsærtæg* ran off into the forest, caught a young deer and milked it, and mixed with it some fresh dew-drops. Then he gently removed the arrow from the

woman's eye, and poured into the wound the prepared mixture. She at once began to see again, and was happy to make out *Æxsartæg*.

«How do you think my brother fell prisoner to the *Bycenægta*?» *Æxsartæg* then asked her.

«I will tell you all, from the beginning, as far as I know it. The *Bycenægta* went out hunting, and suddenly the gates of the sky opened, and out fell a piece of heavenly ore, right on the head of the eldest *Bycenæg*, and passed right through him. The *Bycenægta* carried off that piece of heavenly ore with them, below the water. *Æxsar* heard about this, and thought that he would take this piece of ore from them. When he came they must have surrounded him, tied him up and carried him off prisoner with them. Just today I was making plans what to do, when because of your blow I was unable».

«But to whom among the Nartæ do you belong, and why do you call yourself one of our women? To whom are you sister? Then afterwards explain why when I looked at your tent at night there appeared and disappeared a strange light?»

«I am *Wærxcæg*'s sister, but have lived here for a long time. My husband was a table-companion of the Sun, and he presented him with a white stone. That stone I hung around my neck every night, and it lighted up my path. The light you saw was the light from it!»

«Where, then, has your husband gone?» enquired *Æxsartæg*.

The old lady pointed to the iron door, lying in the ground:

«That door leads to an underground cave, and at evening, on Saturdays, it opens. The *Bycenægta* come to catch at least one person living on Earth's surface. If they don't succeed, one of them dies. So it was they once took my husband, but what happened to him I do not know, just as I do not really know what has happened to *Æxsar*».

*Æxsartæg* and the old woman waited till Saturday evening came. When the door to the underworld opened, *Æxsartæg* put his shoulder under it to prevent it closing, then gave a great heave, and tore it out, together with the hinges, and flung it aside. After that he and the old lady went into the cavern and saw with horror that a man lay bound with arms and legs spread out, and from his beard and moustaches was woven a rope-like ladder which stretched up to the surface.

«There he is – my husband, the master of my head!» cried his wife.

*Æxsartæg* drew his sword and cut the man's bonds, and then cut short his beard and whiskers. The man stood up and thanked *Æxsartæg*. Then they went together into the cavern, and suddenly saw *Æxsar*, standing as it were crucified, with his back to the cavern wall, while the *Bycenægta* were shooting arrows at him, and then began attacking him with their swords. Seeing this, *Æxsartæg* fell on

them in a fury, and began to hew them down, while *Wærxcæg's* sister and her husband chased those who fled, and killed them.

Thus *Æxsærtæg* freed his twin brother *Æxsar*.

«You and your husband go along home together, and *Æxsærtæg* and I will come to you later!» said *Æxsar*.

The husband and wife went off together, while the brothers looked for the store-room where the *Bycenægtæ* kept the ore. They found this heavenly ore at last where the *Bycenægtæ* had hidden it, and carried it off to the smith of the gods, *Knyrdalægön*, and from it he made for *Æxsar* a two-edged sword. Such a sword it was, that from a single blow any stone or any metal would fall apart, while the blade itself was never blunted.

When *Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* descended to earth again from *Knyrdalægön's* forge, they found the *Bysenægtæ's* chief, *K'armæg*, waiting for them with more men. *Æxsærtæg* at once engaged them in a furious battle. But *K'armæg* struck *Æxsærtæg* such a cunning blow that he fell senseless to the ground, and sword dropped from his hand. Just then one of the servants of *Donbetyr* appeared and whispered to *Æxsar*: «Smear your blade with this fish-fat, and you will overcome your enemies!»

*Æxsar* at once smeared his sword with the fish-fat, and then when *K'armæg* raised his sword to strike him, *Æxsar* parried the blow, and *K'armæg's* blade shattered into tiny fragments, like little tin-tacks.

*Æxsar* went on to slay all his *Bysenæg* opponents, to the last one. The *Donbetyr* servant, who advised *Æxsar* how to avoid defeat, then carried *Æxsærtæg* off to the Milky Lake, and bathed him in its healing waters, where he immediately recovered consciousness.

The word about *Æxsar's* wonderful sword flew round among all the *Nartæ*. They all gathered to see, and stood in amaze before that wonderous weapon. Since that time, whenever difficulties faced the *Nartæ* *Æxsar* went into attack in the vanguard with his wonder-working sword against their enemies. For its invincible durability it received the name «*Æxsargard*», which means «*Æxsar's* sword».

After *Æxsar's* death, his eldest son inherited his sword. Since then it has been a *Nart* custom that the eldest son receives his father's sword, and the youngest son inherits his horse.

## THE NARTÆ'S APPLE

An apple-tree grew in the *Nartæ's* orchard. Like heavenly azure its blossoms shone, but each day only one apple grew ripe on it. That was a golden apple, and it gleamed like fire. It had also life-giving powers, and cured people from all kinds

of diseases, and healed all kinds of wounds. Only from death it could not save one. The whole day such an apple grew ripe but during the night somebody stole it. The Nartæ went on guard in turn, every night, but nobody ever saw anyone thieving the apple, though it continued to disappear each night.

It came to *Wæræg's* turn to stand on guard in the orchard. He called his sons *Æxsar* and *Æxsartæg*, and said to them:

«Go, my sons, and protect the golden apple. All my hopes are set on you. If you do not preserve it, then you know what will happen. All three Nartæ clans will gather here, a man from each of the three families. One of them will cut off your heads, the second will cut off your arms, and the third will stick on a stake the head of one of you and the arm of another, and I shall remain alone in my old age with none to protect me nor feed me!»

«Have no fear, father, we shall guard the golden apple tree!» his sons replied.

«Get along then. I know that you are afraid of nothing, only I myself am afraid that you should not guard the apple well,» said their father.

The fence round the orchard was of reindeer antlers, and it was so high that not even a bird could fly over it. The brothers sat under the magic tree, had their supper, and the younger one, *Æxsartæg*, said to the elder one, *Æxsar*:

«We shall stand guard by turns. You lie down now, and sleep till midnight. From midnight it will be your turn to watch».

*Æxsar* agreed, laid down, and slept. He awoke at midnight and said to his brother:

«May god forgive me, *Æxsartæg*, but have I not overslept?!»

«No, it is not midnight yet, sleep on a little!» said *Æxsartæg*.

*Æxsar* was glad to hear that and slept again. Then at about the hour when night begins to change to day, some kind of bird, it seemed, flew to the tree.

The apple was suddenly lit up, and *Æxsartæg* saw a pigeon near the magic apple. She plucked the apple-stem, and *Æxsartæg* straightway shot arrow at her, so that half of her wing fell to the earth, and the pigeon, covered in blood flew unevenly lower, and let the apple fall to the ground. Then *Æxsartæg* woke up *Æxsar*.

«You see these drops of blood?» he said to his brother. «I shot a pigeon in our apple-tree. She flew off, and see, here is half her wing! Very low, only just above the earth she flew, leaving a trail of blood. I must follow that track. I must catch her, or die in the attempt. There's nothing else left for me to do!»

*Æxsartæg* carefully bound up his victim's half-wing in a silken handkerchief, put the apple in his bosom, and when it grew quite light he said to *Æxsar*:

«I am off to seek that fatal bird. What do you say to that?»

«I shall come with you, wherever you go!» replied *Æxsar*. So the brothers followed the bloody trail which led them to the sea-shore.

«It goes on into the water!» said *Æxsar*, and *Æxsærtæg* replied:

«I shall go to the bottom of the sea. Wait for me here. If the waves throw up bloody foam on the shore – that means I am no longer in the land of the living, and you had better return home. If the waves throw up white foam, then wait for me here, wait just a year!»

«Very well,» answered *Æxsar*, and remained on the shore.

Then *Æxsærtæg* pulled up the ends of his overcoat and stepped into the water, and down to the bottom he went...

## THE BEAUTY *DZERASSÆ*

*Æxsærtæg* found himself in the house of the *Donbetyrtæ*.

The walls of the house were of mother-of-pearl, the floor of blue crystal, and the morning star shone through the ceiling.

*Æxsærtæg* stepped across the threshold, and there he saw seven brothers sitting, and along with them two sisters, one more beautiful than the other. Like gold glittered and gleamed the maiden's fair hair.

«Good day to you!» *Æxsærtæg* greeted them, «May happiness ever fill your home!»

«May you be blessed by a kindly fate!» one of the seven brothers, and sister pair replied. They rose and made place for him to be seated. The three who were older than he sat on one side, the four who were younger on the other. They looked *Æxsærtæg* up and down, and said:

«None like you have ever been in our home before, and never will be. We should be joyful at your coming, and greet you with honour, but we cannot do so now since we are in mourning».

«God save you from all sorrow. What woe is troubling you?»

The eldest brother answered him so:

«We have three sisters, and one of them has been going into the *Nartæ*'s orchard, and it has ended badly for her. There each day a golden apple grows ripe. At night our sister changed into a pigeon, and stole it away. More than once we told her that the *Nartæ* youths were bold, and no birds dare fly over their heads, so don't go after any more apples. But she did not listen to us. The *Nartæ* *Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* were guarding the apple-tree last night, and wounded our sister fatally, may they cut each other down with their swords!»

They had only just pronounced this name when a groan was heard from the adjoining chamber.

«Who is that groaning?» enquired *Æxsærtæg*.

«It is our *Dzerassæ*, of whom we have told you,» they replied.

«Is there any remedy which will cure her?» asked *Æxsærtæg*.

«There is such a remedy!» answered one of the brothers, «If anyone can put back the missing half of her wing in its proper place she will be cured, and her life will be saved, if not she will surely die!»

«How would you reward anyone who cured your sister?»

«We should give our beloved sister *Dzerassæ* to him in marriage! The gods have decreed that only such a one should she marry».

Then *Æxsærtæg* boldly told the brothers the truth:

«I am *Wæræg's* son, *Æxsærtæg* is my name. The half-wing of your sister is in my keeping. I was the one who wounded her, and I will be the one to cure her. Bring her in here, I beg you!»

The brothers' faces all lit up with happiness, and they answered *Æxsærtæg*.

«Our sister *Dzerassæ* is seriously ill, and we cannot move her out here to you. You yourself must cross the threshold of her chamber».

Then *Æxsærtæg* stepped across the threshold.

*Dzerassæ* was lying on her bed, and her golden hair fell over her shoulders and down onto the floor. The sun was laughing on her face, and the moon was shining upon her breasts. She turned towards *Æxsærtæg*, and he could not help smiling with happiness. He took from his belt the silk handkerchief, and laid the half wing on *Dzerassæ's* wound. Then he gave her the golden apple from his bosom, and she ate it, and straightway she became seven times more lovely than before.

The seven brothers and her two sisters were all so glad, that they happily gave *Dzerassæ* to *Æxsærtæg* as his bride. One day then another and so on for a week the wedding-feast lasted for *Æxsærtæg* and for *Dzerassæ*, the daughter of *Donbetyr*. They fit one another like the sun and the moon among their guests at the festive board...

Day followed day, week followed week. *Æxsærtæg* and his beautiful bride *Dzerassæ* lived in the underwater land of the *Donbetyrtæ*.

Then came the time when *Æxsærtæg* remembered how his brother was still waiting for him, and he grew sad. He then said to *Dzerassæ*:

«I cannot live here any longer. I must go to meet my brother, and then return home!»

«If you have a home of your own, then we must hasten there. It is not good for me to remain here any longer!»

She was already with child, and wished for it to be born in her husband's home, as custom demanded.

In the hour of farewell, *Dzerassæ* took a strand of golden hair from her plait, and bound it round herself and *Æxsærtæg*, and at once they became one big fish, shining with scales of mother-of-pearl, and thus they swam up to the surface of the sea...



\* \* \*

In the dark forest, on the sea-shore, *Æxsar* built himself a tent of animal skins, and awaited news of his brother. Once he saw that the waves cast up white foam on the shore, and he was very glad. «Alive and well, my brother will soon return happily to me! I shall go hunting for wild game, and maybe I shall be back in time for his return». So off he went to the hunt...

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«Where are my two sons? Shall I never see them again?» so said old *Wærxæg*, and grief bent his head, and his great power was broken.

But the Nartæ youths were glad that *Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* did not return, since they were always and everywhere superior to them, and made them obey. They did not hesitate to mock at *Wærxæg*, and made him always take the cattle out to pasture as their shepherd, to insult him. *Wærxæg* grew angry at this. More than once he deliberately drove some of the cattle into the sea, and drowned them, or prodded them over the edge of an abyss, and they broke their necks. He remained in the wilds, and didn't go to the villages of the Nartæ, and all the same he suffered more, because of his absent sons...

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*Æxsærtæg* and *Dzerassæ* came from the bottom of the sea and saw on the shore a tent made of skins. They looked inside, but *Æxsar* was off hunting, and the tent was empty. When *Dzerassæ* entered the tent, all inside was lit up by the radiance of her face. Such a fine tent it was, that she said to *Æxsærtæg*:

«I cannot leave this place until I have sat and rested here awhile».

«Very well», replied *Æxsærtæg*, «you sit here meanwhile, and I'll go and look for my brother».

So *Æxsærtæg* went off to the forest to find his brother. In the meantime his brother returned home to his tent, and so the two brothers missed each other...

## THE DEATH OF *ÆXSAR* AND *ÆXSÆRTÆG*

*Æxsar* returned to his tent, and on entering caught sight there of *Dzerassæ*, and said to himself:

«Oh, God of gods! Do not take what happiness you have given us, neither on the road, nor at home! How could I expect that *Æxsærtæg* would not only return alive, but also bring his bride to my tent?»

*Dzerassæ* glanced at *Æxsar*, and took him for her husband. Those fair-haired, tall, bright-eyed, wide-shouldered twin brothers were as like as two peas, so much that even mother Earth and the gods in heaven could not distinguish one from the other.

«Why have you been so long away?» asked *Dzerassæ*.

*Æxsar* did not answer.

«What is wrong with you? Don't you recognize your own wife? Did we not live a whole year together beneath the sea, with the *Donbettyrtæ*?»

Thus *Æxsar* was convinced that before him sat his brother's wife.

*Dzerassæ*, taking *Æxsar* for her husband, gathered her things for the night, and began to cling to him, but saw at once that he turned away from her, distressed.

The time came to lie down and sleep. Silently *Æxsar* spread his felt cloak out, and they lay on that, covering themselves with *Æxsartæg's* cloak. *Æxsar* drew his sword and placed it between himself and *Dzerassæ*. This so infuriated her that she, being deeply offended, rose from the bed, and sat further away with a bitter-sad look on her face.

Some time after, towards morning, the tent-flap opened, and in stepped *Æxsartæg*. He had shot a deer, and had brought a tree branches and all, to make a fire.

When he caught sight of *Dzerassæ* sitting with an offended look on her face, and his brother sleeping under his cloak, then jealousy crept into his soul. What if *Æxsar* had taken advantage of his wife *Dzerassæ*? Why did she look so distressed?

He took an arrow from his quiver, and shot it up into the sky:

«Oh, God!» he prayed, «let my arrow soar like two, and return as one, and pierce that place where he touched my wife!»

The arrow soared away, then turned point downwards fell and struck *Æxsar's* little finger, and immediately he died.

Further distressed, *Dzerassæ* told *Æxsartæg* all exactly as it had happened, and he was siezed by despair. Because of him and his suspicion, his innocent brother had died! He straightway drew his sword, and placing the haft on his brother's breast, and the pointed blade at his own heart, he leaned heavily forwards upon his sword. The point pierced his breast, and thus *Æxsartæg* died...

#### DZERASSÆ'S LAMENT

And then *Dzerassæ* tore her hair,  
Beat with her fists on brow and knees,  
Scratched her cheeks, and cried in despair:  
«Oh, woe is me! Black days are these!

Because of me brothers have died.  
 Because of me their blood was shed!  
 She moaned and groaned, lamented, cried,  
 And mountains echoed her woe o'erhead.  
 Wild beasts in sorrow silent fell,  
 On hearing her pitiful sad lament.  
 Her tears on blood-stained cheeks did swell,  
 Went streaming, gleaming, never spent.  
 Her sorrow floated like a cloud  
 Above twin corpses as they lay.  
 Her warm tears fell, like a funeral shroud,  
 But nought could wash her woe away.  
 She sat between them. Till midnight came,  
 Above the corpse of *Æxsar* the bold.  
 From midnight till morning, just the same,  
 Above *Æxsartæg*, his flesh grown cold...  
 «What shall I do with these poor dead men?  
 Let ravens come, peck out their eyes?  
 Let foxes come, and gnaw at them,  
 And tear their pallid cheeks likewise?  
 I should make each of them a grave,  
 But how can I do so alone?  
 How bury them here, beside the wave,  
 Where all is stern, unyielding stone?..»

Just then *Wastyrdži*, a great spirit on a three-legged horse, and with a hunting hound, descended from the heavens to the earth. He then appeared before her, and said:

«O *Dzerassæ*! Sun of Suns! Ornament of the Universe. My lovely world, and the beauty of the Earth! Long since I have followed in your tracks, and here I see you in great sorrow. What has happened to you?»

«How could I not be sorrowful?» replied *Dzerassæ*, «I have been the cause of the death of these two brothers, and I do not know how I am going to bury them here!»

«O woman!» replied *Wastyrdži*, «I could of course bury them both, but if I do, then you must become my wife!»

*Dzerassæ* straightway answered:

«Why should I not become your wife, when you have buried them?»

Hearing this, *Wastyrdži* lightly struck the earth with the handle of his whip, and the bodies of the two brothers sank into the cavity in the ground. Then there

arose a tomb of stones united by mortar above their grave. Then above the risen tomb a beautiful palace arose. *Wastyrdži* then turned to *Džerassæ* and said:

«Well, now all is accomplished, and we can go...»

«Wait here a moment while I go and wash my face and hands on the sea-shore. How can I go with you like this? The blood has dried on my cheeks and fingers...» so *Džerassæ* answered him.

*Wastyrdži* took her words as true, and off she ran to the sea-shore. She threw herself into the watery waves, and sank below into her father's domain, the realm of *Donbettyr*.

*Wastyrdži* waited and waited, and what kind of thoughts and wishes did not run through his head? «Where is that woman, then? The lovely *Džerassæ* has disappeared! She has deceived me, and I shall not forget such deception. Just wait awhile, and woe to your hearthstone!» swore *Wastyrdži*. «In this world I may not be able to catch you, but how will you escape me in the Land of the Dead?»

*Wastyrdži* flew in a frenzy, leapt on his three-legged horse, and called his hunting hound, and galloped off along the sea-shore hunting.

## THE BIRTH OF WYRYZMÆG AND XÆMYC

*Džerassæ* lived beneath the waters in the home of her parents – the *Donbettyrtæ*. When her mother knew that *Džerassæ* was expecting a child, she said to her:

«Go now, my daughter, into the land of the Nartæ. Whoever is not born in their country, they will never recognize as their own».

So the poor woman did as her mother had advised. With bowed head she set out on her long journey.

«Even if I reach a Nartæ village, who will take me in?» she thought.

Soon she came to such a village. *Džerassæ* went near the square, the meeting place of the respected Nartæ elders. As is incumbent upon a bride, she bowed her head, and did not turn her back upon the old men.

The Nartæ elders were surprised.

«Who is she, then? She showed us deep respect, as though she were one of our newly-weds. But all our young wives are here in the village – there are none who according to the custom or because of some offence or the other would go back to their parent's home, to stay with them!»

Then the elders said to the young Nartæ:

«Go to our women, and tell them to find out who is this young woman stranger, who comes as our guest».

So the young Nartæ went to the Nartæ women and said to them:

«Listen, young wives of ours, well-mannered and silent before your elders, ask this newcomer why she too is silent before us – is she one of our brides? You, our respected older wives and mothers, find out if she too is a respected mother, and get to know her name, where she is from, and tell it to us!»

The young wives began to surround *Dzerassæ* and question her:

«Who are you, and what are you?» they clamoured.

But *Dzerassæ* did not answer, and thought to herself: «If I tell them who I am, my answer will not be heard by the elders from my own lips, and may not be believed!»

Then the mothers, seeing that she did not answer the young wives went up to her and asked her:

«What brings you, say, to the land of the Nartæ?»

*Dzerassæ* answered:

«Don't all ask me questions at once. If you wish to know who I am, and where I come from, let one of you speak, and I will answer».

Then one of the most respected mothers took her on one side:

«My sunshine, tell me, what brings you here. They all trust me here in this village, and you may trust me too!»

Then *Dzerassæ* glanced at the elderly mother and answered:

«It is awkward for me to even mention my name, and where I come from. It is shameful for me» to stand on Nartæ land, before you young Nartæ wives and respected mothers. One thing only I would ask of you; take me to the entrance to my husband's family tower».

«But you see, there are many such towers here. Who was he then, whose name and home you seek?»

«It is against custom to pronounce it before you», replied *Dzerassæ*, «but there is no other way out for me, so despite that, I must tell it to you. My husband was *Æxsærtæg*, and I beg you lead me only to the ground floor of his tower, where the cattle lives in winter».

Then the women told the young Nartæ whose bride she was, and they repeated it to the elders, sitting on the village square:

«This woman comes to us from those relatives of ours for whom we have been waiting for so long».

The elders were glad to hear this news, and replied:

«Let it be so, then. If we have not heard from them so long, then nonetheless we shall learn from her what has happened to them. Only do not take her to old *Wæræg*'s tower, but to the top-most chamber in *Æxsærtæg*'s bastion!»

When *Dzerassæ* standing nearby heard this she said to the women:

«It is not fitting for me to be there. Soon will come the time when I shall show you a new shoot off your family tree. Meanwhile it were better and qui-

eter for me to be not at the top of the tall tower, but in the shady cattle-stall below».

So the women led her to the stall down below in the tower, and there she gave birth to twin sons. *Wyryzmæg* and *Xæmyc* they named them.

### HOW *WYRYZMÆG* AND *XÆMYC* FOUND THEIR GRANDFATHER *WÆRXÆG*

By day two fingers, by night a handsbreadth grew her twin sons. But when they went out of doors for the first time from their home, and stood out on the street playing, and shooting their bows, all the Nartæ youngsters hid wherever they could from the whistling of arrows.

At that time *K'ulbadagus*, a prophetess, sent her only daughter to the spring to fetch some water.

As soon as *Xæmyc* saw the girl, he shot an arrow at her, which smashed the jug to smithereens, and tore her dress to pieces.

Crying and sobbing bitterly she returned home.

«What happened to you, for goodness sake? Why did you return home so soon, and where is the water I sent you for?»

«That mischievous young devil *Xæmyc* shot an arrow at me, and broke the jug to bits, and tore my dress to rags».

Her mother gave her another jug, and warned her:

«Go again, my daughter, and don't come back without water. May the milk I fed you on as a babe fill you with some of my sharp words. If you can't answer back to such a young rascal, may you not have much luck in your life!»

The girl had only just stepped out of the house, when *Xæmyc* again shot an arrow at her.

«How easy it is to test your strength out on me!» shouted the girl. «Any little bird of the forest is stronger than I. But if you are a bold young fellow, better go and find your old grandfather *Wærxæg*, who has withered away, wandering after the Nartæ's cattle!»

Having heard these offensive words, both lods broke their bows and arrows in a frenzy, and roaring and shouting like highway thieves, they burst into their house and told their mother:

«We are going to the meeting-place of the elders on the square. We have heard that our grandfather *Wærxæg* is still alive. We want to go and find him. The elders may tell where he is».

They arrived on the square, where elders from all three Nartæ families gathered, and some of the younger Nartæ too.

*Wyryzmæg* and *Xæmyc* bowed to the elders and said:

«May fortune smile on your council!»

«May it smile on you as well» – was the reply.

«We have heard that our father's father, *Wærxcæg*, is still alive, and pastures Nartæ cattle. We beg you to show us where we may find him!»

«Let some of the younger boys go with you and show you the way».

The lads led them to the pasture. As *Wyryzmæg* and *Xæmyc* strode towards their grandfather, the earth trembled beneath their feet, and stones fell from the cliff-sides.

From far away *Wærxcæg* heard the thunderous steps of *Wyryzmæg* and his brother *Xæmyc*.

«What a wonder is this?» thought he, «*Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* are no longer in the land of the living, but it seems to me I hear them!»

Suddenly he saw the youngsters, and called:

«Hey, who are you then?»

They answered him back:

«We are the twin sons of *Æxsærtæg*».

«Come nearer, come nearer to me. Only by feeling your limbs, and how you are made, can I tell who you are, and recognize you as my grandsons or not».

*Wyryzmæg* and *Xæmyc* came up to the old man and embraced him, and then *Wærxcæg* fell silent, while with the tips of his fingers he felt their wrists and knee joints. Tears began to flow from his eyes:

«My sons *Æxsar* and *Æxsærtæg* have perished, but I am happy that our breed has not passed away». Thus he recognized his grandsons.

*Wærxcæg* then led the youngsters back to his old tower. First they climbed upstairs to the chambers at the top, but saw that they could not enter for all the rubbish there accumulated.

Then one brother took a wooden shovel, and the other took a broom, and they cleared away the rubbish and swept the rooms. All was shining bright when they finished, and everyone saw that the tower was seven times more beautiful than before.

Supporting their old grandfather by the armpits, they led him out into the courtyard, and there they trimmed his shaggy hair and beard and whiskers.

Then they stuck his stick into the rubbish outside and made him urinate on it. And they saw that the foam went upwards.

They gaped at each other in surprise and said, one to the other:

«Yes, indeed, he's still quite young, our granddad! He can still work, and manage to feed our mother». They escorted him back to the hearth, sat him on a stool, and then said to him:

«We are your sons, and from now on we shall live with you!»

While they were doing all this, *Dzerassæ* stayed in the upper part of the *Æxsærtæggata*'s tower.

Now, having found their grandfather, and put all things in order, they set off to meet their mother again. They took her with them to the old tower of their grandfather *Wærxæg*, and old *Wærxæg*, when he saw *Dzerassæ*, took her to be his wife.

## WYRYZMÆG AND SATANA

### THE BIRTH OF SATANA

A year had passed since the marriage of *Wærxæg* and *Dzerassæ*. Then *Wærxæg* died, and *Dzerassæ* lived after that only a year or so more. Before her death she called her two sons to her and said to them:

«When I die you must stand guard over my corpse for the first three nights, because I am under the threat of a powerful being, who has sworn to give me no peace in the Land of the Dead».

Then she died, and they placed her body in a vault.

The first night came. *Wyryzmæg* put on his armour, took his bow and arrows, stood at the entrance to the vault and kept guard, till morning came. He did the same on the second night as well. On the third night *Xæmyc* said to his brother *Wyryzmæg*:

«Our mother brought us up together, so let me stand guard tonight over her dead corpse».

*Wyryzmæg* answered his brother thus:

«If I could have been sure of you, then not I but you, as the younger son, should have stood guard over our mother's body all the three nights!»

*Xæmyc* was offended by *Wyryzmæg*'s sharp words, but he put on his armour, took his bow and arrows, and set off for the vault. There he stood on guard – and how could it be otherwise? But soon, from the Nartæ village he caught sounds of merriment and feasting, the songs and dancing of wedding celebrations. Then with disappointment he thought:

«Let the one who listens to a dead person die too! Who would want the dead corpse of my mother? Let's go and join in the dances, and have some fun at the wedding-feast!»

But no sooner had he left the vault than its walls were lit up, and *Wastyrdži* entered. He tapped *Dzerassæ* with his magic felt whip, and she became alive, and seven times more beautiful than she had been. But when he left, he touched her again with magic whip, and all the life left her body again, and *Dzerassæ* slept the deep sleep of the dead.



Nearly a year passed by. Sharp-eared *Syrdon* passed *Dzerassa's* vault, and heard a baby crying there. He went straight off to the meeting-place on the square, where the three Nartæ families convened:

«Peace upon this meeting, and a good morning to you all!»

«May you meet with a happy fate this day, *Syrdon!*»

Then *Syrdon* told the elders of what he had heard:

«A miracle has happened in the Nartæ cemetery: a new-born babe is crying there!»

At the head of the elders, in the seat of honour sat *Wyryzmæg*. Having heard *Syrdon's* words he thought to himself: "My light-minded brother obviously did not guard my mother well on the third night..."

He jumped up, and quickly went to the burial-ground. There he entered *Dzerassa's* vault where her corpse lay, and at once saw nearby a newly-born baby girl. He took her home with him, and they named her *Satana*.

She was so wise and beautiful that in the light of her face the night became day, and the words she uttered were straighter than a sunbeam, and sharper than a sword.

#### HOW *SATANA* BECAME *WYRYZMÆG'S* WIFE

*Wyryzmæg* became a grown man and took as his wife a beauty named *Elda*, from the Nartæ family *Alægata*.

Meanwhile *Satana* had been growing up also. In one month she grew by a year, in one year she grew by three. She became such a beauty as had never been seen before among the Nartæ girls. Slender was she, bright-eyed as an angel, and when she turned round, she was like an arrow in flight. Her voice was like nightingale's song, and she when answered you her words were as caressing as a mother's. Her hands were hospitable and generous. The bread she baked was such that one crumb would satisfy your hunger, and make you as drunk as *æluton*, the ale, which the Nartæ so much loved to drink.

The time came for her to get married, and she thought to herself: «I should take a husband, but how am I to know who is fated to be my mate?» She looked around on the earth, she looked on high in the sky, but among the earthly souls, and even among the heavenly spirits she found none more valorous and wise than *Wyryzmæg*.

She simply could not disobey her heart's choice. «Either I shall become the wife of *Wyryzmæg*, or I shall not become anyone's wife!» So she said to herself. But it is easy to propose, and not so easy to dispose, as the saying goes.

To confess her desire to *Wyryzmæg* she did not dare, and to tell him through the lips of another she had no intention.

What's to be done? She must put a bold face on things and somehow broach the desired subject, so she spoke thus to *Wyryzmæg*:

«*Wyryzmæg*, does anyone cast his wealth and possessions to the winds? Is it not a pity to give me in marriage to some other family? You must become my husband. There is no other way out!»

*Wyryzmæg*'s ears rang with shame, the hair on his head stood on end.

«You can forget that at once!» he answered her, «Have you no conscience? If I did so, how could I show the Nartæ my face?»

Time passed by, not long, not short, and *Wyryzmæg* was preparing to go on a distant *balc*-campaign. He would be away for a whole year.

Then he said to his young wife *Elda*:

«When I return, people will come to our house to meet me, and greet me, and congratulate me on a safe return from the *balc*-campaign. See that you are in good time, and have everything ready to make our guests properly welcome, and prepare the necessary food and drink!»

So the year ran on towards its end. The time for *Wyryzmæg* to return drew near. *Elda* began to make honeyed mead for the guests. But when she poured the ferment in, it just would not brew properly. So, what could she do? *Elda* did not know that *Satana* had with her heavenly wisdom and earthly magic prevented the mead from fermenting. In her distress she ran to *Satana* and told her trouble:

«My dear girl from my husband's family! It is time for me to prepare a feast for my husband's guests, who will come on his return, but my mead will not ferment. If I do not prepare food and drink, my husband will see how helpless I am, and will beat me for it! He will be so angry – and that's worse than death for me!»

«But what business is that of mine?» replied *Satana* indifferently.

*Elda* ran to and from between the unfermented mead and *Satana*.

«What can I do now? Ah, woe is me!» she cried, «my soul is hanging by a single hair. My death-hour is drawing near!»

*Satana* had brought her to the brink of despair, and was convinced that she feared *Wyryzmæg*'s anger more than anything.

«Listen, my beautiful *Elda*», she said, «I want to play a joke on your husband when he returns. Lend me your wedding-dress and veil for one night, and I'll make some new ferment for the mead, so that it will brew at once, and be ready».

The young wife agreed to this, and *Satana* made some ferment from malt and hops, and the mead brewed up straight away.

*Wyryzmæg* returned safely. His Nartæ guests came to welcome him. At the feast they praised the mead, and congratulated him on his return. The horns of mead went round, all drank their fill, and all was well. *Wyryzmæg* too drank his fill, and when the guests had all departed went to his room.

*Satana* at once slipped on *Elda's* wedding gown and veil, and entered his chamber, and he took her for his wife.

«Young lady of the *Alægata*» he said, «you have become more beautiful than you were on our first night!»

«That so happens with all young brides in our family», answered *Satana* quietly, and not in the least disturbed...

Dawn was approaching, but again with her heavenly wisdom and earthly magic, *Satana* lighted up the moon and stars on the chamber ceiling, so that still seemed night.

«Is it not time to rise?» asked *Wyryzmæg*.

«No, dawn is a long way off yet!» answered *Satana*. «Look, the moon and stars are still shining!»...

Meanwhile *Elda*, having cleared the guest-room after the feasting, and put everything in order, went to enter her husband's chamber. She tapped on door, but it was locked, and no one came to open it. After a while she came again and tapped the door. Again no answer. She ran all round the house in despair, then third time she came and knocked. No one answered... She was in such a fit of despair that her heart broke, and she fell dying on the floor.

*Satana*, hearing the knocking, and after it the silence, felt that *Elda's* soul had departed from her body. She made a gesture and wiped the Moon and stars from the ceiling, and the spell was broken.

Full daylight was here, and *Wyryzmæg* urged her:

«Come get up, daylight is here already!»

When he saw *Satana* standing before him, he was dumbfounded:

«Is that really you, *Satana*?» he queried dubiously.

«Well, who else then passed the night with you?» she replied.

What could he do now?

They buried *Elda* with all the usual honours...

\* \* \*

«You have shamed me, *Satana*», *Wyryzmæg* reproached her. «How shall I live with you in front of the Nartæ? What sort of face can I put upon things? They will cry shame on us both!»

«People's abuse lasts only two or three days!» answered *Satana*. «It is no great shame. Do as I say, and it will soon be forgotten. Go and sit back to front on your donkey, and trot three times round the meeting-place on the square, and afterwards tell me what the old counsellors sitting there have said».

*Wyryzmæg* was amazed, but did as *Satana* suggested.

When the elders first saw that he rode his ass the wrong way, both they and the younger men simply burst their sides a-laughing. Some rolled helplessly on the ground in their mirth. But when he passed still back to front the second time, only the merriest ones mocked at him, and many others did not even glance at him again, and a few even said that *Wyryzmæg*, once their leader, had gone out of his wits it seemed. The third time he passed, not a single one smiled, and among the many respected elders sitting there, one said:

«He is not doing this for nothing: most likely *Wyryzmæg* has a few very clever schemes up his sleeve!»

*Wyryzmæg* returned home and told *Satana* all that occurred.

«There, you see», she said, «it will be just the same with our personal affair. At first they will sneer at us, but they will soon get used to it all!»

So it turned out, and thus *Satana* became the wife of *Wyryzmæg*.

### THE NAMELESS SON OF WYRYZMÆG

A year of famine came to the land of the Nartæ. The grain did not sprout, the grass did not grow, but withered away. The Nartæ were dying of hunger, they grew down-hearted, and lost faith in their own powers. The famous young Nartæ, so brave previously, became so powerless, that they lay day and night dazed upon the meeting-place on the square, and if they woke up, all they spoke about were the glorious feats they had performed, the dangers they had overcome when they had driven the fat cattle off from their enemies' pastures. About their good swords, glorious bows and arrows, they said not a word.

*Syrdon* had an impudent bitch, and it so happened, that all that time she ran about on the village square, and jumped above the heads of the sleeping Nartæ, licked some of their mouths, gnawed some of their sandals, and bit through some of their belts – it was simply pitiful to see all that.

Once *Wyryzmæg* came to the square, and there he saw how it looked more like a battle-field. There lay the brave youths, lean and hungry-looking, while *Syrdon's* insolent bitch played all her dirty and loathsome tricks on them. Anger flared up in his bosom, he threw his ivory walking-stick at the bitch, but it struck on a stone, and was broken in pieces. He gathered the broken fragments in a fury, and returned home. There he threw down the broken bits onto the floor, and slumped down with all the weight of his body in his armchair, also made of ivory, and that fell to pieces as well.

«Why are your brows so black and stormy? Why did you slump down so angrily on your armchair and break it, my dear husband, master of my head?» asked *Satana*. «What has happened to you? Who has offended you, and made you look so furious?»

«Nobody has offended me», replied *Wyryzmæg* sadly. «But how my heart aches when I see that our young Nartæ have entirely lost all their honour! As soon as they began to lie about the meeting-place on the village square, then *Syrdon's* impudent bitch came along, jumping over their heads, even the bravest of our famous youths, licking some of their mouths, gnawing at some of their sandals, biting through some of their belts... All of them dozing and sleeping, and none has the strength, or the will to drive her away. My dear mistress, I would not grudge my life, if only I could see our Nartæ well-fed and satisfied, so that the warm blood flowed swiftly through their veins again».

«Don't be down-hearted!» replied *Satana*. «Go and call them all! Our store-room is full of food and drink... I shall feed them all, as though they were but one man!»

Then *Satana* led *Wyryzmæg* to their pantry. One cupboard was full of cheesepies, in the other up to the ceiling were stored up heaps of beef and mutton shoulder-blades and thighs, while in the third were stacked up bottles full of various beverages.

«You see, when the Nartæ had plenty, and were feasting, they sent home to me my honoured share, and I stored it all up carefully, and now it will serve a good purpose!» said *Satana*.

The clouds of worry dissolved from *Wyryzmæg's* brow, and he said to *Satana* in pleased tones:

«Yes, there is even more than enough food here for all. They couldn't eat half of it in a whole year. Make ready for a feast, my mistress!»

Then *Wyryzmæg* called the village herald, fed him up to the ears, and ordered him: «Go and cry with all your might, and tell the Nartæ: «Those who can walk should come to our feast themselves, and those who can't – let them be carried by others. If anyone has a baby still in its cradle, let them bring baby, cradle, and all! *Wyryzmæg* of the *Æxsartæggatæ* calls all Nartæ to join in his feast!»

So the village-crier went around the village and cried aloud:

«Oh Nartæ, those who can walk, should come themselves. Those who can't – let them be carried by others. If anyone has a baby in a cradle, let them bring baby, cradle and all! *Wyryzmæg* of the *Æxsartæggatæ* is giving a feast and calls you to join in!»

Having heard the news, the Nartæ floded into *Wyryzmæg's* home. All, from the smallest to the greatest, from the youngest to the eldest gathered together. Tables were set up and filled with food and drink, and day after day the company kept up the feast.

Meanwhile the fire began to get low on the hearth, *Wyryzmæg* rose from his chair and went into the yard to chop some logs. Just as he was bending to pick the chopped pieces up, a huge shaggy-feathered eagle flew out from the Black

mountain, seized him in his talons, and flew off with him in its clutches to finally place him on a single pillar of rock amidst the sea - no mountains, no trees, nought living to be seen around. Then *Wyryzmæg* began to name himself a most unhappy man, uncertain about his future.

All day he sat on the pillar, glancing around. Evening came, darkness began to gather, when suddenly he saw that from beneath the water, from beneath a submerged rock, somehow light was breaking through.

«Come what may, I must know what kind of a wonder that is», said *Wyryzmæg* to himself. He slipped down from his pillar, slid into the water, moved the huge rock aside, and saw a door there before him. He opened this door, and there stood three maidens, each one more beautiful and slender than the other, who came running to greet him.

«May you come to us hale and hearty *Wyryzmæg*. May you come to us sound, dear relative of ours. Come in, and be our guest!» said the maidens smiling gaily and gladly.

So he entered the house and saw a respectful old lady there.

«May there be good fortune in this house!» he greeted her.

«Be well, and happy, and be welcome!» said the old lady, and invited him to sit in an armchair.

*Wyryzmæg* sat down, looked around, and noticed that the floor was of blue glass beneath his feet, that the walls were studded with mother-of-pearl, and that the morning star was shining from the ceiling.

He was amazed at all this. What a wonder it was, right in the ocean depths. Of course, he soon understood that he had chanced upon some relations of his, the *Donbetyrtæ*.

Then *Wyryzmæg* noticed a little boy who was running around, so light and swift he ran, that *Wyryzmæg* could not follow him. He loved to look at this little fellow, and happiness filled his old heart.

«Happy is the man who has you for a son!» he thought to himself.

«Was it sunshine, or heavy rain which brought you to our land?» asked the old lady kindly. «We have been waiting to see you for so long!»

*Wyryzmæg* straightway felt bolder, and thought that he would not die after all, if on the ocean bed he had found relatives, eager to see him. And he began to tell them how he had come to their land. Meanwhile the maidens served the table for him. The host brought in a well-fed ram, and asked *Wyryzmæg* himself to slay it. The fire was blown up, and *Wyryzmæg* had barely time to look round once more, before the table was set in front of him, full of good things to eat.

To begin the feast, *Wyryzmæg* according to Nartæ custom, raised a piece of meat on the point of his dagger, and said a prayer. When he had finished, he then,

once more in accordance with custom, turned towards the little boy, and said kindly «Come to me, sunny-boy, and taste the offering-meat»

Holding the meat on the dagger-blade, *Wyryzmæg* stretched it out towards the little fellow. He came running quickly to take it, then stumbled and fell right on the point of the dagger. The sharp blade penetrated his little heart, and like a beautiful cut mountain lily, he fell. He trembled a time or two, and then his young spirit flew away...

Deep sorrow seized *Wyryzmæg*, and all the *Donbettyrtæ* family. The maidens carried away his corpse into the next room.

«Why am I so unlucky, why has such a woe fallen on my head!» thought *Wyryzmæg*.

Then, seeing that he did not touch the food, the old lady said: «Help yourself, *Wyryzmæg*. What has happened cannot be righted – all fulfils the will of God»

But *Wyryzmæg* simply could not eat. He rose upset, bid them farewell, and returned by the way he had come. On leaving the house he heard how all the women were bewailing the loss of the little child.

No sooner had *Wyryzmæg* climbed back onto his lonely pillar, than the enormous black eagle appeared in the sky, swooped down and once more took him in his talons, and carried him back all the long way to his home. There he collected the chopped firewood, and entering the dining hall, saw that the feast was still in full swing, and nobody had noticed neither his absence nor returning.

He sat down in the place, and turning to the company asked:

«What kind of story would you like to hear from me? Old or new?»

«We have heard lots of old ones already», said his guests, «now we should like to hear something new!»

«Does anybody remember how I came out?» – asked he. «When the fire began to get low on the hearth, I rose from my chair and went into the yard to chop some logs. Just as I was bending to pick the chopped pieces up, a huge shaggy-feathered eagle from the Black mountain seized me in his talons, and flew off with me in its clutches. For a long time he bore me over the sea, far from the shore, and finally placed me on a single pillar of rock. There were no other cliffs nearby, only sea all round – no mountains, no trees, nought living to be seen, and the only moving thing was blue water below. Evening came, darkness began to gather, when suddenly I saw that from beneath the water, from beneath a submerged rock, somehow light was breaking through».

«Come what may, I must know what kind of a wonder that is», I said to myself and slipped down from the pillar, slid into the water, moved the huge rock aside, and saw a door there before me. I opened this door, and there stood three maidens, each one more beautiful and slender than the other, who came running to greet me. «Come in and be our guest!» said to me the maidens. There were also

a respectful old lady and a young boy there. I looked around and saw that the floor was of blue glass and the walls were studded with mother-of-pearl, and that the morning star was shining from the ceiling.

They served a table for me and I raised a piece of meat on the point of my dagger, and said a prayer. When I had finished, I then, in accordance with custom, turned towards the little boy, and asked him to come to me and taste the offering-meat! He came running quickly to take it, then stumbled and fell right on the point of the dagger.

Deep sorrow seized the host family and me myself. I did not touch the food. I rose, bid them farewell, and returned by the way I had come. Then the enormous black eagle appeared in the sky, swooped down and once more took me in his talons, and carried me back all the long way to my home».

In the next room among the women, *Satana* was sitting. She heard *Wyryzmæg's* story, and began to tear her hair, and to scratch her cheeks, and to bemoan her lot:

«Glorious men, best of the best, you deeply respected elders, do not judge me, I beg of you, that I speak before you in tears. In my parental *Donbettyrta* home I left a secret treasure. My husband was away on campaign when he was born and did not know about it. I gave him to be brought up by my relations in my father's home. But there *Wyryzmæg* found him, and with his own hand sent our immature son into the land of the Dead. How shall we live now? Who take care of us in our old age?»

Everyone felt sad and silent on hearing her mournful plaint, and quietly they arose and went home to their houses.

Since then *Wyryzmæg* was pining. He went about with bowed head and hunched shoulders, and did not smile when someone smiled at him, and did not speak when someone addressed him.

There was a blue-grey stone at the meeting place on the village square – the stone of oblivion. Anyone who lay on that stone immediately forgot his sorrow. *Wyryzmæg* made a habit of lying himself face down on that stone, and not to arise all day long. Then the elders used to come to him and say:

«Nart *Wyryzmæg*, glorious among the glorious! You must not be so sad, and waste away with grief. Could such a griveous thing happen to anybody but you!»

To hear these words he cheered up, and sooner he became his former self.

\* \* \*

The dolorous *Donbettyrta* buried the body of the little boy in the earth, but his soul flew off to the land of the Dead, and the ruler of that land, *Barastyr*, set



the little fellow on his knee. But the lad was troubled, because nobody on earth remembered about him.

«What is worrying you?» asked *Barastyr*, and the lad replied:

«Many years have passed since I came to the land of the Dead, and my father *Wyryzmæg*, who finds time to bother about others, even about strangers, has no times to pay me tribute, and I am completely forgotten. He has not given a funeral feast, and not raised a memorial stone for me, and I am lonely and lost here among the dead. I beg you, *Barastyr*, release me for a little while from this land of the Dead. I only want to prepare with my own hands all that is necessary for the funeral feast that should be held in memory of me since a year has elapsed after my death, and I give my word that I shall return at once».

«I do not wish to offend you, but I cannot do what you ask», replied *Barastyr*. «If any of the others knew that I let you go, then none of them would stay here. It is hard enough to hold them here now, in the land of the Dead, so how could I hold them then?»

«I can help you there», said the youngster. «I shall turn the shoes on my horse *Gee-gee* round the opposite way, and when the dead ones miss me, and rush to the gates of the land of the Dead, then you can tell them; 'Just look at these horse tracks – if he has gone out of these gates, then I have no power to hold you, but if the tracks lead back into this land, there is no way out for you!»

To this *Barastyr* agreed.

The lad shod his horse *Gee-gee*, as he proposed, and galloped off out of the land of the Dead. When the dead no longer saw him in their midst, they flocked to the gates, where they met the gate-keeper.

«Where are you all going?» asked *Aminon*, the guardian of the gates.

«If anyone can leave here, then nobody will stay!» shouted the crowd. «First of all make sure what has happened!» he replied. «Look at the horse's tracks, and you will see that no one has left here!»

The dead ones looked and saw that the tracks led into the land of the Dead, and then they all calmed down, and each one returned to his place without further trouble.

But the boy, the foster-child of the *Donbetyrtæ*, the son of *Wyryzmæg*, who had never received a name, galloped afar up to the *Nartæ* village, to the old home of the *Æxsartæggata*, and loudly called for the master of the house to appear.

«I am looking for *Wyryzmæg*», said the young rider. «Will he not come with me on campaign? Tell him, please, that I shall wait for him at the Memorial Mound at the village pasture».

*Satana* returned back to the house and said: «Oh, my dear husband, someone is making fun of you. At front door there is a youngster hardly seen from be-

hind the pommel and he invites you to campaign. He says he will be waiting for you at the Memorial Mound at the village pasture».

«Hurry up, mistress!» he replied. «Put out my breast-plates for my journey. Of course, if anyone sees me going on campaign with a young lad, they will laugh at me. But I cannot break my word. While I have eyes to look out under my brows, I shall always act honourably, and honestly. All my life I have never refused any comrade to go on campaign, and shall not do so now!»

But *Satana* did not want *Wyryzmag* to go with that bold young lad. When evening came she baked three round honey-cakes, and prayed:

«O God of Gods, my God! If you have created me for some reason, then I ask you to show me your favour! Send down this night on earth all the snow and rain that you have prepared for the next seven years, and whip up some whirlwinds and hurricanes, and I hope that the bold youngster who is worthy of death will find it this night, but my old man will remain at home».

She had only just finished praying, when the heavens clouded over with heavy rain, and then snow fell so thick that no one had ever seen anything like it before. The ancient glaciers swept from the mountains, the whirlwinds wheeled and roared above the earth and blinded everybody who tried to go to the next-door neighbour.

But all the same, before daylight *Wyryzmag* saddled his old dapple-grey steed *Ærfæn*, and went off on the road, pushing his way through the thick snowflakes, the ice and the drifts. Far away he saw that through the morning mist and snow rose the village pasture Memory Mound, like a black mountain.

*Wyryzmag* rode up to the mound, and saw there a young lad lying asleep, with his saddle under his head, on a spread-out horse-blanket, covered over with a felt cloak, and all around him the field was green. You could find place for seven thrashing floors, and there his horse *Gee-gee* was browsing.

«Whether that is a heavenly spirit, or an angel, all the same, that's something wonderful!» said he quietly to himself.

On his faithful *Ærfæn* he climbed the mound, and adressed him: «Hey, youngster, arise! The road is long, and the day is short. We must be on our way!»

The young lad jumped up quickly, armed himself with his weapons, straddled his steed, and off they went. *Wyryzmag* rode ahead on his dapple-grey *Ærfæn*, and behind him the youngster on his *Gee-gee*. They pushed ahead, and every passing hour the blizzard grew bolder. *Wyryzmag's* steed thrust aside the mounds of snow with his powerful chest, protected with a breast-plate, but it became more and more difficult for him move forward, and he stumbled. Meanwhile the youth followed in his tracks, and where he passed, the snow melted, and black earth appeared. *Wyryzmag's* dapple-grey started to choke for breath, and then the youngster said:

«I will ride ahead. From this day let it be not shame, should a youngster ride in front of an elder».

As he became the leader, the breath of this horse melted the snow around him making the road wide enough for seven thrashing floors and *Ærfæn* was treading over a black earth.

So they rode on, was it a long way or a short one? *Wyryzmæg* said:

«Now my lad, we must take counsel. Where shall we go? What enemies shall we attack?»

«Take me to a land where you have never been before on a campaign!»

«I have not found the way across the sea, therefore beyond the sea alone remains one land where I have not been. It is called *Terk-Turk*», answered *Wyryzmæg*. «There is not a richer land on earth. There are so many sheep and cattle, so many horses, that once they start out on the road, no shepherd or herdsman can turn them back. But it is not easy to get there. One must sail across a stormy sea, and then conquer those who keep watch over the cattle. First the shepherds and herdsmen of *Terk-Turk*, then an iron stallion, a wolf with iron teeth, and a hawk with an iron beak!»

«That is the land where we shall go!» declared the youngster.

«Let us try out our luck there. Maybe something will fall into our hands!»

They reached the shores of the stormy sea, and began to swim across on their horses. Like fishes their steeds swam, and bore them across to the further shore. They came out of the water onto dry land. Then the youngster carefully bathed his horse, and smeared him with magic glue that sticks well without water, and made him roll in the nearby gravel. Then he smeared him again and made him roll in the sand on the shore. *Gee-gee*, his steed, became enormous, like a mountain. Then our two riders went on and found the herd of horses belonging to the *Terk-Turks*. Then the youngster made hasts and dug two holes – one for himself, and another for *Wyryzmæg* and his horse. Going up to *Wyryzmæg*, he said to him:

«Look, *Wyryzmæg*, my horse will now fight with the iron stallion. At first they will kick each other with their hind legs, and their iron hooves will strike each other, and send off sparks, and set the earth slight. Take care, whatever you do, not to look out of your hole then, or terrible misfortune will overtake you! Next they will bite each other, and kick with their forelegs, and such a blast of fury will arise from their stormy breathing, that it will carry away the topmost handbreadth of the earth. Do not move from your hole then, or your dust and ashes will blow over the hills and dales. When the time comes to act, I myself will tell you».

Then the two horses began to fight, neither sparing the other, the iron stallion and the youngster's horse *Gee-gee*. From the clash of their iron hooves came

such sparks, that the earth took flame. *Wyryzmæg* could not restrain his inquisitiveness, and glanced out of his hole, and his long beard caught alight at once. The youngster skilfully extinguished the flames, and said to him:

«From now on there will be a new custom: all will wear their beards as short as yours has now become!»

Then the iron stallion and the youngster's steed began to bare their teeth and bite, and to kick with their forelegs. Such a blast arose, that it stripped the first handbreadth of soil from the earth. Again *Wyryzmæg* could not control his inquisitiveness, and looked out of his hole, and the blast blew off the top of his skull and carried it quickly away.

«So now my dear elder is left with no top to his head!» said the youngster, and sprang out of his hole, run after the top of *Wyryzmæg's* skull, which the blast had carried away. He overtook the wind, seized the skull, and brought it back. Placing it above *Wyryzmæg's* brow, he said: «From this time on the Nartæ will no longer remove the top half of their heads!»

But before that any Nart could take off the top of his head in order to shave it more easily, and could then put it back on again.

The horses had still not finished their fight, when a wolf with iron teeth in his jaws came to the aid of the iron stallion. Then the youth shot an arrow at him, and may it be so with all who curse you, the wolf died on the spot. The youngster cut off one of his ears and hid it in his tunic. Then a hawk with an iron beak came to aid the iron stallion. Again the youngster showed his skill, and shot an arrow at the hawk. He had only waved his wings once, then he fell down dead upon the ground. The youngster cut off his head, and hid that in his tunic too.

But still neither of the horses could defeat the other. More than once the iron stallion bit at the neck of *Gee-gee* with his iron teeth, but then gravel and sand filled his mouth, and he could not sink his teeth in. At last *Gee-gee* began to come out on top of the iron stallion who sank on his knees to the earth. The youngster grabbed his saddle, flung it on the stallion, and bestrode him, calling out:

«Hey, *Wyryzmæg*! Quickly drive the herd of *Terk-Turk* horses off home, while I ride to inform their owners that their herd is gone».

«While nobody is pursuing us, better both go together on the same road home!» answered *Wyryzmæg*.

«My honour will not allow me to sneak off with such rich booty, without letting the owners know!» replied the youngster.

At that time there was a feast among the people of *Terk-Turk*, and suddenly they saw a youngster gallop up on the iron stallion.

He came to the feasting-place and cried:

«Alarming news, people of *Terk-Turk*! All your herd of horses all your riches, they are driving off».

The younger *Terk-Turk* heard this alarming news, and informed their elders. The eldest said:

«That fellow probably seeks for something to eat and drink. Invite him in, and we shall welcome him as guest».

The younger *Terk-Turk* ran to the lad and invited him into the horse where the feast was, and where the elders were sitting. He looked round the festive board, and then took out the head of the hawk, and the ear of the wolf from his tunic pocket. The head he threw where the elders were feasting, and the ear he threw where the young *Terk-Turks* were eating. To the elders he said:

«You didn't have enough cunning heads, dear elders! Here, take this one!» Then he turned to the younger ones, and said:

«You didn't have enough sharp ears. Here, take this one. As for your iron stallion, he is tied up in the stall»

The feasters were all gripped by great agitation. They understood that they had been robbed of their faithful guards. While they were recovering for a moment from the shock, the young lad went to the stall, leaped upon the iron stallion, and off he went at full gallop, to overtake *Wyryzmæg* with the herd of horses.

He passed over the outskirts and saw there a gray-haired old lady, sitting between six burial mounds, weeping and moaning, and addressing herself to each of the burial mounds in turn.

«What kind of wonder is this?» thought the youngster.

At once the old lady, pointing at the burial mounds, said to him:

«I had seven sons. Six of them have departed into the land of the Dead. When enemies tried to seize the herds of the *Terk-Turk*, they died defending them, and their honour. Only one son remains to me. I know that he will gallop in pursuit of you who have driven off our horses. But your skill and bearing are obvious. You are so brave, but my son, who will be in front of all the others, will attack you. But spare him, for my sake, for the sake of a widowed mother, and do not slay him. Give him a light wound, and throw him by the wayside, so that others galloping after to attack you, do not trample him in the dust. May my only remaining son, my only support in old age, find in you a protector. So that all may be thus, be my milk-son, and let him be your milk-brother. Take my breast between your lips, then swear to me your oath».

The young lad leapt down from the iron stallion, took the old woman's breast between his lips, and then gave her his solemn word that means the firm promise of a Nart, that he would not cause her son any harm. The old woman thanked him, and told him what her son looked like, so that he might recognize him at once.

Again he bestraddled the iron stallion, and set off at a gallop to overtake *Wyryzmæg* and the herd. When they met they guided the horses across the stormy

sea to the other side, then further still, untill they heard a rider galloping after them.

«You drive on ahead, *Wyryzmæg*, and preserve the booty, while I will try to restrain the followers». So they agreed.

«Hey, you son-of-a-bitch, dirty dog that you are!» cried the rider from afar, as he galloped up nearer and nearer. «Do you know whose herd you have driven off? If you are a man, don't try to run away from me!» Then the arrows began to buzz like flies around the ears of the youngster. He turn shouted back his answer:

«I may not touch you. I have named your mother my milk-mother, I have taken her breast between my lips, and given her my sacred word to preserve you. Do not hinder me then, let me go my way!»

The persecutor did not obey him. Taking aim with one arrow after another, with passionate curses he drew nearer and nearer. Then the Nart youth shot one arrow at him. That arrow, not touching his body, but catching in his clothing, tore him from his saddle, and hurled him to the earth. In vain he tried to tear the arrow from the ground where it was stuck, but to no avail.

Meanwhile the other followers galloped up, and all together began to tug the arrow to release him, but they could not move it. In the end they had to slash his clothes from him with their swords, and only then could they set him on his feet again. Then they all set upon the young Nart, and the battle began. *Terk-Turks* hit out and hewed at the young Nart, but he slew half of them, and so much blood was spilt, that it washed their corpses away. Those who remained alive understood that they could not defeat such a warrior, and they returned home.

*Wyryzmæg* and the youngster successfully drove their booty home to the Nartæ's village, and stopped at the place where spoil was divided. Then the youngster said to *Wyryzmæg*:

«You are the eldest, therefore it falls to your lot to divide the spoil between us!»

«But why should I divide the spoil which you have won?» replied *Wyryzmæg*. Then the youngster chose a white bull and set it aside, tied with a silken cord. All the remaining booty he divided into three lots, and thus he adressed *Wyryzmæg*:

«The first lot goes to you, *Wyryzmæg*, as the eldest. The second, as my comrade on the campaign, to you also. The third is my lot, which I present to you with respects. The white bull remains. Take it and arrange for me a yearly memorial feast. To all the dead you pay your respects, but to me, your nameless son, whom you placed in the home of the *Donbetyrtæ*, and with your own hands sent to the land of the Dead, only to me you never gave a funeral feast, nor celebrated my memory!»

With that he jumped upon his own steed *Gee-gee*, waved a hand in farewell to *Wyryzmæg*, and galloped off to the land of the Dead.

Tears streamed down *Wyryzmæg's* cheeks, and he cried to his departing son: «Glance back at me, if only once!» But his son did not look back thinking to himself that his time was running out.

So *Wyryzmæg* sadly drove the booty home, and there said to *Satana*:

«Oh, dear mistress of our house! I have been on campaign with that same youngster who was your joy and happiness in life, and who you could not see enough of while he was alive!»

Hearing that, *Satana* went galloping off after her son. For a long time she rode and rode, and gradually began to overtake him, and cried:

«Oh, you who were my joy and delight on earth, you whom I could not see enough of when you were alive. Look back I beg, just one glance, just one my son, just look at me!»

Her son did not look back, but called to her:

«The sun goes down, my time is running out, and I hasten to the land of the Dead, in order to keep my word!»

*Satana*, unhappy mother as she was, understood that he could not stay, even for a moment, so she, prayed:

«Oh, God of Gods, my God! You can see into a mother's heart? Let it be so, that this eve on the mountain snows the sun's rays should remain a little longer, the cold sun of the Dead!»

The youngster reached the gates of the land of the Dead, and cried to the door-keeper *Aminon*:

«Hey, open up the gates!»

«You are late, the sun has set already!» replied *Aminon*.

«No, it is still not dark! See, on the mountain snows the rays of the sun of the Dead are still shining!» and turning, he pointed to the mountains. The gate-keeper opened the gates, and at that very moment *Satana* saw her son. The edges of his garments gleamed, and for a second she saw his face, as the gates were closing behind him. But she hastened forward, and threw her gold ring after him, which itself bounced up and fell straight upon her son's finger. With that ring he returned to the land of the Dead, this bold son of *Wyryzmæg*, and took his place on the knee of the God *Barastyr*.

When *Satana* returned home, they slew the white bull and arranged a great funeral feast in honour of their son. All the remaining horses and cattle they distributed among the poorer Nartæ.