

EXTENDED READING COMPREHENSION:

Excerpt
Adapted
From

The King of Elfland's Daughter



Read the following adapted excerpt of the first chapter of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, a fantasy novel by Lord Dunsany, published in 1924. Then answer the questions that follow.

CHAPTER 1: The Plan of the Parliament of Erl

The men of Erl appeared in parliament before their stately white-haired Lord of Erl. Though the lord's family had ruled well for seven hundred years, the men of Erl desired something new: they wished to be ruled by a magic lord. Bound by the wishes of parliament, the lord consented and called his eldest son, Alveric, to come before him. He commanded Alveric to go forth past the twilight boundary of the fairylands to the palace of the King of Elfland. Alveric was to marry the King of Elfland's daughter, Lirazel, a fabled princess of the magic line. The journey would be long and treacherous, filled with unearthly perils.

- The lord gave his mighty sword to his son, saying, "This has brought our family through the ages, and it shall guard you upon your journey, even though you travel beyond the fields we know."
- Alveric took the sword, though he knew that no such earthly sword could serve him on this journey.
- But Alveric thought of the lonely witch who lived near the Castle of Erl, on high land near the rolling thunder. There, the witch lived by herself in a narrow cottage of thatch. She roamed the high fields alone, gathering thunderbolts that, with the use of suitable runes, could be forged into such weapons that would ward off unearthly dangers.
- This ancient witch would roam at certain times of spring, taking the false form of a beautiful young woman, singing among tall flowers in the gardens of Erl. She would go at dusk, when hawk-moths first came out. In his younger years, Alveric had come upon the witch and was one of the few who had ever seen her. Her beauty had lured him, but she knew that it would be a catastrophe for a mortal to fall in love with her, so she'd changed instantly back into her true, withered form.
- Even so, Alveric was not afraid and did not look away in horror. For that, the witch was grateful. She invited him to her thunder-haunted hill.

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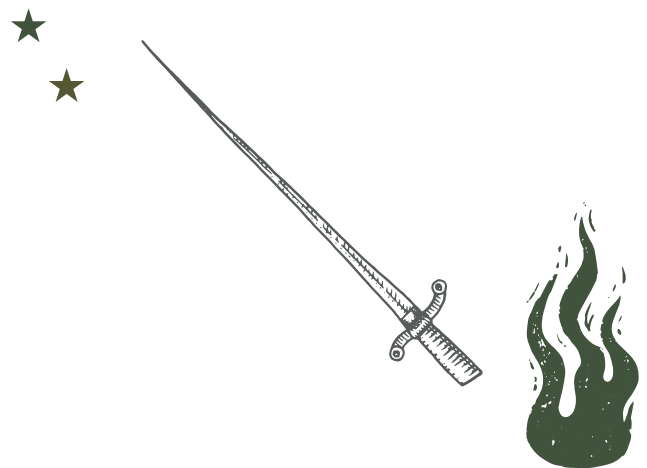
There, she showed him that, should he ever need it, she could make him a magical sword that could thwart any of the earthly weapons of Elfland.

Only three master runes, known to a very select few, could withstand the might of such a powerful sword. Alveric had never forgotten the witch's secret promise.

- 6 When Alveric left the Castle of Erl, it was barely dark. He went swiftly up the witch's hill and found her burning bones in the dim light by an open fire. He told her that the day of his need had come. So the witch instructed him to collect thunderbolts from her garden. In the gathering darkness, Alveric quickly harvested seventeen thunderbolts, heaped them into a silken handkerchief, and carried them back to the witch.
- 7 On the grass beside her, Alveric laid those strangers to Earth. From wonderful spaces they came to the witch's magical garden, shaken by thunder from paths that we cannot tread. Though the thunderbolts did not themselves contain magic, they could carry the magic imparted by the witch's runes. The witch turned to those stormy wanderers and arranged them in one straight row by her fire. Over them she toppled the burning logs and the embers, prodding them down with her black wooden stick. When she had deeply covered those seventeen thunderbolts, she stepped back, stretched out her hands, and suddenly blasted them with a frightful chant. The flames leaped up in amazement. And what had been but a lonely

fire in the night, with no more mystery than any other fire, flared suddenly into a thing that wanderers feared.

- 8 As the green flames, stung by her runes, leaped up, and the heat of the fire grew more extraordinary, the witch stepped backward farther and farther. She muttered her runes a little louder the farther she got from the fire. She bade Alveric pile on dark logs of oak that lay scattered on the ground. As he dropped them on the fire, the heat licked them up. The witch went on pronouncing her louder runes, and the flames danced wild and green. And down in the embers, the seventeen, whose paths had once crossed Earth's when they wandered free, knew heat again as great as they had ever known. When Alveric could no longer come near the fire, and the witch was some yards from it shouting her runes, the magical flames, having burned all the ashes away, suddenly ceased, leaving only a circle glowing on the ground. And lying flat in the middle of the glowing circle, all liquid still, was the sword.



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9 The witch approached it and trimmed its edges with a sword that she drew from her side. Then she sat down beside it and sang to it while it cooled. Unlike the runes that had enraged the flames, the song she crooned now was like a summer wind blowing from untended wildwood gardens, blowing down valleys loved once by children but now lost to them but for dreams. It was a song of such memories that lurk and hide along the edges of consciousness that now flash a glimpse of some golden moment before passing swiftly out of remembrance again. Left behind are faint traces of little shining feet which, when dimly perceived by us, are called regrets. She sang a song so full of long-gone, dewy mornings and evenings that Alveric wondered if this were the ghost of some day lost to Man, from times that were fairer. And all the while the magical metal grew more solid. The molten liquid cooled and turned red. The glow of the red dwindled. And as it cooled, it narrowed: little particles came together, little cracks closed. As they closed, they seized the air about them, catching the witch's rune to grip it and hold it forever. And so it became a magical sword.

10 Nobody can tell you all there is to be told of that sword. Those that know of the paths on which the sword's metals once floated in space have little time to waste on such things as magic. Those who know of poetry and song or any of the fifty branches of magic have little time to waste on such things as science.

The witch, still singing an eerie song, drew the black blade forth by the hilt and began to sharpen both sides of it by rubbing them with a curious greenish stone. Alveric watched in silence, wondering, not counting time. It may have been mere moments, or it may have been while the stars went far along their courses. But then suddenly, the witch was finished. She stood up with the sword lying flat in both her hands and stretched it out to Alveric. He took it, and she turned away sharply, a strange look in her eyes. It was as though she would have kept that sword, or perhaps even kept Alveric.

- 11 Alveric turned to pour out his thanks to the witch, but she was gone. He rapped on the door of the dark house. He called out, "Witch! Witch!" His voice carried across the lonely earth, till children heard him on faraway farms and were terrified.
- 12 Finally, he ceased to call for her and turned for home. And that turned out to be best for him.



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The King of Elfland's Daughter Questions

Answer the following questions about the excerpt adapted from *The King of Elfland's Daughter*.

- 1. Why does the lord of Erl send his son Alveric on a journey beyond the fairylands to Elfland?
 - a. The mention of Princess Lirazel reminds him of the beautiful witch who lured him in the gardens of Erl.
 - b. He wants Alveric to prove his worth by completing the long, treacherous journey.
 - c. He wants Alveric to marry Princess Lirazel, thus satisfying the people's desire for a magic ruler.
 - d. He wants Alveric to convince Princess Lirazel to use her magic to forge him a powerful sword.

- 2. Why does Alveric think of the witch after his father commands him to go on his journey?
 - a. The mention of Princess Lirazel reminds Alveric of the beautiful witch who lured him in the gardens of Erl.
 - b. Alveric knows the witch will be able to forge a more powerful, magical sword, which he'll need on his journey.
 - c. Alveric wants the witch, who has become his friend, to accompany him for protection on his long journey.
 - d. The thought of going on such a long journey into magical lands makes him fearful of the witch's dark magic.

- 3. How did Alveric come to be in the witch's good graces? Summarize the events of the initial meeting between Alveric and the witch.

- 4. **Part A.** The word **runes** is used throughout the passage. In your own words, define the word as it is used in the text.

Part B. Provide two context clues from the text that help you understand the meaning of the word **runes**.

- a. _____

- b. _____



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Keep going! Answer the following questions about the text.

5. Part A. Which adjective best describes the beginning of the witch's spell based on the information in paragraphs 7 and 8?

- a. intense c. cruel
- b. gentle d. ambitious

Part B. Cite specific evidence from the passage to support your answer.

6. Part A. Which adjective best describes the last part of the witch's spell based on the information in paragraph 9?

- a. terrifying c. wistful
- b. reckless d. sacred

Part B. Cite specific evidence from the passage to support your answer.

7. What conclusion can you make about the witch based on her behavior after she gave Alveric the magic sword? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. Consider the author's use of figurative language in the following sentence from the passage. Name the type of figurative language, such as personification, simile, or metaphor, and what it means in the context of the story.

Paragraph 7: *On the grass beside her, Alveric laid those strangers to Earth. From wonderful spaces they came to the witch's magical garden, shaken by thunder from paths that we cannot tread.*
