

## **The Pearl of Light**

### **A Fairy Tale**

*By Michael Bauer*

Once upon a time, there were two brothers who lived in a village. The elder brother, Dizuto, possessed great riches. He was never content with the wealth he accumulated, and hence he amassed an ever greater fortune. However, the younger brother, Antino, was a poor hunter. His cottage was situated along the village border behind a curve in the river at the forest's edge.

Just a few hours' walk from the village rose a towering mountain visible from a great distance. Many fairytales and legends were told about it, about enchanted castles and great riches, but nobody knew if any of this was true. For whoever once lost his way in the foothills of the mountain might suddenly, especially at night, hear the chatter of mysterious voices behind him! Were evil spirits up to their mischief? Who knows?! No one wanted to tangle with them, so they all made scarce as quickly as possible.

One day, after a rather disappointing hunt, Antino discovered stag tracks, which, as the prints indicated, must be from a big and strong animal. He immediately followed them deeper and deeper into the forest. "When one is so seldom met by the blessings of good fortune," he said to himself, "one understands what treasure happiness is when it finally finds us!"

At long last, Antino found the magnificent animal, concealed now by only a few bushes, standing in the clearing. Antino sneaked up on him, carefully grasped his bow and arrow, and - "Oh, dear hunter, please help me!" - he suddenly heard a wretched voice moaning behind him. Bewildered, he let his arms fall and turned around: There in the thick brushwood of a briar, a little bird was stuck and helplessly flapped its wings. Antino carefully opened the branches and helped it out.

"Thank you very kindly, dear hunter, this you shall not regret!" it spoke before flying off with its heart gladdened. However, unfortunately, the stag was alerted to the imminent danger it faced, and it, too, was away quicker than a fleeting breeze.

Thus Antino was left alone in the clearing. The sun was rapidly approaching the horizon, and it was now time to think about heading home. But wherever had he wandered in the midst of the hunt? Everything looked strange and unfamiliar. From the clearing, he saw his village down below in the valley, which was much too far away for him to think of returning now. Then, all at once, he realized where he was. He had begun to climb the foothills of the mysterious mountain! This had never happened to him before!

Antino was tired after such a hard day. He made camp for himself beneath a big tree, laid down his weary head, and fell asleep in the blink of an eye.

He did not rest for long, however. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, he heard a voice! Startled, he quickly sat up. Was it not the sound of someone calling his name? Or was it only a dream? Alert, he listened into the darkness - indeed, there it was again! No, this was no dream! He could hear it very distinctly; someone was clearly calling his name, and it seemed to be coming from the direction leading to the top of the mountain! But whatever should this mean? Was it robbers, or was it a ghost hoping to lead him astray? Or was someone in danger who needed his help? Upon hearing the strange voice a third time, he took heart and followed the call.

The journey through the nighttime darkness was long and hard. Antino pondered whether it might not be better to turn back and wait until daylight. Then, finally, he saw a faint gleam from within the fog. With tremendous anticipation, Antino climbed the rest of the way to the top. Oh wonder of wonders, before him stood an enormous castle! Its walls and towers rose, perfectly erect, high up into the sky, so high that it made him dizzy looking up to the top! Although a muffled shimmer came from all the windows and the open gate, it was strangely silent. Could they have forgotten to turn out the lights before going to sleep? The old watchman standing at the entrance would surely know the answer. Antino called out to him, but he stood, motionless, uttering not a word. He bravely tapped the dark figure on the shoulder and - But what was this? The soldier was as lifeless and hard as stone! There was something mysterious going on here! To get to the bottom of things, Antino entered the castle through the gate that stood halfway open.

The castle was built in the shape of a star around the courtyard in the middle and was further subdivided into four sections of three corresponding to the twelve months of the year. The walls consisted entirely of brilliant jewels in the colors of the sky and the earth. If only it weren't for this dim half-light, then it would truly be the Palace of the Sun! But, oh dear, all the people, the animals and plants, indeed even the water in the fountain, and the flames in the fireplace - everything once living had been turned to stone! Dark wafts of mist circulated.

Antino passed through many rooms before finally exiting out into the courtyard. Never before had he experienced anything so truly amazing as here, when, surrounded by twelve old trees, he beheld the wondrous crystal tower! From the outside, one saw only one's own reflection. From the inside, however, one could have looked far out across the land had it not been for the shroud of mist! Astonished, Antino climbed the many steps to the top. But in a small room at the

top, he encountered something greater than could ever be expressed in words. Here, in front of the window, sat, a thousand times more beautiful than the stars in the heavens, the Princess of the Castle - stone, from head to toe! Calmly she looked into the distance.

He was so moved by the sight of her that he could think of nothing but returning life to her and all the other motionless beings, no matter what this might entail!

He turned around and saw, above the entrance to the chamber, the following words engraved:

'round here there once a kingdom was  
Of power great and glory wide.  
Throughout the lands was known to all  
Its wondrous gem, the Pearl of Light.

But then through greed and sham deceiving,  
Its worth was soon forgotten, lost,  
And over time the kingdom fell,  
Its people turned to stone foremost.

It radiated light from here,  
Across the world from tower tall.  
Its luster joy to life did give,  
Just as the sun revives all.

The pearl rests now in Eastern Sea  
In which the Lord of Dragons lives.  
This sword here on the wall you see  
The might to clear your path it gives.

Beneath it hung a sword, and one could read these words:

Just he who finds the Pearl of Light  
Will break the curse and end the night.

After hesitating briefly, Antino took the sword and examined it carefully. Secured in its sheathe, it looked rather simple. When he removed the sword, however, it flashed brilliantly, and so sharp was the blade that it could even cut water in two halves, without getting wet in the least! Yes, with its help, it must be possible to clear a path through the Eastern Sea to the Lord of the Dragons. Antino fastened it on his belt and began the journey.

Upon reaching his village in the early hours of the new morning, he was met by his older brother, Dizuto.

"Greetings to you, dear brother Antino! Since when do you carry a sword with you? Do you want to become a soldier?"

Antino recounted the previous night's experience and said,

“This sword has the power to part the waters of the Eastern Sea, so that one may make one’s way to the Lord of the Dragons. I want to find the Pearl of Light, so that life may be returned to the castle atop the mountain.”

“Oh, a very bold resolution!” Dizuto cried in his astonishment. “But, say, why don’t you spend your last evening here at my country estate? I invite you for a farewell dinner!”

Hmm. Antino paused to reflect. Was it not better to leave at once? But his older brother persisted until he finally agreed.

In reality, though, Dizuto had concealed his true intention. He wished to possess the brightly shining pearl himself, even if this meant he would have to err from the straight and narrow! However, in order to do so, he would have to steal from Antino the sword with the power to part the waters - tonight!

The day was soon over, and when it was dark, Antino went, as planned, to the magnificent house in which Dizuto lived. The latter had prepared a sumptuous meal and secretly placed a sleep-inducing drug in Antino’s wine. Both brothers ate and drank to their heart’s content. Soon Antino felt so tired that he fell asleep right at the table! Dizuto rejoiced. He took the sword and hid it under his cloak before carrying his brother off into the forest. May the wild beasts feast upon him there! Then, feeling content, he returned home, saddled his horse and rode off, taking the broad street that headed east.

Meanwhile the forest crawled with wild beasts! The hungriest ones then came closer and closer as they circled in on Antino in his deep slumber. At this very moment, the little bird he had freed from the briar the day before flew over. Quickly it summoned its friend, a big eagle. He seized Antino by his belt just as the beasts’ gaping jaws were poised to close down upon him! The eagle brought Antino to his cottage in the village and laid him down safely on a bed of straw.

Here Antino rested an entire week! Not until the morning of the seventh day did he open his eyes. At first, everything seemed normal, but then, suddenly, he recalled the petrified castle on the mountain top. Had he been dreaming? No, that couldn’t be. Antino would never forget the princess, more beautiful than the stars, and her crystal castle! But where had he left the sword with the power to part the waters? He searched to no avail. Then he recalled the farewell dinner at his brother’s home. Quickly he asked the villagers, but no one had ever heard of a sword with such magical powers, and Dizuto had already left.

Then Antino did not hesitate any longer. He hung seven pairs of straw shoes over his shoulders and began his journey to the Eastern Sea without the sword.

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Much time passed. One day Dizuto crossed a broad stream and came to a place where it had rained continuously for a long time. As it was a very low-lying area, the water continued to rise; most of the fields and farm houses could not be reached without getting one's feet wet! If this continued, the harvest was sure to be ruined and the houses brought to collapse! The old folks and children had fled to the nearest hills, while men and women paddled around their farmhouses and tried to save their possessions.

There was an old fortuneteller, however, who knew what to do: "We must as soon as possible go to the Lord of the Dragons whose home is in the Eastern Sea and fetch the Silver Ladle. Only with the Silver Ladle can we clear away the flood waters, and then the rain will also stop."

But who would perform such a difficult task? No one was ready for it.

Dizuto had finished the rest of his provisions just before arriving and was once again hungry. What to do? When he heard that the peasants were searching for someone who would go to the Lord of the Dragons, the idea dawned on him: "I am on my way there, countrymen. If you give me enough to eat, I will fetch you the Silver Ladle!"

The peasants were very happy when they heard this. At once they gathered their meager provisions and gave them to Dizuto. He was more than willing to accept them and rode off, content.

Some time later Antino, too, crossed the broad stream before coming to the flooded fields. When he saw the calamity, he was filled with grief and did all that he could to help the villagers recover their things from the water. While working alongside them, he overheard that they needed only the Silver Ladle in order to clear away, without effort, the terrible flood waters! And this one could be found in the possession of the Lord of the Dragons.

Antino did not need think for long: "I am on my way, friends, and I shall bring you back the ladle."

All were amazed, for a man had just arrived with the same goal in mind, and now another so daring wayfarer had come! But they said to him, too, "Bring us the Silver Ladle, dear friend!"

Antino promised to and resumed his journey.

Then, in the midst of a storm, he reached the Eastern Sea. It was like a raging battlefield: the wind howled like whole legions of rabid dogs, the waves pounded the shore, and huge rocks were flung about in the surf.

Grasping the water-parting sword, the elder brother, Dizuto, stood at the water's edge, for he did not wish to gamble with his life. Then, to his great surprise, he saw Antino approaching; after

he had overcome the initial shock, he thought of a clever solution. Quickly he spoke, in as friendly a manner as he could: "Oh, how good it is to see you again safe and sound and looking well, dear brother! I had begun to fear that you might sleep for all eternity after our meal together! Yes, and therefore I finally decided to embark myself in search of the pearl; surely you would have done the same in my position? Now, If you like, you may, of course, have your sword back and be the first to descend into the sea."

Antino could sense that his brother was not telling the whole truth, but should he engage in an endless discussion with him now? Should the beautiful princess be forced to wait still longer, and should the peasants in the flooded regions be left to drown? No, time was short! Antino took heart, retrieved the sword, unsheathed it, and descended into the raging Eastern Sea.

What happened next was unbelievable - it became light, and, cut in two by a strong flash, the waters parted. There was an open path into the chasm! Dizuto seized the favorable opportunity. He grabbed hold of Antino's coattail, closed his eyes and ran behind his brother. Meanwhile, his horse remained back on the shore.

The path descended sharply now. It took extraordinary courage to follow straight along the sword's path through the furious waters, while, to the left and to the right, horrible monsters from the bottom of the sea fought one another!

Finally, though, both brothers arrived at the fortress of the Lord of the Dragons. His loud bellow penetrated one's bones, and he intended to gobble them up without delay!

However, like a flaming meteor, the light from the water-parting sword struck him!

"I am Antino! We seek the Pearl of Light and the Silver Ladle!"

Blinded, the Lord of the Dragons shrank back as he produced an awful howl! Then he hissed, "This sword is your good fortune, mortals! But keep in mind that we have an old law here! And he who fails to heed it, ah, soon his final hour shall have struck! Now follow me!"

He led the brothers to the treasure chamber and pointed to an inscription above the entrance:

When you see these treasures through,  
This rule you never must forget:  
*One only* you may choose for you -  
Abstain from more, or you regret!

They both knew at once what this meant. Dizuto wished to beat his brother and quickly shouted, "I want the shining pearl!" Then he darted into the treasure chamber.

Inside lights flashed and sparkled as in the fabulous lands of magical dreams! On the walls, on the tables - everywhere - were the most beautiful treasures imaginable. Dizuto had already taken for himself the biggest of the pearls. Its golden shimmer filled the entire room, in which mysterious, moving images were reflected: great heroes, shining palaces, amazing wonders! Dizuto put the pearl in the bag he strapped to his back. However, this was not nearly enough. He would have preferred to take everything, had it not been for the Lord of the Dragons dire grumble.

And Antino? Did he not also need a shining pearl, in order to deliver the castle atop the mountain from its awful plight? No, this one was enough. He thought of the great flood and the promise he had made to the poor peasants there. So he asked for the Silver Ladle.

The Lord of the Dragons gnashed his teeth and hissed: "Take with you that which you have chosen! But out of my sight, before I change my mind!"

Neither of the brothers hesitated, both embarked upon their journey home at once.

When they came again to the water's edge, the storm had subsided. The elder brother mounted the horse and raced off with the shining pearl. Antino, traveling by foot, was much slower.

Soon, Dizuto reached the flooded region. Here the rain had still not stopped, and the flood waters continued to rise. The peasants eagerly awaited their rescuer. Finally, Dizuto rode in! They surrounded him from all sides and inquired about the Silver Ladle.

"The Lord of the Dragons did not wish to give it to me," he lied. "There was nothing I could do." Then he spurred his horse on and made sure he was soon out of sight.

Three days passed before Antino arrived. As he approached from the distance, he cried out to the peasants: "Come here, friends, I have brought the Silver Ladle!"

This they did not need to hear a second time! Antino took the ladle himself and began to clear away the water. After the first scoop, the peasants' homes were dry, and after the second, the fields were no longer covered by water; his third and final effort cleared the entire plain. The rain had finally stopped. The peasants were beside themselves with joy!

But good heavens! Whence has this big oyster suddenly appeared? After the flood waters had vanished, they found it lying in a deep pit. But with the water gone, it was already dead. They opened it and discovered inside a big, black pearl. The old fortuneteller, whose idea it had been to obtain the Silver Ladle, gave the pearl to Antino and said, "After the great flood, we have nothing else with which to express our gratitude. So please take this black pearl. May it bring you good fortune!"

Antino accepted and placed it in the bag he carried on his back. Then he worked vigorously in helping to rebuild the village.

In the meantime, Dizuto delighted in unimaginable abundance during his journey back. People came in droves to see the brilliantly shining pearl. Anyone who wished to glimpse the enchanting images it contained had to pay in pure gold! And wherever Dizuto passed through, he acquired all the riches, and the lands left behind were poor and barren!

Then one day he came to the big mountain, which he climbed all the way to the top. Finally, all his wishes were about to be fulfilled! Now no one would ever be able to match him!

As evening approached, he entered the castle in great splendor. From the center of the courtyard, an image of the shining pearl was reflected in the crystal tower. At the same time, something truly extraordinary happened - the pearl began to glow with such intensity that it burst into a thousand rays of light! A sparkling shower of flames rained down, and every flammable thing caught fire! Dizuto ran off as fast as his feet would carry him, but in his haste, he failed to notice a deep crevice. He fell headlong straight into it! Meanwhile, the disaster spread rapidly. A terrible firestorm swept across the land, leaving nothing alive in its wake!

It was not until the fires reached a big river far off in the distance that the disaster came to an end.

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Antino, who was still helping the peasants to rebuild their village, knew nothing of the horrible calamity. However, still occupied by the thought of the beautiful princess, he found no peace of mind. Then one day, after all the work was done, he began his journey back home.

As soon as he crossed the broad stream, however, he saw a terrible sight. Everything, wherever he looked, was black and burnt to the ground! A huge desert of ash was spread before him, as far as the eye could see! But whatever could have happened?! Had his brother not rescued the castle with its stone inhabitants and become King of a powerful Empire? Determined to solve the mystery, Antino ventured on.

He traveled for days across the desolate land destroyed by the fire. After a long time, believing himself too exhausted to continue, he finally saw off in the distance the towering mountain of his native land! With what little strength he had left, he climbed to the top. To the left and right of the path were strewn about the golden treasures Dizuto had collected. Now, of course, they were of no use to anyone in this barren desert. And, yes, up above, at the very top, stood, as before, the petrified castle. The fire had not destroyed it. In the center of the crystal tower the



beautiful princess still sat, waiting, and looking into the distance. Apparently no one had been able to find the Pearl of Light, and who knew if it had ever existed at all?!

What more, now, could Antino do? He took the last thing he had left, the black pearl, and placed it in the lap of the Princess.

Then a miracle occurred.

The pearl emitted a bright light. Indeed the true Pearl of Light shone like the golden sun from atop the tower out across the entire land! Once stone, the castle's occupants awoke, rubbing their sleepy eyes while gazing up in amazement at the wondrous sight. Even those who had perished in the firestorm were given new life, yet each one a thousand times more wonderful than before. All around grass and flowers, shrubs and trees, grew up, and all experienced the purest of joy. Antino was certain he would awake from a deep slumber! Then, suddenly, the little bird flew up, the one he had once helped. It landed on his shoulders and answered every question asked of him.

No one heard anything more from Dizuto, though. Indeed, there seemed no end to the golden treasures he had collected, which were given to the needy.

Then a great feast was celebrated, as the world had never seen before. It lasted forty days and forty nights! Everyone who wished to come was invited, for there was no shortage of anything! The highpoint occurred when Antino and the beautiful princess gave each other their hands in marriage.

They ruled the Kingdom to the delight of everyone. Over time, a powerful city grew up around the mountain, and because it was constructed according to the paths of the rays of light radiating out from the pearl, it resembled a magnificent jewel! Indeed, throughout the entire land, structures were built according to this plan, and no one can begin to describe this splendor.

So happy as they were, so long they lived - in the Kingdom of the Pearl of Light.