

Excerpt from
ELISABETH AND THE WATER
TROLL

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Part One:

To Dorf, before the Dawn

There's a mist in the valley in moonlight. The sun will rise and burn that mist away. But first, while people are sleeping and nobody knows it, something more monstrous is arising. The Troll is coming up.

His head and shoulders heave above the well. His eyes glow green in the night. His cat feet step on the mossy rock—then suddenly he leaps, and with a loping gallop the horrible Troll is running, running.

Across the valley floor, up the hills like a stallion he goes.

Over the fields, down empty roads, through woods, through gardens, through gates—until he comes to Dorf, where the houses are shut. The Troll is in the village of Dorf, and no one, no one knows.

He stands by the church. Three times he turns in the village square, sniffing the breezes. Suddenly he sees grey light in the eastern sky: the sun is coming and he has to hurry. Hurry, Troll!

One, he's the shadow that falls on the door.

Two, he's a cough in the night.

Three, he is counting the houses—till *four*,

He rears like a horse at the smell of a war—

There! There is the house he is searching for:

Small and wood and white.

Quietly the Troll goes creeping across the lawn. He puts his face to the window glass and peers in with old, old eyes. He sighs at what he sees. "Bonnie Lass," he growls.

Inside the room on a little pillow lies Elisabeth asleep. She is beautiful.

This Troll can move like water—anywhere, through any crack or crevice. Like water, then, he steals into her bedroom and holds his breath as he bends above the child. His heart is rushing as hard as a river.

Elisabeth has pale white skin.
The Troll is lifting her
Her hair so black, her arms so thin
Hang like a broken violin.
The Troll begins to purr:

‘Thee be—’ he says. He swallows, unused to speaking, unused to so much feeling. “Beth, Beth,” he says, “thee be my guest.”

But quick! The dawn is coming!

Hurry, Troll. Begone before the sun. Begone!

In an instant the Troll has leaped from the room with the child against his breast. He's running. Faster than sunrise he goes. His hair streams in the wind, his teeth flash, the breath woofs in his chest. But the child doesn't wake because he cushions her so tenderly. Down the path like a flying stallion, down the valley, galloping, galloping toward the well—and there, in a single, magnificent motion, he springs. He sails through the air, dives down his hole, and is gone.

When the sun comes up that day, the Troll has disappeared, and the valley is as empty as it ever was. The Troll is deep underground, gazing at the child Elisabeth.

He has laid her in a lizard shell and spread her hair around her. With a rough knuckle he is brushing her cheek. And here is a wonder they never tell by firelight: he is weeping. The Troll is weeping to see this child on a ledge in the Well. Despair—for her mouth is so sad, and her brow is so beautiful.

"Babe," he growls. "Baby best."

He is frowning on account of a difficult thought, how to make one sad heart happy.

"Pretty. Pretty. Prettiest."