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The Princess and the Goblin—Chapter 26: The Goblin-Miners

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Alastair Roberts

For the Easter season, I am posting some rather different things on this channel, in addition to my regular output, as a little gift to my followers and supporters. This is the second book I am reading through: 'The Princess and the Goblin', by George MacDonald. I hope that you all enjoy!

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You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Chapter 26 The Goblin-Miners That same night several of the servants were having a chat together before going to bed. What can that noise be? said one of the housemates, who had been listening for a moment or two. I've heard it the last two nights, said the cook.

If there were any about the place I should have taken it for rats, but my tom keeps them far enough. I've heard, though, said the scullery-maid, that rats move about in great companies sometimes. There may be an army of them invading us.

I've heard the noises yesterday and today, too. It'll be grand fun, then, for my tom and Mrs. Housekeeper's bob, said the cook. They'll be friends for once in their lives and fight on the same side.

I'll engage tom and bob together, we'll put to flight any number of rats. It seems to me, said the nurse, that the noises are much too loud for that. I have heard them all day, and

my princess has asked me several times what they could be.

Sometimes they sound like distant thunder, and sometimes like the noises you hear in the mountain from those horrid miners underneath. I shouldn't wonder, said the cook, if it was the miners after all. They may have come on some hole in the mountain through which the noises reach to us.

They're always boring and blasting and breaking, you know. As he spoke there came a great rolling rumble beneath them, and the house quivered. They all started up in a fright, and rushing to the hall found the gentlemen toms in consternation also.

They had sent to wake their captain, who said from their description that it must have been an earthquake, an occurrence which, although very rare in that country, had taken place almost within the century. And they went to bed again, strange to say, and fell fast asleep without once thinking of Curdie, or associating the noises that they had heard with what he had told them. He had not believed Curdie.

If he had, he would at once have thought of what he had said, and would have taken precautions. As they heard nothing more, they concluded that Sir Walter was right, and that the danger was over for perhaps another hundred years. The fact, as discovered afterwards, was that the goblins had, in working up a second sloping face of stone, arrived at a huge block which lay under the cellars of the house, within the line of the foundations.

It was so round that when they succeeded, after hard work, in dislodging it without blasting, it rolled thundering down the slope with a bounding jarring roll which shook the foundations of the house. The goblins were themselves dismayed at the noise, for they knew, by careful spying and measuring, that they must now be very near, if not under the king's house, and they feared giving an alarm. They therefore remained quiet for a while, and when they began to work again, they no doubt thought themselves very fortunate in coming upon a vein of sand which filled a winding fissure in the rock on which the house was built.

By scooping this away, they came out in the king's wine cellar. No sooner did they find where they were, than they scurried back again, like rats, into their holes, and running at full speed to the goblin palace, announced their success to the king and queen with shouts of triumph. In a moment the goblin royal family and the whole goblin people were on their way, in hot haste to the king's house, each eager to have a share in the glory of carrying off that same night the princess Irene.

The queen went stomping along in one shoe of stone and one of skin. This could not have been pleasant, and my readers may wonder that, with such skilful workmen about her, she had not yet replaced the shoe carried off by Curdie. As the king, however, had more than one ground of objection to her stone shoes, he had no doubt took advantage

of the discovery of her toes, and threatened to expose her deformity if she had another made.

I presume he insisted on her being content with skinned shoes, and allowed her to wear the remaining granite one on the present occasion, only because she was going out to war. They soon arrived in the king's wine cellar, and regardless of its huge vessels, of which they did not know the use, proceeded at once, but as quietly as they could, to force the door that led upwards.