

***La courte paille | The short
straw***

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I. Le sommeil | Sleep

Sleep is on vacation
My God! Where has it gone?
I've rocked my little one in vain;
He cries in his crib,
He's been crying since noon.
Where has sleep put
Its sand and its wise dreams?
I've rocked my little one in vain;
He turns, all sweaty, he sobs in his bed.
Ah! Return, return, sleep,
On your beautiful racehorse!
In the black sky, the Big Bear *
Has buried the sun
And re-lit the bees. **
If the baby doesn't sleep well,
He won't say "good morning,"
He won't say anything tomorrow
To his fingers, to the milk, to the bread
That greet him with the day.
* *The Big Dipper* / ** *The Milky Way*

II. Quelle aventure! | What an adventure!

A flea was pulling a little elephant
Along in its carriage,
While looking at the shop windows
Where the diamonds sparkled.
My God! My God!
What an adventure!

Who'll believe me, if they hear me?

The little elephants casually
Licked at a jar of jam,
But the flea didn't care;
She pulled along, smiling.
My God! My God!
How hard this is!
And I think I must be crazy!

Suddenly, near a fence,
The flea blew over in the wind,
And I saw the young elephant
Save himself by knocking down the walls.
My God! My God!
It's really true,
But how can I tell Mommy?

**III. La reine de cœur | The Queen of
Hearts**

Softly leaning
On her window-panes of moon,
The queen gestures to you
With an almond flower.
She is the Queen of Hearts.
She can, if she wishes,
Lead you in secret into strange dwellings
Where there are no more doors,
Or rooms, or towers,
And where the young dead come to talk of
love.

The queen salutes you;
Hasten to follow her
Into her hoar-frost castle
With smooth stained-glass moon windows.

IV. Ba, Be, Bi, Bo, Bu

Ba, be, bi, bo, bu, bé!
The cat has put on his boots;
He goes from door to door,
Playing, dancing, dancing, singing –
Pou, chou, genou, hibou.
“You ought to learn to read,
To count, to write,”
Everyone calls out to him,
But ricketikketau,
The cat bursts out laughing,
Returning to his castle:
He is Puss in Boots!

V. Les anges musiciens | The musician angles

Upon the treads of the rain
The Thursday angles
Play on the harp for a long time
And beneath their fingers, Mozart
Tinkles, deliciously,
In drops of blue joy
Since it is always Mozart
Which is played endlessly
By the musician angels
Who, all day Thursday
Make their harps sing
The sweetness of the rain.

VI. Le carafon | The baby carafe

“Why,” lamented the carafe,
“Couldn’t I have a baby carafe?
At the zoo, Mrs. Giraffe –
Doesn’t she have a baby giraffe?”
A wizard who was riding by
Astride the phonograph
Recorded the beautiful

Soprano voice of the carafe
And play it for Merlin.
“Very well,” he said, “very well!”
He clapped his hands three times –
And the lady of the house
Still asks herself why
She found, that morning,
A pretty little baby carafe
Leaning up against the carafe
Just as in the zoo, the baby giraffe
Leans its long and fragile neck
Against the smooth flank of the giraffe.

VII. Lune d’Avril | April moon

Moon, beautiful moon, moon of April,
Make me see in my dreams
The peach tree with a heart of saffron,
The fish that laughs at sleet,
The bird that, far away, like a horn,
Sweetly wakens the dead
And above all, above all, the country
Where there is joy, where it is bright,
Where, sunny with springtime,
The have broken all the rifles.
Moon, beautiful moon, moon of April,
Moon...

Liederkreis, op. 39 | Song cycle, op. 39

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(*Bärenreiter*)

I. In der Fremde | In a foreign land

From my homeland, beyond the red lightning,
The clouds come drifting in.
But father and mother have long been dead,
Now no one knows me there.

How soon, ah! How soon till the quiet time,
When I too shall rest
Beneath the sweet murmur of lonely woods,
Forgotten here as well.

II. Intermezzo | Intermezzo

I bear your beautiful likeness
Deep within my heart,
It gazes at me every hour
So freshly and happily.

My heart sings softly to itself
An old and beautiful song
That soars into the sky
And swiftly wings its way to you.

III. Waldesgespräch | A forest dialogue

“It is already late, already cold,
Why ride lonely through the forest?
The forest is long, you are alone,
You lovely bride, I’ll lead you home!”

“Great is the deceit and cunning of men,

My heart is broken with grief,
The hunting horn echoes here and there,
O flee, you do not know who I am.”

“So richly adorned are steed and lady,
So wondrous fair her youthful form;
Now I know you, may God protect me!
You are the enchantress, Lorelei!”

“You know me well, from its towering rock
My castle looks deep and silent down into the Rhine;
It is already late, already cold,
You shall never leave this forest again!”

IV. Die Stille | Silence

No one knows and no one can guess
How happy I am, how happy!
If only one, just one man knew,
No one else ever should.

The snow outside is not so silent,
Nor are the stars on high
So still and silent
As my own thoughts.

I wish I were a little bird,
And could fly across the sea,
Across the sea and further,
Until I was in heaven.

V. Mondnacht | Moonlit Night

It was as though Heaven
Had softly kissed the earth,
So that she in a gleam of blossom
Had now to dream of him.

The breeze passed through the fields,

The corn swayed gently to and fro,
The forests murmured softly,
The night was so clear with stars.

And my soul spread
Its wings out wide,
Flew across the silent land,
As though flying home.

VI. Schöne Fremde | A beautiful foreign land

The tree-tops rustle and shudder.
As if at this very hour
The ancient gods
Were pacing these half-sunken walls.

Here beyond the myrtle trees
In secretly twilit splendour,
What are you telling me, fantastic night,
Obscurely, as in a dream!

The glittering stars gaze down on me,
Fierily and full of love,
The distant horizon speaks with rapture
Of some great happiness to come!

VII. Auf einer Burg | In a castle

Up there at his look-out
The old knight has fallen asleep,
Rainstorms pass overhead,
And the wood stirs through the portcullis.

Beard and hair matted together,
Ruff and breast turned to stone,
For centuries he's sat up there
In his silent cell.

Outside it's quiet and peaceful,

All have gone down to the valley,
Forest birds sing lonely songs
In the empty window-arches.

Down there on the sunlit Rhine
A wedding party's sailing by,
Musicians strike up merrily,
And the lovely bride – weeps.

VIII. In der Fremde | In a foreign land

I hear the brooklets murmuring
Through the forest, here and there,
In the forest, in the murmuring
I do not know where I am.

Nightingales are singing
Here in the solitude,
As though they wished to tell
Of lovey days now past!

The moonlight flickers,
As though I saw below me
The castle in the valley,
Yet it lies so far from here!

As though in the garden,
Full of roses, white and red,
My love was waiting for me,
Yet she died so long ago.

IX. Wehmut | Sadness

True, I can sometimes sing
As though I were content;
But secretly tears well up,
And my heart is set free.

Nightingales, when spring breezes
Play outside, sing

Their song of longing
From their dungeon cell.

Then all hearts listen
And everyone rejoices,
Yet no one feels the pain,
The deep sorrow in the song.

X. Zwielicht | Twilight

Dusk is about to spread its wings,
The trees now shudder and stir,
Clouds drift by like oppressive dreams,
What can this dusk and dread imply?

If you have a fawn you favour,
Do not let her graze alone,
Hunters sound their horns through the forest,
Voices wander to and fro.

If here on earth you have a friend,
Do you trust him at this hour,
Though his eyes and lips be smiling,
In treacherous peace he's scheming war.

That which wearily sets today,
Will rise tomorrow, newly born.
Much can go lost in the night,
Be wary, watchful, on your guard!

XI. Im Walde | In the forest

A wedding wound across the mountain,
I heard the warbling of birds,
Riders flashed by, hunting horns blared,
That was a merry chase!

And before I knew, all had faded.
The night covers the land;

Only the forest still sighs from the
mountains,
And deep in my heart I quiver with fear.

XII. Frühlingsnacht | Spring night

Over the garden through the air
I heard birds of passage fly,
A sign that spring is in the air,
Flowers already bloom below.

I could shout for joy, could weep,
For it seems to me it cannot be!
All the old wonders come flooding back,
Gleaming in the moonlight.

And the moon and stars say it,
And the dreaming forest whispers it,
And the nightingales sing it:
"She is yours, is yours!"