



South Tyrol – Legends of the Dolomites

King Laurin and His Rose Garden

Above the forested knolls between Tiers and Eggental Valley, near Bolzano, there towers a rocky mountain that bears the name Rosengarten (Rose Garden). This is the story of its genesis.

Long ago, the rocks were less steep and completely covered with red roses. A dwarf people and their king, named Laurin, lived on these rose-blanketed slopes. The mountain itself was hollow, and contained numerous passages and halls. The borders of this mysterious realm were drawn only by thin silk thread, which demarcated the roses. Peace reigned in King Laurin's realm, and there was no violence at all.

One day, King Laurin learned that a neighbouring king had a beautiful daughter named Similde. He decided to woo her, and sent three of his men to attain the princess's hand in his name. When they came to the castle, an ill-natured man named Wittege opened the gate. He considered it impudence that the dwarf people thought themselves equal to his people. But an old warrior named Hildebrand, who had just come along, told him to hold his tongue. In the end, the princess rejected the marriage request. The dwarfs, dejected, went dolefully on their way home. Wittege mocked them as they left, however, and the dwarfs replied sharply. Wittege followed them, overtook them—and killed one. The other two fled and reported what had happened to King Laurin.

Peace was now a relic of the past, also in the Rose Garden. Laurin kidnapped Similde, and held her prisoner for seven years in his hollow mountain. When the princess's brother finally learned of her whereabouts, Hildebrand warned him of King Laurin's strength. Dietrich von Bern was asked to come to his aid. Wittege joined them to lead the way. When they arrived at Rosengarten Mountain, the roses radiated their unique beauty and their extraordinary aroma permeated the air. Dietrich saw no soldiers—only the silk thread, which he did not want to destroy. He thus proposed that a messenger be sent to negotiate with Laurin. These peaceful words angered Wittege. Without further ado, he tore the thread and crushed the roses.

Then King Laurin arrived: a small man with a crown on his head. All the warriors laughed. Laurin attacked Wittege with his spear nevertheless. A fight broke out. Wittege was soon in a precarious situation, and needed Dietrich's help. Hildebrand called to Dietrich, "Laurin has a belt on, which gives him the power of twelve men. Tear it—and victory will be yours." It happened just so, and Similde's brother asked the defeated Laurin for the princess. Similde came out from behind the rocks. She thanked her brother for rescuing her, but said also that King Laurin was a noble man and had always treated her

as a queen. At that point, Dietrich offered Laurin peace. Everyone was in agreement—except Wittege.

Laurin showed his newly acquired friends his treasures, and entertained them. They ate and drank together; when evening fell, they all retired. A squire awakened Laurin, though, and reported that Wittege was trying to enter the mountain with a group of armed men. Laurin and his men marched out and drove Wittege and his down the mountain. Hildebrand heard the noise of battle, and immediately suspected a betrayal. He awoke his comrades, and sent them to hold the gates. Laurin saw that he had done this, and thought that Wittege and Hildebrand had arranged to attack the dwarves during the night. The dwarfs donned magic hats upon Laurin's order. This enabled them to defeat the enemy, whom they cast into the dungeons.

Dietrich was so angry that he spat fire. Lo and behold, the fire melted the chains and freed them all. Similde gave them all magic rings, which dissolved the effect of the magic hats. In this way, Dietrich and his men won the battle. They captured King Laurin, and made Wittege his warder—who mistreated him frequently.

After several years of captivity, Laurin managed to escape and return to his homeland. But when he saw the red rose garden in front of him, he said: "These roses have betrayed me. If the warriors had not seen these roses, they would never have come to my mountain." Laurin thus cast a spell over the roses. He turned the rose garden into stone. The petrified roses were to be seen neither by day nor by night. He forgot to mention twilight, though. And so it happened that you could see the roses of the enchanted garden only in twilight. This phenomenon is known today as *Alpenglow*.