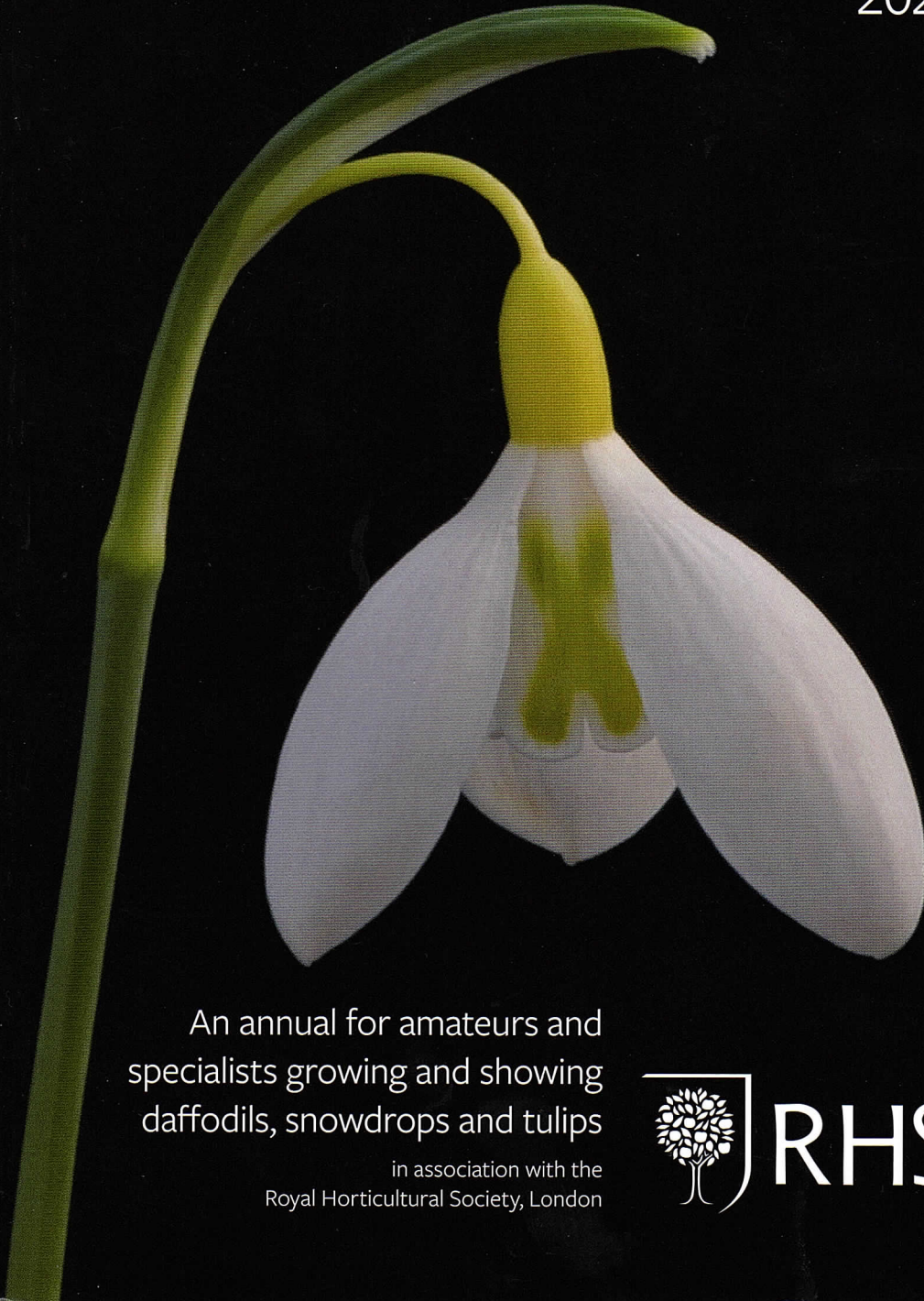


Daffodil Snowdrop and Tulip Yearbook 2021



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The story of The Robber Hotzenplotz

Anne Repnow

When I was a young child, it was a treat when the hand-puppet theatre came to our school. We knew all about the traditional characters – Kasperl, Seppel, the Constable and the Robber – and were so involved in the action we couldn't keep to our seats!

It was 60 years ago when children's author Otfried Preußler wrote *Der Räuber Hotzenplotz* (The Robber Hotzenplotz). Incidentally, the ß is pronounced as a sharp s and can be written ss on an English keyboard. In this book familiar figures of German puppet-theatre come to life in a wonderful adventure. *Der Räuber Hotzenplotz* is still very popular today and when Horst and Ingrid Bäuerlein, who run a charming specialist nursery – Bäuerleins Grüne Stube – near the historic town of Regensburg in Bavaria, ruminated on names for their snowdrop selections, they decided to name some after the book's characters.

So – what is it all about? Young Kasperl (pet name for Caspar) lives with his grandmother (Großmutter). He gets up to all sorts of pranks and jokes with his loyal friend Seppel (pet name for Joseph).

The cultivar 'Großmutter' (pictured) is a sparkling, pure white *G. nivalis* from eastern Bavaria, only the inner surfaces of the inner segments bear some green lines. The flower grows to a huge size (outer segments 3cm). It is a healthy plant but slow to increase.

G. nivalis 'Seppel' (pictured) has a Czech background. The outer segments are large and flat, with edges that are distinctly flared. They are adorned by a feathered, roughly round mark in mid-green that takes up about a third of the segment, leaving a white edge and white

tip at the apex. The inner segments bear a solid darker green U.

On Großmutter's birthday Kasperl and Seppel gave her a coffee-grinder. To her delight, while grinding coffee, it plays the melody of the popular song *All New in May*. Understandably she is devastated when the feared robber Hotzenplotz steals this beloved contraption. Having no confidence in the skills of constable (Wachtmeister) Dimpfelmoser, Kasperl and Seppel decide to catch Hotzenplotz themselves.

Large and prolific, *G. elwesii* 'Wachtmeister Dimpfelmoser' (pictured) has a passing resemblance to *G. elwesii* 'Grumpy'. However, the eyes on the inner segments are larger, sometimes fusing to form sunglasses. The angle of the V-shaped apical mark is flatter than in *G. elwesii* 'Grumpy', with the ends slightly turned up to form a moustache.

Kasperl and Seppel make a plan. They fill a wooden crate with sand, drill a hole in the bottom and plug it with a match. They write "TAKE CARE – GOLD!" on the box and lug it into the forest where Hotzenplotz is known to lurk. When the robber approaches, the two friends remove the match and hide. Sure enough, Hotzenplotz gleefully carries the box to his hidden robber's den, leaving a trail of sand. Unfortunately, he discovers immediately that the box doesn't contain gold, notices the trail and furiously uses the rest of the sand in the box to lay down another trail that leads to a pit trap. Meanwhile Kasperl and Seppel swap their caps as a disguise and stealthily follow the trail of sand. Alas, they are caught by Hotzenplotz who promptly confuses the two



Above: *G. nivalis* 'Großmutter' Below: *G. elwesii*
'Wachtmeister Dimpfelmoser' (photos Horst Bäuerlein)

Above: *G. nivalis* 'Seppel' (photo Anne Repnow)
Below: *G. nivalis* 'Fee Ama Ryllis' (photo Horst Bäuerlein)



friends. Kasperl pretends to be very stupid by mispronouncing Hotzenplotz's name time and again. Driven to distraction, the robber sells Kasperl to the nasty sorcerer Petrosilius Zwackelmann, who needs a household slave. Now Kasperl has to peel tons of potatoes, the staple diet of Petrosilius Zwackelmann, who never masters the art of charming the peel off his beloved spuds.

With a bit of imagination, late-blooming *G. nivalis* 'Petrosilius Zwackelmann' resembles a sorcerer's hat. The inner and outer segments of the relatively large poculiform flowers are narrowly boat-shaped and of equal length. Their apices are slightly pinched and generously tipped in green.

Petrosilius Zwackelmann is convinced that Kasperl is as thick as two short planks as he seems to be incapable of mastering the pronunciation of the sorcerer's name (who can blame him?). Therefore, he thinks it is safe to leave him in his castle locked up by a spell while he visits a friend in Buxtehude. Alone, Kasperl explores the castle and suddenly hears cries for help from the cellar. He discovers a talking toad in a mud-filled pit. This is in fact the Fee (fairy) Amaryllis, whom Petrosilius caught, turned into a toad and is kept prisoner. Amaryllis asks Kasperl to pick a powerful fairy herb up on the high moor. She explains that he can break the lock-up spell and flee from the castle if he leaves a piece of clothing behind.

When naming their fairy-like, very late blooming Czech *G. nivalis* selection with the pale-yellow ovary, Horst and Ingrid Bäuerlein had to split up the fairy's name in order to comply with naming conventions, which forbid using a species as a cultivar name. The flower of *G. nivalis* 'Fee Ama Ryllis' (pictured p59) is about 3cm long, pure white and semi-poculiform. This charming snowdrop needs time to settle and increases slowly.

Kasperl breaks the lock-up-spell by leaving Seppel's cap, exits the castle and makes for the moor. Meanwhile, the sorcerer returns. He is furious to discover the tatties unpeeled and

Kasperl gone. But he knows a spell that allows him to get hold of anyone with the help of something they used to own. He grabs what he believes to be Kasperl's cap muttering the spell and – wham! – there is Seppel standing before him, holding one of Hotzenplotz's boots, which he was about to clean. Seppel explains to Petrosilius that he and Kasperl swapped caps. Now the sorcerer wants to use Kasperl's cap to catch his servant – but it was burned by Hotzenplotz. In his anger, Petrosilius uses the boot to get hold of Hotzenplotz, turns him into a bullfinch and locks him up in a birdcage. Meanwhile, Kasperl has managed to sneak back into the castle and – with the help of the fairy herb – the toad is turned back into the lovely fairy Amaryllis. She is so grateful she gives Kasperl a magic ring that grants him three wishes.

Petrosilius Zwackelmann discovers Amaryllis and Kasperl in the cellar, throws a fit of rage, falls into the pit and drowns in the mud. Kasperl and Seppel happily walk home and hand over the birdcage to the astonished Wachtmeister Dimpfmöser. Kasperl uses his first wish to turn the bullfinch back into Hotzenplotz, the second to get a new cap and the third to give the musical coffee grinder back to his greatly relieved grandmother.

There are more characters in Otfried Preußler's Hotzenplotz pantheon than snowdrops named by Ingrid and Horst – there are three sequels to the original book, so maybe in the future we will be able to meet (and cultivate) more of these charming celebrities of our childhood. And maybe you are now a little reconciled to some unpronounceable German cultivar names.

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