# The Golden Heart

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Great blue lotos-flowers were covering the brink of the water’s edge.

# THE GOLDEN HEART

&

# Other Fairy Stories

BY


## VIOLET JACOB

AUTHOR OF "THE SHEEPSTEALERS," "THE INTERLOPER"


*With Illustrations by* MAY SANDHEIM


LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1904

DEDICATED

TO

THREE LITTLE BOYS,

HARRY, EVAN, AND RAYMOND,

AND THREE LITTLE GIRLS,

MARJORY, SUSAN, AND GWYNETH.

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

# THE GOLDEN HEART

&

## Other Fairy Stories

# THE GOLDEN HEART

THE night lay clear upon the North Sea, but now and then a soft wind came floating by; it whistled through the rigging of a fishing smack in which a little boy lay under a tarpaulin, peeping over the side of the boat down into the water below.

His father had told him to be still and to go to sleep, so he lay looking up at the spangled sky above, and the masts rocking to and fro against the stars as the boat swayed about. Sometimes he thought the tall, dark forms looked like black arms trying to reach the bright lamps and put them out. He did not feel sleepy as he lay by himself and he began to wonder, as he gazed into the water, how deep it was down there, and whether the little fishes among the shells and seaweeds were ever told by their fish-fathers to go to sleep, and, if so, whether they found it as hard to do as he did.

Presently he saw the eyes of a great shining fish staring up at him. It opened its mouth as if it wished to be friendly, but hardly knew how to begin, so the little boy plucked up courage, though he had never met a fish before and was not quite sure how to address one.

"Is it very cold in the sea?" he inquired shyly.

"That depends on what you are accustomed to," replied the fish. "For my part, I should say it was a particularly warm night for the time of year. What in the world do you find to do in that monstrous boat? Is there anything worth eating up there?"

"It's very dull," said the little boy. "My father said I was to go to sleep, but I can't. I'm not sleepy."

"Why don't you come down here?" suggested the fish. "It stands to reason that it must be much more amusing in the water."

"I should be drowned; I can't swim like you."

"How dreadfully ignorant," remarked the fish.

The little boy was rather hurt at this, and made no reply.

“Well,” continued the hoarse voice from below, “if you like to come with me, I can show you some of the most wonderful things in the world; you can hold by my tail and I’ll pull you along. You can’t drown so long as you don’t let go.”

The little boy was much tempted.

“But are you sure you won’t leave me?” he asked anxiously.

“Goodness, no,” replied the fish, “I’ll see that no harm comes to you. You are evidently a shockingly ignorant child, and it would be real charity to show you something of the world. Come along and don’t be silly.”

The little boy looked round to see that there was no one near, then he slipped over the side and, in another minute, was in the sea and holding firmly to the tail of his new acquaintance.

Away they shot through the clear water; it was not nearly so cold as it had looked, and the rapid motion was very exciting.

On they flew, smoothly and easily; they passed tall ships and curiously-shaped masses of rock sticking up out of the sea. Great twisted pieces of sea-weed floated by them, and the flashing lights of Orion’s Belt seemed suspended from the dark blue arch overhead, while, up in the north, the Northern Lights shot their trembling streamers far into the centre of the sky.

By the time day was dawning they had reached a tract of ocean where there was neither sail nor coast, and where the rolling line of water stretched for miles around.

“Now,” said the fish, “I will show you one of the strangest things in the world. Can you see anything between us and the horizon?”

“I see a dark spot a long way off.”

The light was growing brighter every moment, and pale streaks in the sky began to kindle the sea when the fish and his companion drew near the object of which they had been speaking. In the midst of the heaving water there rose a steep rock; on its grim sides grew neither sea-weed nor anything to give sign of life. There was an oppressive silence hanging over everything, and the water lay dark and still; no little wave played against the relentless stone. On the top of this rock a beautiful woman sat with her hands clasped together. She wore a black robe against which her arms shone like ivory, and her hair flowed in a shower over her shoulders. Now and then she raised her eyes and looked out to sea; they wandered over the horizon

and rested with a look of sad expectation upon it, then she sighed and glanced down at something which she held in her hand.

Beside her stood the only living creature excepting herself visible on that desolate place—a gigantic grey cormorant of terrible aspect and size. A gleam of light from the rising sun shot over the waters, and, as it touched the woman's hair with its first rays, the cormorant flew up into the air. From some hidden place in the rock another bird appeared, and, joining its mate, rose with him far above their bleak abode; then the two sailed away and were soon lost in the distance.

"What does it all mean? Oh, do tell me!" begged the little boy.

"I thought I could show you something surprising," chuckled the fish; "this is the history of it. I am one of the *very few* who know anything about it. Inside that rock, in a cavern which is reached by a passage to which no one knows the entrance, sits an old witch; she is very wicked, and is sometimes able to cast dreadful spells upon her enemies. That Princess who sits there is the daughter of a King, whose country is an immense way off, and who once had the ill-luck to offend the old woman. So, when the Princess was a child, she went to the King's palace and stole her away; here she has kept her sitting, year after year, upon this lonely rock with no one to speak to but the old cormorant. Every day he keeps guard in case someone should come to take her away, and every morning he flies off to fish with his mate, who has a nest just now and young ones in a cave of the rock. Once in two days the hag comes out to bring the Princess food and to ask her whether she sees anyone coming, and when she gets no reply, she laughs and leaves her again."

"Will she ever get away?" asked the little boy.

"How can I tell?" said the fish. "She has sat there for so long that it doesn't seem like it. There is only one chance that I can see. She holds in her hand a little heart made of gold; if she could only find someone to whom she could give it, she might be saved. For, whoever possesses it can ask any question, and the heart will answer and tell its owner how to act under all difficulties. But he who takes it has to accept trouble and pain with the gift."

"But then, why doesn't she ask it herself how to get away?"

"The heart is of no use to any one but a man," said the fish.

"And I suppose no man has ever been here?"

"Two or three have come sailing by; one who came was anxious to help the Princess, but, as she was about to throw him the Golden Heart, she told

him that if he took it he would have to face as much trouble as a man could bear. So he would not have it and sailed away. But that was years ago—and now, we really can't stay here any longer, nor do any good if we do—let us be off."

And he swam away.

The little boy would have liked to stay and speak to the Princess and his eyes were full of tears.

"What are you sniffling at behind there?" exclaimed the fish, who was getting rather tired of his load.

"I am so sorry for her!" he sobbed.

"Dear! Dear! If you cry for all the troubles you see, you will have enough to do; try to think of something else, and, for goodness' sake, strike out a little with your legs and help me along—I have to do all the work."

The little boy was so frightened when he heard this that he kicked out with might and main for fear that his protector should shake him off.

When evening was coming on and when they had travelled some distance, they saw a large ship; as she approached, the fish suggested that they should swim alongside, and the little boy was charmed with the idea. They saw that the sails were embroidered with gold and silver, and that, on the prow, there was an immense carved crown glittering with precious stones. Closer and closer she came till they were almost touching her. A man was looking over the bulwark into the water; he was young and very richly dressed, and a sword hung at his side. Over his face was a black mask which hid it completely, leaving only the mouth visible.

"There!" remarked the fish, "look at that man. That is another wonderful sight. He is young and rich and a king's son, but he chooses to sail about by himself. He is so ugly that he wears a mask day and night and never takes it off, and he roams about on the high seas so that he need see none but his own crew who love him so much that they would go with him anywhere."

"What a pity," said the little boy, wondering. "He looks very nice standing up there with those beautiful clothes on. And I can see his mouth; it does not look so very ugly."

"It's simply enormous," replied the fish.

"Oh, I don't think so—really," answered the little boy, "it isn't any bigger than yours, you know."

“That’s neither here nor there,” said the fish; “and don’t pull my tail so. You hold it so clumsily that I can hardly move.”

“I wish I could see him nearer,” continued the little boy, lost in admiration of the figure above him, “I’ve never seen any one like him.”

“You haven’t seen much,” answered the fish, who had not been best pleased by the allusion to his mouth, “now come along.”

“Oh, wait a minute, do, please! He’s looking at us.”

The Prince was gazing over the bulwark at them.

“Well!” exclaimed the fish, “if you’re so devoted to him you had better stay with him altogether. I’m getting sick of dragging you along like this.”

The poor little boy was horrified and looked imploringly up at the Prince, who called one of his men to see the strange pair. “Lower a boat and fetch me that child,” he said, “and the fish too, if you can.”

When the fish heard this, he began to flounder so violently that he twitched his tail free and swam quickly off, leaving his friend gasping in the waves. The Prince threw off his beautiful coat, plunged into the sea and caught the struggling figure, holding it till the boat picked them both up. Soon they stood safe on deck, dripping with salt water, the little boy sobbing with terror and excitement. “Oh,” he cried, “look! look! your lovely clothes are all spoilt.”

“Never mind, little man, never mind,” laughed the Ugly Prince, “and don’t cry. You are quite safe with me and I have plenty of other clothes in my cabin.”

Then he sent for a great tall sailor, who took the little boy below, where he was undressed and dried, then rolled up in one of the Prince’s cloaks and carried on deck. “Come here,” said the Prince, “and tell me all about yourself.”

The child came up shyly and climbed upon his knee. “And how was it,” continued he, “that you came to be swimming about with that great fish? Little boys don’t travel in that sort of way as a rule.”

His voice was so soft and he stroked the child’s hair so kindly, that the little fellow began to think he was a much nicer friend to have than the fish, with all its knowledge; so he told him of everything that had happened and especially of the marvellous sights he had seen since he slipped over the side of his father’s smack a day ago. When he had finished there was a long

silence and he glanced up at the Prince, for he felt, somehow, that he was looking grave. But the black mask hid everything.

In a short time the Ugly Prince set him down and spoke a few words to his helmsman. Then the ship turned slowly round and sailed off in the direction from which the fish had come.

As night drew on they still kept steadily forward, and when the stars had come out and the last light departed, the little boy was put to bed in a beautiful cabin all painted sea-green, with a pale green curtain hanging over the door on which was embroidered a silver crescent moon. He was laid in a soft bed with a quilt of the same colour, and soon he was far away in the land of dreams, dreaming that he was again in the sea, sinking into a world of branching sea-weed and silver sand through which swam the little fishes about which he had so often wondered.

When he opened his eyes next morning the light was peeping in through the port-hole, and his clothes, which had been dried, were lying beside a bath which was waiting for him. He washed and dressed and then went on deck, where the Ugly Prince stood looking out over the ship's bows. When he saw the child he lifted him up in his arms.

OH·CRIED·THE·LITTLE·BOY·I·SEE·A·DARK·THING·FAR·AWAY·IN·FRONT·

“Oh!” cried the little boy. “I see a dark thing far away in front! Why, it is the rock where the Princess is! Are we going there?”

The Prince did not answer.

As the sun rose out of the ocean a short time later, the vessel was drawing very near to the rock which rose, like some dark monster, out of the sea, and the Prince and the little boy were on deck, the latter looking eagerly out for the captive Princess.

There she sat, just as she had sat the day before and all those weary days in the years gone by with her hands clasped over her one hope, the Golden Heart. Two dark spots could be seen in the distant sky growing smaller and smaller; they were the two cormorants flying off for food.

As the Princess saw the ship the colour rushed back into her pale cheeks; she fixed her eyes on the advancing sails, and at last distinguished the tall form of the Ugly Prince standing out against the sea and sky beyond. As the vessel came under the shadow of the rock he looked up at the sweet face above him and told her to have courage, and that he had come to take her from her long imprisonment, back to the world she had left.

“Throw me,” he said, “the Golden Heart that you hold.”

The Princess stood up. “Thank Heaven that the cormorant is gone!” she cried. “He stands there so that, if I throw it to anyone, he may catch it in his beak and rob me of my last chance.”

“But throw it carefully,” begged the little boy, “or the Prince won’t catch it.”

The Prince smiled. “Now,” he called.

“But, before I do so,” said the Princess, “I must tell you this; if you take it, it will bring you pain and sorrow—perhaps more than you can bear. Can you really accept it? Are you willing to take the trouble that must come?”

The Ugly Prince simply held out his hands. “Throw,” he said.

The little boy thought he had never seen anybody look so noble as he did, standing there with his outstretched hands and his masked face turned up to the lovely, sad figure above him.

A flash pierced the air, and the Heart lay safe in the hands of the Ugly Prince.

“And now,” he said as he held it, “remember that there is nothing I will not do for your sake; whatever this thing tells me to do, that will I do;

wherever it tells me to go, there will I go; and, as long as there is life in me, I will not rest until I have accomplished my end."

The evil birds were now seen returning over the waters, and at the sight of the ship lying anchored under the rock, they were dreadfully disturbed, and made such a flapping of wings that the witch came up from her lair to see what could be the matter. When she saw the vessel her fury knew no bounds, and when she observed that the Golden Heart was gone, she nearly wrung the old cormorant's neck.

"The next time you go away," she cried, "I will sit here and watch myself! And, as for you," she went on, turning to the Princess, "you need never think you can escape, for you shall be guarded day and night!"

But the Princess said nothing.

Meantime, the Ugly Prince was taking counsel of his treasure; he looked long and curiously at it; then, as he felt a little tremor fluttering between his palms, he inquired of it what he was to do to save the Princess from her bondage. A radiance like a flame rose all round the Heart, and a small, soft voice spoke. It was so low that he had to bend down his head to catch the words. "To-night," it said, "you must watch on deck until morning, and when the two cormorants fly away at sunrise, be careful to notice from which part of the rock the female bird comes; then, when they have started on their flight, slip down into the water and swim to the place. It is a large cave, black and gloomy, but, nevertheless, swim in. The water is deep at the entrance, but when you have gone forward a few strokes, you will find a great stone rising a couple of feet above its level; let your eyes get accustomed to the darkness and you will see upon the top of this stone the cormorant's nest. Climb to it very softly, for in it will be the three little cormorants asleep. Be sure you do not wake them. Beside them you will find three grey feathers which you must take; the first feather will give you the power of becoming invisible when you please, the second will enable you to see in the dark, and the third will enable you to understand the language of birds. When you have secured them, make yourself invisible and stay in the cavern until the mother-bird comes home. Then, keep your ears open to hear all that passes."

The voice ceased, and the Prince, knowing he would be told no more, buttoned the Golden Heart into his doublet and prepared to wait patiently till night should come and he could take up his post on deck to watch for the coming sunrise.

The hours wore on and day slowly faded. When the dark set in he lay down, with his eyes fixed on the heavens, hardly able to bear the time which lay between him and the morning, and, when dawn came creeping on, he distinguished the dim figure of the old cormorant at his post.

He stood as though carved out of the stone beneath him until the sun's disc appeared over the horizon-line, when, with a loud flapping, he rose in the air. The Ugly Prince lay looking at the rock as though his life depended upon it, and, from out of a deep shadow in the right side of the huge mass, the mother-bird came flying to join her mate. He kept his eyes on the spot till the last rush of wings had died upon the air, then he looked up at the Princess and plunged into the sea.

The green water had a cold chill which struck him to the marrow, but he swam steadily on, stroke after stroke, till he reached the mouth of a rugged cavern where the rock towered above his head as though poised for a moment ere it fell to crush him to atoms; and, through the darkness, he saw the outline of the flat-topped stone described by the Golden Heart.

With long strokes he swam to it, and, clinging to its jagged sides, drew himself out of the water. To climb to the top was the work of a moment. Once there, he stood staring through the gloom at the nest, which was built, as he had been told, on the summit. There lay the three little cormorants asleep, like three fluffy balls; he could just distinguish their soft bodies and their breasts heaving up and down in the deep breathing of their slumbers. Not a sound was to be heard but the lapping of the water, stirred by his swimming as it rose and fell against the stone's foot. As his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness he saw, beside the sleeping birds, the three feathers for which he was searching. He put in his hand and took them, his heart beating high as he felt all three in his grasp and knew that the first step of his labours was accomplished. He slid down again into the salt water, having placed his new treasures carefully in his pocket. Then he seated himself in a little niche above water-mark to await the mother-bird, wishing with all his might for the promised power of seeing in the dark. Immediately every cranny in the cave became visible and he began to wonder where the mysterious passage might be which led to the witch's dwelling.

In a short time the narrow slit of light was darkened by the form of the cormorant-mother coming back to the nest; she flew in and alighted by the side of her young ones. The Prince lost no time in wishing for the power of understanding bird-language, and, as the little birds awoke, he strained every nerve to catch any speech which might pass between the four creatures.

“Lie still, you tiresome little things,” said the mother as they all began chattering at once, “I have got some very good fish here; but *not one* of you shall taste a bit if you make such a noise.”

“What a long time you’ve been getting it,” squeaked one of the little birds.

“That is not the way to speak,” observed the mother, “and you must learn not to make remarks when you are not spoken to. If your father heard you talking like that he would punish you severely. I am always very quick about getting your food, and greediness is a very shocking fault—remember that.”

“But I’m not greedy, I’m hungry.”

“Be silent, sir, at once!”

The three little birds were very much frightened at this and kept quiet while the fish were being broken up and divided into four parts. When this was done a great gobbling began, and no one spoke for some time.

“Now,” said the old bird, when every piece had disappeared. “I am going to speak to you very seriously.”

At this there was a dead silence, for all the little birds felt that their mother was in no humour to be trifled with this morning.

“Remember that I forbid you all distinctly to make any noise to-day or to scream or chatter loudly. I have a very good reason for doing so, and as I wish you to see for yourselves how very important it is, I will tell you about it. Are you all listening?”

“Yes! Yes!” cried the little birds.

“Your father is in great trouble,” she began, “for a most disagreeable thing has happened and our mistress is very angry. A ship is close by and there is a strange man on board who wears a black mask. We are afraid that he has come to take the Princess away. Yesterday, on our return from fishing, we found the ship here, and, what was far worse, discovered that the Heart which the Princess held in her hand had gone. Your father thinks there is every reason to believe that the man with the black mask has got it and he is much distressed, for our mistress has used words to him which have hurt his feelings deeply. Now, if any of you scream and make a noise, it may draw the attention of that wicked man in the ship to this place and he may discover the way to our mistress’s cave, which lies, as I suppose you all know, behind that piece of rock shaped like a fish’s head sticking out in

yonder corner. If he got to her he might do her some mischief, or perhaps force her to give him the Princess. Besides which, he would certainly wring all your necks—and then, how would you like *that*?"

Here one of the little birds began to cry.

"How dare you make that noise!" said his mother, prodding him with her beak. "Stop crying instantly, sir, or we may all be lost!"

The squeaking soon ceased and, quiet being restored, one of the little birds, being of an argumentative turn of mind, began to ask questions. "But if that dreadful man got to our mistress," he inquired, "how could he find his way to the Princess afterwards?"

"If he were in the cave he might see how our mistress goes to her; you know, she takes off her left shoe and knocks at the wall with it. Then she says:

" 'Left-foot shoe, left-foot shoe,
Open, rock, and I'll pass through.'

And the rock opens in a straight passage and she goes up to the top of it, right outside to where your father and the Princess sit. Now, I've told you enough—be quiet."

All this time the Ugly Prince was looking for the stone like a fish's head, and soon saw it sticking out in the remotest part of the cavern, so he began climbing towards it. It was weary work, for the cold had made his limbs stiff, and he feared to go quickly in case any sound should attract the old bird's attention. With much trouble he reached the place, and, looking behind the fish's head, saw an opening which seemed much too small for a human being to enter. He determined, however, to try what he could do and began to creep in, finding that he could just push himself along, and although he could see no light at the other end, he pressed forward. A horrible sickening sensation came over him when he had gone some way, and he felt as though he should be suffocated in this stifling place, from which none could deliver him, and which his crew, if they began to search for him, could never find. The air grew so close and the tunnel so narrow that he had almost given up all hope of life when his head struck against the rock and he lay half stunned. "Now," he thought, "all is really lost, for I can get no further, and must die in this loathsome place."

As he lay in his cramped position he saw what seemed to be a white pebble embedded in the rock somewhere on his left. He stretched out his hand with great difficulty, and found that it came in contact with nothing

solid, though it hid the white spot from his view, and he realised that the object was not a pebble at all, but a speck of light in the far distance, and that he was groping with his arm down a narrow passage, starting away at right angles from the place in which he was imprisoned. A new hope sprang up in his heart, and he dragged himself round the corner. The tunnel grew a little wider, and, with every few inches that he moved forward, his courage rose, and the outer air grew nearer. The stones tore his hands, and he was bruised in every limb as he crept along, but he pressed on till the light became larger and yellower and the air less oppressive, and, at last, after many struggles, he stood upright outside the tunnel's mouth.

An enormous hall met his eyes; bare rock formed its walls and ceiling and the ground under his feet was covered with fine sand.

From the sides of this place hung twisted shapes. He could hardly see what they were. First he thought that they must be great ropes of sea-weed, then human forms; grinning faces seemed to start from them at every side, and yet he could never really make out that they were the forms of either men or beasts, for, as each thing appeared to take some definite shape, it would speedily turn into something else, like the wild and fleeting images in a dream.

As he stood, the noise of the sea roaring underground in remote hollows of the rocks smote desolately on his ear, and, for a moment, the dreary sound made his heart sink in his body. But he thought of the Princess, and courage leaped up in his soul.

A·THING·WHICH·LOOKED·LIKE·A·HUMAN·FIGURE·WAS·LYING·BY·A·FIRE

A column of stone, reaching to the roof, stood in the middle of the cave, and, at its foot, was a thing which looked like a human figure lying by a fire. He approached, thanking Heaven for the power of becoming invisible, and saw that he was in the presence of the witch. By a happy chance she had overslept herself, and had not yet gone up to the Princess.

As he looked there was a stir in her recumbent form. She rose, and, drawing off her left shoe, approached the wall.

"Left-foot shoe, left-foot shoe,
Open, rock, and I'll pass through,"

she muttered, striking it. Then the wall cracked open and she gathered her skirt more closely round her and disappeared through the opening, which closed behind her.

He paced up and down, straining his ears to catch any sound that might steal through some chink in the rock, and give him an idea of what was going on above. But no sound came.

At last the wall opened and his enemy appeared. An evil smile was on her face, and he guessed that she had been taunting her victim. His blood boiled. When the chasm closed, the hag, instead of replacing her shoe, drew off its fellow and, putting them both in a corner, flung herself down by the fire. The Prince had not expected such luck and he bounded towards them. At this she looked up quickly; he had forgotten, in his excitement, that, though invisible, his movements could be heard, and for a minute he stood waiting to see if she would notice the footprints he had made in the sand. But after sitting erect to listen, she seemed re-assured and lay down, while he, pausing a little space ere he moved again, heard her breathing grow heavier and saw that she was falling asleep again over her fire. Then he picked up her left shoe.

He advanced to the wall and struck it, saying the words he had heard her use.

It flew open before him and the fresh air rushed against his face. With one backward glance at the sleeper he climbed the incline, and, in a moment, had wished himself visible again and was standing on the rock by the Princess.

Her eyes were fixed on his ship, but she turned on hearing a step. Her face was almost fierce, for she expected nothing better than to meet the witch. Then she saw the Ugly Prince and rose, with a cry, stretching out her hand to him. Her great sorrow seemed to be looking out of her eyes, and the

beauty of her face was so far beyond anything he had imagined that he stood before her dumbfounded, more like a culprit than the man who had fought his way to her through peril and fatigue. He took her hand and pressed his lips upon it. As he did so there was a rushing in the air, and the old cormorant, who had just returned from his fishing, began raining the blows of his heavy wings upon his shoulders. He fought it off as well as he could with his left arm while he drew his sword, and, as the savage bird swung back to make a fresh swoop, the steel blade flashed and it fell dead on the rock at his feet.

The Princess covered her eyes; she almost sank upon the ground, but the Ugly Prince caught her in his arms.

"How can we escape? How are we to reach the ship?" she cried.

He drew out the Golden Heart. The same tremor ran through it as it said: "Cut off the cormorant's wings and strike them with the witch's shoe. They will fasten themselves upon your shoulders and you will be able to fly as well as the bird."

The Prince obeyed, then he stood ready to leave for ever the scene of his conflict. "Come," he said to the Princess.

We must now return to the little boy, who had never left the deck all the hours his friend had been away. As he saw him rise into the air with his living burden he clasped his hands, standing breathless until the cormorant's wings had borne him over the strip of water. His joy knew no bounds as he saw him land safely beside him, and he looked with admiration and awe upon the lovely Princess who had suffered so much.

"Who is this?" she asked, pointing to the child.

"That is more than I can tell you," said the Prince, smiling, "for I picked him out of the water. But he is very dear to me all the same."

"Shall I love you too?" she said, looking down at him with her sweet, mysterious eyes. "I have had no one to love for so very long."

The Golden Heart was their guide, for it knew everything—even the way over the trackless seas—and soon the terrible rock was no more than a fast disappearing speck, far astern.

After a happy voyage they reached the country where the Princess's father still reigned, an old man bowed down by grief.

When they got to the shore and the people saw that it was their own Princess who had returned and heard the tale of her captivity and rescue,

their joy knew no bounds and they conducted the Ugly Prince and his crew with great rejoicings to the royal palace, which lay at some distance off. Messengers were sent forward to the poor old King, who, in spite of age and infirmity, mounted his horse for the first time for many years and came out to meet them.

He could hardly believe the news, and, when the meeting was over and he had held his daughter in his arms and knew that it was no dream, but the real, happy truth, he turned to the Prince. “I cannot speak to you now,” he said, “but to-morrow you must tell me the story with your own lips, and, were you to ask me for my kingdom, it should be yours.”

The next morning the Ugly Prince was summoned to the old man’s presence. He told the story of the Princess’s rescue, making very light of his own brave deeds, but the King was not easily deceived; and, as he sent also for the little boy, he soon got at the whole truth.

“And now,” he said, at the end of the tale, “is there anything in the wide world that I can do for you? My kingdom and all I have is yours if you will only take it. Have you no wish—no matter what it may be—that I can gratify?”

“I have loved your daughter since the first moment that I saw her,” said the Ugly Prince.

One evening the Ugly Prince and the Princess were walking on the terrace of the palace garden. The sunset glowed along the western sky, the birds were twittering in the deepening silence, and the heavy scent of masses of roses which climbed over balconies and pillars steeped the air. A minstrel was singing softly inside one of the open windows, and his song reached them as they stood looking out over the balustrade on to the country lying spread before them.

“Do you remember,” said the Prince, “that, when you threw me the Golden Heart, you told me I should have to suffer almost more trouble than I could bear?”

“Yes,” she answered.

“Well,” continued he, “I nearly gave myself up for lost in the tunnel of rock; but, after all, I came safely through it. And it was a small price to pay for this,” he added, taking her hand.

“How brave you are!” said she.

He laughed. “But now,” he said, “I cannot imagine anything happier than the present. I have no wish unfulfilled but one, and that is to make you my wife, which I shall do in a few days.”

The Princess looked down. “I have one wish ungratified,” she replied.

“But you have only to say it,” exclaimed he; “surely you know I would do anything for you—anything. I promise it.”

“I can hardly ask you. It would seem as though I did not trust you. It troubles me very much,” she said, with tears in her eyes.

“Do not keep anything from me,” he implored. “I cannot be content now until I know what it is. You shall not go from here until you tell me.”

“If you would, only once, before our wedding-day, let me see your face.”

The Prince groaned.

“But you promised,” urged the Princess.

For a moment he hesitated, then he turned away and took off the black mask. When he faced her again a shriek rang over the garden and she fell senseless.

He had just time to replace it before the King, alarmed by the sound, came out followed by several servants. The Princess was carried into the palace and laid upon a couch, and, when many restoratives had been administered, she opened her eyes; but, on seeing her lover, an expression of terror came into her face and she fainted again.

The Prince withdrew, asking the King to go with him. When the old man heard what had happened, he wrung his hands and begged him to refrain from seeing his daughter until the next morning; then he returned to her bedside, saying that he would come back on the following day and give him news of her.

The Ugly Prince spent most of the night in walking up and down his room; the little boy, who had come to him as soon as he knew what had happened, did all he could to comfort him, and, at last, the unhappy lover fell into a heavy sleep with his hand clasped in that of the child, who refused to leave him, and who sat watching with his friend until he, too, became drowsy and lost consciousness.

It was almost noon when they were aroused by the sound of footsteps, and, looking up, saw the King.

“My son,” he said to the Prince, “I have come with weary tidings; my daughter has recovered; but early this morning she sent to me.”

He paused for a moment, and went on in a shaking voice.

“She implores you to release her from her promise to marry you. She will give no reason for what she asks, and when I suggested that she should speak to you herself, she grew so pale that I feared she would faint again. I reasoned with her, I prayed her to consider her words again, but all to no effect. I knew not how to act. She owes her very life to you. I would compel her to fulfil her promise if I could force myself to do so, but alas! alas! I cannot when I see her in such a state!”

The Prince was standing before the weeping old man. “And do you think I would accept such a sacrifice?” he said, slowly.

The King made no reply, but covered his face. There was a long silence.

Then the Ugly Prince spoke, and his voice seemed to the little boy as though it were miles away.

“Sire,” he said, “tell the Princess that my only wish is to serve her. I release her from this moment.”

Then the King went slowly away, and, as the curtain fell behind him, the Ugly Prince was left alone with the little boy.

He remembered what the Princess had told him when he took the Heart from her, and he knew that the time had come.

When the King’s subjects heard that the marriage was not to be, they were sorely troubled, and gloom fell over the Palace. The King refused to be comforted, and, when the Prince announced his coming departure, he begged for a last interview before he left.

“What you have told me about the Golden Heart is very wonderful,” he said. “Could it be of no use now?”

“Nothing can be of any use,” sighed the Prince. “It cannot alter my face.”

“But it seems to work miracles,” persisted the old man, “and one cannot tell how far its powers may extend.”

So they consulted the Golden Heart.

“There is,” said the voice, “in a far country beyond a vast desert, almost impossible to cross, a marsh traversed by a stream. On the further bank of that stream, at a place where rises a tall crag like the entrance to a tomb, there grows a plant bearing a cluster of pale red berries. It only shows itself once in a thousand years, and on this day three months the time for it to appear will be due. You must reach the place on the evening before its appearance, and allow nothing to tempt you from the spot, for it grows up in one night, and lasts but a few hours. When it has grown as high as your knee, break off the spike of berries, crush them in your hands, and anoint your face with the juice. It has the power of restoring perfect beauty, as well as perfect health, and it can only benefit one person in a thousand years. Hardly any one in the world has heard of its existence. You must start at once, as the way is long, and you must go by the Great Gates, which are at the other side of the world, and which lead to the desert.”

That evening the Ugly Prince set out. He took with him the witch’s shoe, and the old cormorant’s wings hung at his saddle; he also placed the three feathers in his cap. Before he went he called the little boy.

“I am going on a long journey,” he said, “and it will be many months before I can return; you must be very good until I come back. Stay here with the Princess. If I never come back the King has promised that this palace shall be your home. And now, my dear little child, my faithful friend, good-bye, for I must go. Good-bye. You will not forget me?”

The little boy clung round his neck till the servants came to tell the Prince that his horse was saddled; then he rushed up to the highest tower of the Palace, and, leaning far out of the window, watched the gallant figure riding away, as it seemed to him, into the sunset.

It was in the eleventh week after his departure that the Ugly Prince drew near the Great Gates that lie at the other side of the world. He had only one week left in which to cross the desert beyond them, and he saw, on approaching, that they were locked; he had not counted on such a possibility, and it was with a heavy heart that he marked how strong they were, and how they towered in the air above him. As he dismounted to lead his horse nearer —for the animal looked with terrified eyes upon the huge bars through which the wind was humming and vibrating—something fell from the saddle. It was the witch’s shoe. He picked it up and ran to the Gates, striking the lock and saying:

"Left-foot shoe, left-foot shoe,
Open, Gates, and I'll go through."

They burst open, and he turned to re-mount his horse. But the creature stood with planted fore-feet and quivering nostrils, and he saw that there was no time in which to urge him forward, as the Gates were closing again. He tore the cormorant's wings from where they hung on the saddle, together with his few provisions and a water-flask, and was just in time to rush through them before they swung together with a crash that rang through the air like thunder, and sent the frightened horse tearing over the plain. Then he stood unhorsed and alone on the confines of the desert.

His only chance now lay in making use of the cormorant's wings, which he had hitherto omitted to do, preferring to travel on horseback. But he fastened them to his shoulders by the power of the magic shoe and toiled on, directed by the Golden Heart, going straight forward until his provisions were nearly done. One morning he reached a green oasis on which rose a fountain, bubbling in a grove of feathery acacia trees, and, as he lay resting in the shade, he saw two birds sitting among the boughs and talking together. Remembering the feathers in his cap, he wished to be invisible and to understand their language.

"Look at that cool water," said one. "When we have arranged our wings and tails a little after our flight, we will go down and drink. We shall not get a chance again till we reach the stream flowing through the marsh land for which we are bound."

"Very well," replied the other, "and, after that, we will start at once, for I am anxious to get home. I have not seen my family for an age, and I think it is really time I put in an appearance. We can be there by nightfall."

When the Prince heard this he resolved to follow them; and when the two birds had satisfied their thirst and set off on their journey, he spread his wings and sailed with rapid strokes after them.

"What an odd rushing there is in the air beside us," observed one; "the wind must be going to change."

By the time it was dark they entered the marsh land and saw a glimmer of the stream for which the Prince was looking. In due time they flew across it, and he alighted on the further bank and dropped his wings while he sat down to rest. His hopes were high as he thought of his lost Princess—lost perhaps no longer—and he anticipated the moment of finding the plant with

joy almost amounting to dread. He rose to his feet and wished for the power of seeing in the dark.

He saw that he stood in the midst of so wonderful a piece of scenery that he could hardly believe himself awake. Just in front of him appeared the rock which the Golden Heart had described as being like the entrance to a tomb. It rose upwards out of a deep, dark pool, and a great star which stood in silver radiance over the summit threw a long steel-blue reflection trailing across the silent water. Down the face of the rock, and all round on a tangle of low bushes which closed him in on every side, hung thick wreaths of white convolvulus; strange lights flashed in and out among the heavy foliage, and from the blossoms rolled drops of scented dew like the tears of a weeping enchantress.

The air was faint with enchantment; the Ugly Prince felt a languor creeping over his body. His senses seemed to be fading from him, and, fearing that he might be overcome by the strange atmosphere of the place, he dashed through the bushes towards an open space not far off. There his eyes fell on a tall, solitary plant growing in the very centre of the clearing, and perceiving it to be none other than the object of his search, he threw himself upon the ground beside it, took the Golden Heart from his bosom and pressed it to his lips, covering it with passionate kisses.

His journey was done, his troubles ended; he had now only to wait till the plant had grown as high as his knee to bathe his face in the juice of the berries and all would be well. He would go back across the desert, through the Great Gates and over the world to his Princess's kingdom, a changed man, with his happiness lying before him. He pictured the joy of the King, the delight of the faithful little boy who awaited him, and the clinging arms of his adored Princess, as he lay hour after hour beside the green stem and watched it grow taller and saw the berries begin to take shape and colour. At last, it had grown almost to the height of his knee, and, as he sat waiting in the breaking daylight for the moment when he should pluck his treasure, the Prince heard footsteps behind him, and, springing to his feet, beheld a tattered figure which started on seeing him, and then, with a long cry, fell prostrate upon the earth.

In a moment he was beside it and raising in his arms a man still young, but so bowed and emaciated by illness and trouble, that he seemed scarcely able to stand.

"Leave me! leave me!" he cried, as the Ugly Prince held him in the grasp of his strong arms. "What brings you here? Have you, too, come for the

plant—the magic plant?"

"I have," said the Prince firmly.

The unhappy man dropped his hands. "Then I am too late," he cried, "and I must die—for what can I do against *you*?" And he glanced from his own trembling form to the straight, strong limbs of the Ugly Prince.

And he bowed his head and wept till the Prince's heart bled to hear him.

"I beseech you, stop your tears," he said kindly, "and tell me what has brought you here?"

As he spoke these words his breath almost stopped, for he foresaw, dawning on the very horizon of his mind, the vague outlines of a possible sacrifice, so great, so overwhelming, that he hardly dared to put it into thoughts, and yet—it was there.

"I have come," said the stranger, "from a long, long distance and crossed the desert on foot. See my feet, how they are bruised. My journey has taken two years (for I am a poor man and must travel as best I may) and, at times, I have hardly hoped to live to the end; for I am suffering from a slow, fatal disease. I have tried every cure in vain, and have been told by a learned magician to seek out this plant as a last hope of life. I have a wife whose whole heart is bound up in mine, and little children. Their hopes have been centred in me through these sad years since I left them to begin my journey. I shall never see them again, and they will go on, day by day, hoping for my return. But that will never be now. That is my history. And you, why are you here? What is yours?"

For answer, the Prince drew off his mask. "That is mine," he said.

His companion recoiled from him, shuddering.

The two men remained gazing dumbly upon each other; then the Ugly Prince broke the silence.

"We are in the most horrible position," he said, "that two miserable men have ever been placed in. Look," and he pointed to the now fully-developed plant, "in a few minutes one of us will have his hopes fulfilled, and one of us will be in despair. Let us suppose for a moment that I am that unhappy man and that you, in your good fortune, will grant me a favour. Let me have a little space in which to think it all over. Give me your word to hold your hand from plucking the berries while I try to face this trial and make up my mind to what is coming. Should *I* take the golden chance that lies here for one of us, a few moments of respite will do you no injury; and, should *you*

profit by it, your happiness will be none the less sweet for having granted the prayer of a man into whose life no joy can ever shine again. Will you do this?"

The man looked at him narrowly. "I am in your power," he said, "for you are the stronger."

"Let that go for nothing," answered the Prince, waving his hand impatiently. "I shall leave you alone. I want your word that you will do nothing till I come back."

"I promise it," replied the stranger.

And the Ugly Prince went, leaving the black mask lying at his feet.

He entered a grove of trees which stood near, and flung his arms round the stem of a tall ash, pressing his unmasked face against the bark; dreadful thoughts assailed him on every side. He had only to go back and drive his sword into that powerless body and the happiness which had seemed so real a short time ago would still be his. None could see the deed or tell of it. His mind was as though filled with evil mists, and, above them, rose the alluring form of his Princess, golden-haired, white-armed, beckoning. But he thrust her from him. No, such a thing could not be. Better to die a thousand times than to sink into such dishonour as that.

And if he relinquished his chance? If he were to give up to that suffering mortal the thing that he had striven and toiled for during the two years through which he had dragged his poor aching limbs to this spot, what then? Whose happiness would he destroy by so doing? Not the Princess's, certainly. She had given him up of her free will, had shrunk from the sight of him and the thought of becoming his wife. The King, her father, would sorrow indeed, but he would still have his daughter. The little boy would welcome him back should he return as he had left him. No, it would be his loss alone.

He thought of that evening in the Palace garden, his last evening of happiness. He saw it all again, the golden sky, the roses, the far-stretching landscape, and he felt again the soft hand of his love clinging to his arm as they talked together. He groaned, and, as he thought of these things, some words came back to his memory, words he had remembered on that last happy evening, words which had once been spoken by the Princess when she threw him the Golden Heart. "*If you take it, it will bring you pain and sorrow, perhaps more than you can bear. Can you really accept it? Are you willing to take the trouble that must come?*" He had not realised them then.

Once more they had returned to his mind when she asked him to release her, and he had then imagined that he understood them. He understood them now.

And his rival? Perhaps he adored that wife as he himself had adored, and did adore, his lost love. And the wife, to whom his own success would mean a life-long grief? He tried to put himself in the unhappy man's place. He tried to suppose that the Princess was waiting for him, that she was sitting watching as this woman watched. What should he feel if another and a stronger hand were to grasp the prize upon which all their hopes of meeting depended? And the little children?

A great lump rose in his throat and a hand seemed to clutch at his heartstrings; he looked up at the early mist rolling away from stream and plain, and a load of black temptation lifted heavily from his bursting heart. The stranger stood waiting a little way off; he approached him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Go!" he said, pointing to the plant. "It is yours. Take it. I give up my claim freely."

A few minutes more and he was lying on the earth near the still pool he had seen the night before, his cheek resting on the cool moss, trying to realise and accept the loveless life which was all he had now left. Every hope was gone and the future lay before him like the vast, sterile desert he had lately crossed, bare and bleak. There was nothing to live for now, nothing. The fact rushed over him in its full meaning, and for the first time since his boyhood he burst into tears and sobbed like a little child.

After a while he remembered the mask which lay on the grass where he had left it. There was nothing for him to do but resume it and go back to the world with his old trouble unchanged; but, before rising, he went to bathe his heated eyes in the water and he leaned over the brink. Just as he put in his hand he saw that another face was looking up at him It startled him. Was it some poor, drowned man who lay staring up at the sky? Impossible, surely. None knew of this place but himself and that one stranger, and, moreover, there was no sign of death in those living eyes that met his own so fearlessly. He plunged down his hand and it only touched the bed of the pool; the water lay deep and still but for the ripples which his action had stirred into widening rings. He was simply bewildered. Still gazing downwards he drew his hand over his eyes, thinking they must be bewitched, and, as he did so, a hand passed over the face in the water. It

could not be his own. He laughed bitterly at the idea. It had no resemblance to himself, and was the face of a handsome man, not a monster whose very look was unendurable. Thinking that he must be going mad, he felt the Golden Heart beating and fluttering against his breast. He wondered that he had forgotten it for so long as he took it out.

"Am I crazed?" he asked excitedly. "What is this illusion?"

"It is no illusion," replied the voice, "but the truth. That face looking from the water is your own. Look once more, for the ripples have ceased."

The Prince obeyed.

He saw the most noble countenance that it had ever entered his mind to imagine; no defect was there, no feature which was not perfection, and over all was an expression of such sublime grandeur, strength, and fortitude, that the Ugly Prince, ugly no longer, drew back, almost awed by what he saw.

"It is only the reflection of your own great soul," said the voice—and it seemed to fill the air around him—"what you see is the beauty of honour and truth, of courage and sacrifice, and there is nothing which can be compared to it in the whole world. Now rise, for you must go from here and begin your homeward journey. Go back to reap the reward which is awaiting you, for there is no reward too great for such as you."

So the Prince went. The cormorant's wings bore him safely over the desert, and the witch's shoe opened for him the Great Gates. Once through them, he procured himself a horse, and at last reached the borders of the kingdom where his heart lay; here he proceeded more slowly, only journeying by night, as he wished no one to see him who might tell the Princess of his return.

One morning early the little boy rose and went, as he always did, to a high turret in the palace to look down the road leading to the nearest city, and to see whether his Prince was coming home.

As he sat with the morning breeze lifting his hair, straining his eyes towards the white road which lay between the ripening corn-fields, he saw a solitary horseman approaching, and, in great excitement, he watched him as he advanced. When he was still some way off, the rider put his horse to a gallop, waving his hand, and the child, doubting no longer, rushed at the top of his speed down the turret stair, through the courtyard gate, across the drawbridge, and down the road till he reached the horse's side and clung,

transported with joy, to the stirrup. The Prince stooped and lifted him into the saddle before him.

When the first rapture of greeting was over, the little boy raised his head from his friend's shoulder.

"Where is your mask?" he inquired.

"It is here, but I do not wear it any more. You see, I am not so ugly now," said the Prince, smiling.

The little boy hugged him again with delight. "I never saw your face before," he said, "but I don't believe you were ever ugly. There is no one in the world like you."

Then the Prince asked him a thousand questions about the Princess.

"She is not very happy," replied the child, shaking his head, "for, after you left, she began to miss you and to cry because you had gone, and she has watched for you so long, that she grows paler and sadder every day."

"Do you think she would love me if I came back with my mask on, as I left her?" asked the Prince.


THEN·SHE·TURNED·HALF·STARTLED
AND·SAW·THE·PRINCE·

“Try,” said the little boy.

They rode together through the gate and crossed the courtyard hand in hand, the Prince in his travel-worn clothes with the black mask on his face. Through the wide hall they went, down the corridor, and out into the Princess’s garden. She was standing in the morning sunlight feeding her peacocks, the gorgeous birds crowding round her; the eyes in their sweeping tails flashed blue and green, and their slim necks bent hither and thither as they picked up the grain. They trod as softly as they could, like two conspirators, so that she did not hear their footsteps until they were close behind her. Then she turned, half-startled, and saw the Prince.

For one moment she stood gazing at him with her hands clasped over her heart; then, with a low cry of joy, she sprang forward like some beautiful wild animal and threw herself into his arms.

“And can you really receive me back like this?” he asked a short time later, “when you see that it is the same man who has returned unaltered?”

“Ah, do not remind me of my folly,” she begged, “I can hardly believe that you have come back to me at last; I fear to wake and find it is all a dream.” And she rested her head against his shoulder with a sigh of content.

“But,” persisted he, “could you bear to see me without my mask?”

“I can bear anything,” she replied, “but losing you again.”

Then he took off his mask and threw it on the ground. She glanced up at him and stood transfixed, for never in her whole life had she seen any one who looked as he looked.

She sank on her knees beside him, and covered her face with her hands. “I am not worthy to be your wife,” she faltered, “let me go, for it cannot be.”

But he did not listen to her.

# THE STORY OF THE SORCERER'S SONS AND THE TWO PRINCESSES OF JAPAN

ONCE upon a time there were two Princesses of Japan who lived with their father in a tall palace. It stood on the banks of a river, and they used to watch from the walls to see the boats plying up and down, and the great cranes standing in the shallows fishing.

They had never in their lives been outside the gardens, except when they were carried in a litter covered with paintings and carvings, and shut in by curtains. They peeped through the chinks as they went along, and Princess Azalea, the elder, used to tell Princess Anemone long stories which she invented about the passers-by. Once, indeed, when the servants had put down the litter for a moment's rest, Princess Anemone, who was bolder than her sister, though not quite so good at making up stories, had slipped quietly out and gone off for a little exploring expedition of her own; while Princess Azalea sat terrified on the cushions, hiding her face behind her little fan. It seemed an age to her till the truant came back, breathless and rather pink in the face.

"Oh! Sister! Sister! What did you see?" she asked, "and how you have torn your dress! What *will* Utuka say?"

Utuka was their nurse; she had brought them up since Azalea was born, sixteen years before.

Anemone looked down at her white silk dress, all covered with silver flowers, and at the three-cornered slit which ran right across the front. "Never mind," she said, "I'll sew it up before she sees it. I know where she keeps her needles. Azalea, there was a man with a long staff who scowled at me so. I ran back as hard as I could, but O sister! look what I found! The world is a charming place, I know."

And she held up a great cream and pink peony.

So the two stood, day after day, looking out over the palace wall, two white and gold figures with their hair done up in little knobs on the tops of

their heads, and their fans fluttering like butterflies' wings. The sun poured down on them, and the blue sky stretched above, and the great, unlimited world, which they knew nothing about, lay all round them.

Now, the Princesses' father was such a popular man that there was only one person on that side of the world so much talked about, and that was the Sorcerer Badoko. The Emperor thought very seldom of the Sorcerer, because he had little time for thinking of anything but how to be kind to his neighbours; but Badoko could hardly sleep in his bed at night for thinking of the Emperor. He tossed about in his lonely cave, saying under his breath that, come what might, he would make himself the more celebrated of the two. He said it under his breath, so that his two sons, who were lying close by, should not hear him. He did not like his two sons very much.

He could not at all make out why the Princesses' father was more admired than himself, for even Sorcerers are stupid sometimes—generally because they think themselves so clever. The real reason was because the old man was so kind, but the Sorcerer did not know that. He was clever enough to see that the Emperor was more thought of than himself, but he wasn't clever enough to know why. At last he made up his mind that it must be because he was richer, and, having come to that conclusion, he determined to steal away the two Princesses. Then he would go to the palace and demand a great ransom—in fact, half the Emperor's money—and he felt sure that it would be paid.

The Emperor's garden was full of beautiful trees. In one corner a fountain played, and, near this, a flight of steps ran up to a summer-house on the wall in which the Princesses sat nearly every day and looked down on the world below.

As they were sitting there one afternoon they saw an old man passing by. It was the same person who had scowled at Anemone when she ran away from the litter, and she pointed him out to her sister. He glanced up at the two girls. Under his arm he carried a kind of guitar; Azalea looked at it with interest, for, besides making up stories, she could sing and play very prettily to a little instrument she had, which was rather like this one.

The Sorcerer—for it was he—made an extremely low bow.

"Shall I sing you a song, my ladies?" he asked.

Anemone felt bolder than ever, for was not the wall between them? "Yes, please," she said.

Then the Sorcerer began to sing; and his voice was like liquid gold. It made one think of all the most beautiful things in the world: of the dawn in the sky, of great birds with white wings, of rushing waters, of prancing horses and waving plumes, of the deep velvet sky with its armies of stars.

“Oh, how lovely! How wonderful!” cried the Princesses. “Oh, sir! where did you learn those songs?”


THE · SORCERER · AND THE · PRINCESSES ·
MAT SAMOHEIM

The Sorcerer smiled. “It is this little guitar,” he said, holding it up. “It is bewitched. One has only to strike the strings and the song comes out of it. Your ladyships think, no doubt, that it is I who sing, but I have only to open my mouth and the guitar does all the rest.”

Now this was a lie, for the Sorcerer’s two sons made all the songs; they were very clever young men.

“Sing one more; please sing one more!” cried the Princesses.

“Very well,” replied he, “one more, but that must be the last. Here is one which I hope you will like. It is called ‘The Peach Trees in the Valley.’ ”

“What a charming name,” said Anemone, who was fond of flowers.

And the Sorcerer sang:—

“My Love sits high in a golden chair,
And my Love looks softly down;
With a golden pin she pins her hair,
But it shines like a golden crown.
And oh, my Love! look down to me
With a smile in your almond eyes,
For the blue doves nest in the willow tree
And the Spring rides up the skies;
Come down, O Love, in the morning glow,
For the day mounts high though the hours run slow,
And I’ll show you where the lilies grow,
And the peach trees blow in the valley!

“But my Love looks down from her chair of gold
With a smile in her cruel eyes;
Her face is fair but her heart is cold
As the stars in the winter skies.
Give me the pin that pins your hair
And stabs like a poisoned blade,
Look once, O Love without compare,
At the wound the point has made;
And come when the morning hours run slow
To see the place where I lie low,
Where the blue doves nest, and the lilies grow,
And the peach trees blow in the valley!”

The girls were charmed, and, as for Azalea, she was so much excited she was almost in tears.

"If your ladyships like my guitar so much why do you not buy it?" said Badoko. "I am very poor, and I am taking it into the city to sell."

Azalea wrung her hands; she had never been in such a predicament before. "But we have no money," she exclaimed.

It had never entered the Princesses' minds to think of money. Everything they wanted was always there ready for them, and it had never in their lives occurred to them to ask how it came.

The Sorcerer laughed rather slyly. "But surely his Imperial Majesty will not grudge you the money," said he.

"Run, Anemone, run, and ask our father!" cried Azalea.

"It would be better for you to look at the guitar before buying it," remarked the Sorcerer.

Anemone was practical, and this idea struck her as being very wise. "Wait," she said to her sister, "we will go down to the gate and see it."

And the two ran down the stairs with a great rustling of silks and clacking of little heels.

When they got out of the door the Sorcerer made another low bow, and held out the musical instrument. Azalea took it eagerly in her hand, and at the same time Badoko made a whistling sound. Two men sprang from behind a bush and threw heavy cloaks over the sisters, winding them so tightly over their mouths that they could not scream, though they tried to with all their might. The wicked Sorcerer laughed aloud, and ordered his men to carry the Princesses down to the river.

The garden opened on a lonely piece of waste ground, so they met no one on the way, reaching the shore and embarking under the shade of a thick tree in a long flat boat. Soon they had pushed off and were floating down the stream, Azalea and Anemone lying covered up under some grass matting, and Badoko steering while his men rowed. Behind them, the city was losing itself in the distance.

When the Princesses were allowed to come out of their hiding-place they found themselves in a wide country; the river wound on through stretches of sand; barren mountains, like great blue stone-heaps, covered the desert. They wept very piteously as they sat huddled together. Before them, Badoko's grim image sat stiffly against the sky, and behind them, the bare

country into which they were going spread for miles and miles; all round was sand and the dry reeds rustled as they passed. They held each other's hands, and sobbed softly for fear he should hear. They would have liked to ask him if he was going to kill them, but they were much too frightened. Besides this, they were very uncomfortable, and they had left their little fans behind. It was all very dreadful. Just before sunset they stopped by the bare stump of a tree which was sticking up among the rushes; on it sat a black raven looking very wise and cawing loudly. He looked at the matting which covered the girls, and pointed at the Sorcerer with his claw.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"Mind your own business," said Badoko, throwing a great stone at him.

He flew away, flapping his wings angrily, but he turned his head round as he went and saw Azalea and Anemone getting out upon the bank. The Sorcerer was offering them some horrible black bread and some dried peas, for he did not want them to die of hunger. If they did, he would lose all the money he hoped to get from their father.

But they were not hungry, and only shuddered as they sat close together on the sand.

"If you don't want any food," said Badoko, "don't sit there whining and wasting my time." And he dragged them into the boat again.

The raven spread his wings and flew far away up the river, and when he had gone nearly a hundred miles, he saw the Emperor's palace underneath him. He lit upon the roof and began to caw and squall at the top of his voice, and to dance in such a way that everybody below crowded to look at him. The Emperor, who was inside, put out his head to see what all the laughter meant. The tears had been running down his face as he thought of his two little girls who had disappeared so strangely, and his nose was quite red, poor old gentleman, but he rubbed his face on his silk handkerchief and went down to the courtyard, followed by his Prime Minister. All the servants were collected and were staring up at the raven.

"What is all this about?" inquired the Prime Minister, as he strutted after his master.

"Sir, it is a raven which is dancing on the roof in a very diverting manner," said a bystander.

The Prime Minister was accustomed to be the principal person in any crowd, and he was not best pleased at finding himself scarcely regarded;

nobody was regarding the Emperor either, but he did not think of that. He put on his spectacles and looked up.

"How very unsuitable!" he exclaimed, turning his back. "Really, what we are all coming to *I* don't know!"

The bird danced still more extravagantly, and even the Emperor began to smile.

"Come down from there immediately!" shouted the Prime Minister; "I wonder you are not ashamed of making such an exhibition of yourself."

"All right," said the bird; and he flew down, alighting at his Majesty's feet, making so polished an obeisance that all were astonished.

The Emperor was much gratified. "What can I do for you?" he inquired.

"I have important news," replied the bird, "and I would ask to communicate it."

"Impudent scoundrel!" exclaimed the Prime Minister, "your right place would be in the cooking-pot if you were not so nasty."

"It would certainly be fitter for me than for you," observed the raven, "seeing that you are old and tough and that I am young and tender."

"Your Majesty must not think of giving the audience unattended," said the Prime Minister; "this disreputable creature may have some design upon your royal life. Someone should be present."

"Anyone, so long as it is not yourself," replied the raven.

And with that, he hopped into the palace in front of the Emperor, who was too much agitated to notice the breach of etiquette. The Prime Minister hurried after, hoping to get in also, but he was too late, for the guard who stood at the door shut it behind his Majesty according to custom. The Emperor seated himself and the bird stood respectfully before him.

"Is it anything about my poor little daughters that you have come to tell me?" he asked, looking very pitifully into the raven's face.

"Your Majesty is right," was the reply. "I myself saw them, not twenty-four hours ago, but in great distress. The Sorcerer Badoko has stolen them away."

"Where has he taken them to? Where? Where?" cried the Emperor.

"They were rowing down the river in the direction of Badoko's country. I have put myself to great inconvenience to bring this news to your Majesty;

and it is lucky that that pig of a Prime Minister did not dissuade you from listening to me. Why such a mud-headed gander should be allowed near your sacred person, *I* don't know."

"He means well, he means well," said the Emperor.

"He means to put me in a pot if he can get me," replied the raven. "I only hope and trust he may not catch me until I have restored the young ladies to their illustrious parent."

At this moment there was a loud knocking at the door.

"Who is there?" cried the Emperor.

"May it please your Imperial Majesty," said the guard outside, "the Prime Minister says it is cold in the palace and that you have forgotten your Imperial Majesty's muffler, and he will bring it in himself."

"What does he say?" asked the monarch, who was rather deaf.

The raven repeated the message.

"Thanks, thanks; tell him I am very comfortable," said the Emperor.

The raven hopped to the door.

"Tell him," he bawled, "that his Majesty says he is to mind his own business and keep his bald head away from the key-hole."

When the Emperor heard what the bird had got to say he determined to set out with a great force for Badoko's country.

When the expedition was ready, they started, travelling in great force. The procession was several miles long, and, in the centre of it, immediately behind his Majesty, the raven was carried on a silver perch which was made in the form of a bower. Over his head swung a scarlet canopy, like an umbrella, which protected him from the rays of the sun, and under which he languished with all the airs of royalty. This he did because the Prime Minister's litter was close behind, and because he knew that its occupant could see him. The slaves who carried him hated him, for his voice was never silent and he poured abuse upon them from dawn till dusk.


THE·PROCESSION·WAS·
SEVERAL·MILES·LONG·

And now we must ask what had been happening all this time to the two Princesses. When the raven had flown away from the spot where he had seen them, they were hurried into the boat again, and continued their way till they reached the place where Badoko lived. It was a sandy desert with great rocks in which there were caves. To these caves, which were high up, staircases were cut in the stone, and the Sorcerer's servant sat in the entrance of one, boiling a cauldron from which the steam went up in a column. They disembarked, and Badoko marched them up one of the flights of steps. "Here," said he, "is the cave you are to live in. If you want anything to eat you can ask for something out of the cauldron."

Azalea and Anemone were very hungry, so they begged a little food and went into their cave, glad to be away from his terrible eye. After some time they heard Badoko giving orders down below.

"Now," he cried to his servant, "I am going on a journey. You are to take care that the Princesses do not escape, for if I come back and find them gone, I will put everybody to death for miles round!"

The servant fell at his feet and promised he would do all he was told, and Badoko, calling together the men who had rowed his boat, mounted a white donkey with pink eyes and rode away at their head across the sand.

When night came, Azalea and Anemone lay down, but they could not rest; and, as it was bright moonlight, they sat at the top of their staircase, looking out over the shining ground.

It was not long before they saw two figures ride up and dismount below. They did not know what new enemies these might be, so they crept softly back into the cave and tried to sleep.

The Sorcerer's two sons—for the riders were none other—were named Tiger and Gold-Eagle, for Badoko had thought these names lucky. They had come a long distance and were very tired, and as, when at home, they inhabited a cave next to the one in which the Princesses lay, they went in and threw themselves down on the piles of skins which served them for beds. In the middle of the night Tiger woke his companion.

"Brother," he said, "what is that strange noise?"

Gold-Eagle sat up; he was very cross at being awakened from his first sleep. "If you annoy me again," he said, throwing a handful of sand at Tiger, "I will get out of bed and beat you."

As he spoke the noise grew more distinct.

“There’s someone crying close by,” said Tiger; “I shall go in and see what it means.”

Gold-Eagle was quite as inquisitive as his brother, so he rose, in spite of his bad humour, and followed. What was their astonishment at seeing two girls lying weeping on the floor. Azalea and Anemone fell at their feet. The Sorcerer’s sons knew very well that these must be some prisoners of their father’s, and as they disapproved of his wickedness, they were horrified at seeing the distress in which the poor little things were plunged. They soon heard their history, for, when the Princesses saw how kindly they looked at them, they were only too glad to have someone to talk to, and they implored Tiger and Gold-Eagle to protect them.

The two brothers were so much charmed that they immediately fell head-over-ears in love, and it was fortunate that Tiger preferred Azalea and Gold-Eagle Anemone, or there might have been a fight. They promised to help them to escape from Badoko and to take them back to their father, for, though they would be dreadfully sorry to part with them, they could not bear to think of them in the power of the wicked Sorcerer. Next day they went to the servant who was left in charge of the captives and asked where Badoko had gone.

“Young sirs,” said he, “his Honour has gone to consult the illustrious Dragon about the ransom which he will ask for the Princesses.”

Now the Sorcerer had a friend, a very rich Dragon who lived on an island some way off, and it was to visit him that he had set out on the pink-eyed donkey. The brothers knew that he could not get back for several days, and they told Azalea and Anemone that they would start as soon as their horses should be rested.

It was night when they left; the sky was clear and the steam from the servants’ cauldron rose in the moonlight. When he saw what the brothers were doing he remonstrated loudly, but nobody listened, so he could only promise to tell Badoko which way they had gone the moment he returned.

“You won’t get the chance,” said Gold-Eagle, giving him a cuff, “for you are coming too.” And he drove him along in front of them.

For three days all went well; as the brothers walked while the Princesses rode, the horses had not much to carry.

They were resting in a wood one day, when they were suddenly surrounded by a band of robbers, who sprang on them, and, before they could resist, tied them to trees while they sat down to decide what was to be

done with them. Gold-Eagle and Tiger were furious and gnashed their teeth, but there was nothing they could do, poor fellows, for the robbers numbered about forty to their two. The head robber came into the circle holding the beautiful embroidered dresses he had taken from Anemone and Azalea. "These are worth a great deal," said he; "if we take them to the Dragon who lives on the island we shall get a large sum; he is a great collector of curiosities, and we can sell the young men to him for slaves, and the girls too, for that matter. This has been a great find."

You may imagine what the Princesses felt when they heard that!

We must now see what the Emperor and his train were doing, and how near they had got to the Sorcerer's country. Every night they halted by the wayside, and the raven had a tent all to himself next to that of his Majesty. It was made of velvet and the royal arms were emblazoned on it; but, had you heard the raven talking about it, you would have supposed it to be no better than a dog-kennel. Nothing was good enough for him. The sentry who walked up and down before it was maddened by the offensive looks which the bird cast upon him as he passed and repassed the door.

One evening a shabby-looking rook flew by the camp, and, seeing so fine a tent occupied by one of his own kind, he went up to it, and, putting on a sad voice, began to beg. The raven, who was in front of a glass admiring a gold collar which the Emperor had caused to be put round his neck, stuck his beak in the air. "Sentry!" he called, "rid me at once of this pestilent bird. His presence is an offence to me."

But the rook's voice drowned the words. "Sir!" he cried, "great sir! Let me tell your noble Honour's fortune. I see by the glorious jewels on your neck that you must be a king."

"No, no, my good fellow," answered the raven, "you mistake, indeed. Your admiration for my person and manners leads you into error."

"Then it is easy to see by your appearance that you are some great lord," continued the rook.

"There, I confess, you have me," said the raven, looking down.

"Let me tell your Honourable Lordship's noble fortune?" cried the rook again. "A great destiny is in store for you—though, to be sure, anyone who sees you can read that in your high-born and illustrious eye."

"Sentry!" cried the raven, "I have made a mistake. I shall not require your intervention."

The rook then approached humbly and began telling his fortune, assuring him that every dignity and honour would be his, that he would die lamented after having ruled the greater part of the earth, and that he would owe all these things to the virtue of his own heart and the lofty perfection of his intellect.

"My good creature," said the raven, "you interest me. Not only do you seem to be in the front rank of the prophets, but you appear to possess discernment of character to a very unusual degree. How have you learnt so many accurate and valuable things?"

"Powerful Nobleman," replied the rook, "though my appearance is mean, I have yet frequented august society—though I have never, of course, been in the presence of such combined rectitude and splendour as that in which I now find myself. Indeed, I have just come from a place where riches are stored such as have seldom been collected in this world."

"Where is that?" inquired the raven.

"I have come from the island of a powerful Dragon who has immense wealth and a great collection of curiosities. He has an exalted guest with him at this moment, a man of great note, who——"

"Vermin, you begin to weary me," said the raven; "who is this person?"

"The Sorcerer Badoko," replied the rook.

The raven started. "And who else?" he cried.

"There are also two young gentlemen, sons of the illustrious Sorcerer, and two beautiful young ladies named Azalea and Anemone, whom gossips say are Princesses. But they did not arrive with Badoko. They were brought to the Dragon by robbers and are now in dungeons. The Sorcerer disapproves of his sons, I hear, and would not be sorry to see them put to death."

The raven was all eagerness to give this news to the Emperor. "Be off, bird!" he said, "I have had enough of your talk."

"But the fee, Gracious Monarch! My fee for telling your fortune!"

The raven fell into a towering rage and began to call for the sentry. The rook snatched up a valuable gold chain from a table and made off as hard as he could go, leaving the raven unable to pursue him on account of the heavy ornaments he wore.

Outside the Emperor's tent the raven set up a great cry of "News! News!"

The Emperor commanded him to enter, and he related what had happened. "But I divined it all in a dream first," he added, "so, when the low creature appeared, I knew exactly what he was going to say."

The expedition started with all haste for the Dragon's island and sighted it in a few days; it was evening when they approached the lake in which it lay, and they saw the single pine tree which stood on it and one star shining above in the green of the evening sky. But they had no leisure to admire all this and pushed on to find that the Dragon had gone to a palace some way from the shore where he was entertaining the Sorcerer with a feast. The only persons left on the island were the Sorcerer's sons and the Princesses who were confined in dungeons below the Dragon's treasure house. The force surrounded the palace in which the feast was going on and turned their heavy guns on it. The Dragon and the Sorcerer came out in great horror, and the Dragon was told that he would be blown to atoms if the captives were not released immediately and Badoko given up to justice.

"Take all I have," said the Dragon, "but spare my collection of curiosities."

So the Princesses were set free and, with them, Tiger and Gold-Eagle, and the Sorcerer was seized, bound, and drowned in the lake. The raven stood by the Emperor and surveyed all that was done. "My good fellows," he said to Badoko's sons, "there is no further need of your services. Your behaviour has been creditable. You may go."

"Do you want your neck wrung?" asked Gold-Eagle, who had come behind him, taking him deftly between his finger and thumb. The raven took the first opportunity of retiring among the crowd.

Next day the Emperor with his daughters started for home, having invited the young men to his court, and they, after bidding the Princesses good-bye, returned to Badoko's country to fit themselves out suitably for the visit.

So everybody departed in peace, except the Sorcerer, who was at the bottom of the lake.

In a short time Tiger and Gold-Eagle arrived at the court. They had inherited all their father's wealth and they came in such splendour and state that people ran out of their houses for miles round to see them pass.

The Emperor was much delighted with their appearance, character and accomplishments, and, above all, with the charming way in which they played and sang, so when Tiger asked him for the hand of Azalea and Gold-Eagle for that of Anemone, he consented readily, and the two marriages took place amid great pomp. Everyone was pleased but the raven, who could not get on with the Emperor's sons-in-law. Finally, he found it wiser to retire from court, and a fine house was built for him in which he spent the remainder of his days and died, at a good old age, of a surfeit.

# GRIMAÇON

ONCE upon a time there lived in a very large and important kingdom a Princess called Moonflower; she was thus named on account of her golden hair, which was two yards and a half in length and shone like the moon. The weight of this marvellous adornment was so very great that she was obliged to have a dwarf, who followed her wherever she went, and who carried it as though it had been the train of her gown. The dwarf, who was French, was called Grimaçon; he was so clever that there was hardly an accomplishment suitable to his position in which he was not perfect. He could dance in a manner which caused those who beheld him to insist upon the performance being repeated again and again; he could cook the most delicate ragoûts and pasties; he could make such unrivalled grimaces that all who saw them were transfixed—in short, he was everything that a dwarf should be. He had lived in all the most celebrated capitals in Europe, and was acquainted with the manners and customs of every country, and, while at Berlin, had learnt to play the German bagpipe in the most accomplished manner.

The parents of Princess Moonflower were both dead, and the kingdom was being governed by the sister of the deceased king until the Princess should come of age and take the management of affairs, which she was to do at the age of seventeen. But, if before her seventeenth birthday she were to die, the kingdom was to go to her aunt. Now the Princess's aunt was very ambitious and proud, and could not look upon the idea of giving it up to her niece without dismay. "What!" she exclaimed, "is this little wretch to supplant me? Am I, with all my wisdom, to be set aside with ignominy for a little fool who has no recommendation but her paltry beauty?" And she began to think of every means in her power by which she could get rid of the Princess.

So she determined that she must never be allowed to see her seventeenth birthday, and at last made up her mind to kill her, though she disliked the job, and put off doing it from day to day.

Now, there lived in that country a very wicked Prince called Blackwig, with whom the cruel old woman consulted. "Tell me, my good Blackwig,"

said she, “how I am to get rid of this tiresome Moonflower? Bethink thyself, and I will give thee a box of pearls, a pair of puce-coloured silk hose, and a dancing ape. And, moreover, if thy counsel please me, thou shalt also have an excellent recipe for a pâté of spiced dolphin’s liver, which was given me by my sister, who learned cooking in Paris.”

“Madam,” replied Blackwig, who was fond of good living, “I desire nothing but to please you; but, as you are so liberal in your offers, I will be the same with my advice. Listen to me. Give me the hand of your niece in marriage, and you shall not be troubled with her long, for I know of a poison which I will put into her soup and which will cause her to expire without anyone’s knowing the reason—and all I will ask for this is two thousand ducats!”

“That is a large sum,” said the Princess’s aunt, who was very economical.

“Well, well, since you make me presents at the same time, I will take one thousand five hundred and twenty-five ducats, *but nothing less*.”

The Princess’s aunt, who was glad to be able to charge someone else with the death of her niece, consented, and went straight to Moonflower’s room, to make known to her that she must prepare for her coming marriage. She found her sitting at the window, watering her flowers. She looked more lovely than the three Graces. She wore a dress of mauve velvet embroidered with bunches of amaryllis in pearls and diamonds, and her long hair fell in showers upon the ground.

“Little darling,” began the old woman, “I have to-day had a proposal for your hand in marriage.”

“And from whom, Madam?” inquired Moonflower.

“The Prince Blackwig,” said her aunt: “he loves you to distraction, and will make an excellent husband.”

“Fie!” exclaimed the Princess, “he squints and has bandy legs, besides being the most malicious person in the world.”

“Nevertheless, I command you to obey me and to marry him!” shrieked the Princess’s aunt.

“I will not,” said Moonflower, “I would rather die.”

“And die thou shalt, little viper!” bawled the old woman, “for I will cut you in little pieces if you do not marry him this day month!” And she left the room in a rage, banging the door behind her.


SHE·FOUND·HER·SITTING·AT·THE
WINDOW·WATERING·HER·FLOWERS··

When she had gone, the Princess began to weep bitterly and wring her hands. “Alas! my good Grimaçon,” she said to the dwarf, “what shall I do? Was there ever a being so unfortunate as I? Either I must perish or wed the odious Blackwig, and I know not which of these two horrors to choose.”

“You must fly, your Royal Highness,” answered the dwarf, who was a sensible little fellow, “before the day which the Queen Regent has named.”

“But alas!” said Moonflower, “whither shall I go?”

“It wants but two months to your seventeenth birthday,” replied he, “when you will succeed to the kingdom. If you conceal yourself till then, you can afterwards return and claim it, and your aunt will have no power over your actions when once you are on the throne.”

The next day Princess Moonflower and the faithful Grimaçon fled from the palace. They walked along the most secret and quiet roads for fear of observation, till at last they came to a huge forest, through which they travelled for some distance, and, aching with fatigue, sank down under a tree to rest. The little dwarf, who had been carrying his mistress’s long hair, threw himself at her feet on the grass, for he was very weary.

“Alas, dear Grimaçon,” she said, “how cruel is our lot! We shall certainly be devoured by wild beasts in this terrible wood.” And she began crying and weeping. Her sighs and lamentations might have touched a heart of stone. All at once she looked up, for there stood before her a little crooked woman, more hideous than a witch.

“Daughter,” she croaked in a voice like a raven’s, “will you direct me in the way to the palace?”

The Princess pointed in the direction from which she had just come.

“Go a little distance with me,” implored the hag, “and help me to carry this bundle I have got on my back.”

Poor Moonflower was very tired, but she took up the bundle and, telling Grimaçon to await her in the same spot, she walked off with her strange companion. When they had gone for about half a mile the old woman stopped her.

“A thousand thanks,” she croaked, “and now, I will give you the reward of your civility.”

So saying, she plucked a leaf from a neighbouring bush and presented it to the astonished girl.

“When you are in distress think of me and touch this leaf with the third finger of your left hand.” And, almost before the words were out of her mouth, she had disappeared.

Full of surprise, the Princess went back to where the faithful dwarf awaited her and told him her adventure. “And now,” she said, “I will touch my leaf and we shall be out of this terrible wood, where I feel sure there are nothing but monsters and savage beasts who will tear us limb from limb. It will certainly save us from our difficulties.”

“No, your Royal Highness,” he replied, “at least let us wait till the wild beasts come—we may be in very much worse straits yet. Let us reserve our resources till then.”

They journeyed on through the forest, and, at last, arrived at a little stream which ran merrily along till it came to a fallen branch lying right across it, and against which so many leaves and twigs had drifted that the course of the water was stopped. The stream was forced out of its bed, and beat itself against the bank.

“Look at that pretty stream,” remarked Moonflower, “how sadly it dribbles along beyond the fallen branch. The water cannot pass it. See, Grimaçon, with what difficulty it flows.”

And she bent down and broke the branch in two, for it was but a slight thing. All the accumulated leaves and twigs sailed away and the stream flowed on in a thousand beautiful ripples; at the same time a voice sang the following words:—

“Princess, should you need a friend,
The grateful stream its aid will lend;
Should you need me, call, I pray,
Hear the words that you must say,—
‘River rise and river fall,
Send the help for which I call.’
—But, call me not till hope is lost,
Or dear the words to you may cost.”

“Well,” observed Grimaçon, who had heard these lines, “friends are not to be despised when one has fallen upon bad times, whatever shape they may assume—or even if they assume no shape at all!”

They continued walking on into the wood, when they heard behind them the sound of horns and of horses galloping, and in the twinkling of an eye

they beheld the wicked Prince Blackwig, who was hunting in the forest with his men. When he caught sight of Moonflower he knew her at once by her long hair. “Ho!” he cried, “here is our runaway!” for he had already heard of her flight. He dismounted, and, seizing her, placed her upon the saddle, then, leaping up behind her, he put spurs to his horse. One of his servants, seeing Grimaçon, picked him up, saying, “He is a merry little ape, who will make us some sport. Let us take him too.”

“Where are we going to?” asked the Princess of Blackwig, as they flew along.

“To my castle,” answered the wicked Prince, “where I will throw you and your hideous dwarf into a dungeon in which you shall languish, if you will not marry me as your aunt commands.”

“I will never marry thee,” replied she, “shouldst thou tear me in bits for refusing.”

When they arrived at Blackwig’s castle the poor captives were thrown into a frightful dungeon, which had only one window, and that on a level with the ground. The place was so deep, and the floor so far down in the earth, that they could hardly see the light, which appeared to them as a little, far-away star. Blackwig was beside himself with fury with the Princess, for, had she married him, he would have gained all the rewards offered by her wicked aunt; and, as he did not intend to poison her, but only to say that he had done so, he hoped when his wife succeeded to the kingdom to share the throne with her. Until then, he intended to keep her hidden in his castle. Truly, it would be a fine thing to be a king, and to have outwitted so clever a woman.

The Princess and Grimaçon sat on the floor of their horrible prison; it was so dark that, for a time, they could hardly see; which was just as well, as the place was full of toads and terrible creatures, and the bones of those who had perished there before were strewn around. At last, their eyes began to get accustomed to the darkness, and Moonflower began to realise the horrors of their position. “It is bad enough to perish one’s self in such a place,” she said, “without having brought thee also into trouble, my dear Grimaçon.”

“Take courage, Madame,” replied the dwarf, “I feel sure that we shall surmount all obstacles, for now I perceive that the time has come for you to use the gifts you have been given. If you will take my advice you will see what the stream, which promised its help, can do for you.”

Half frightened by what she was doing, the Princess repeated these words:—

"River rise and river fall,
Send the help for which I call!"

For some moments nothing happened; but presently a little trickling was heard in the wall. It became louder and louder, and at last, by the dim light, they could distinguish a rivulet running in a tiny thread out of a crack between the stones. It went on increasing in volume until the water covered the floor and rose round the Princess's ankles. "Alas!" she cried, "the cruel stream has played me false, and we shall certainly be drowned like rats in this fearful place!"

"Wait a bit," replied the dwarf, who was already up to his knees; "do not despair, we still have the leaf."

Still the water continued to rise; the Princess, who was horribly frightened, took the leaf that had been given her from the bosom of her gown, and, thinking of the old woman, touched it with the third finger of her left hand. As she did so it began to spread and spread, and at last grew so large and heavy that she could no longer hold it but laid it down. It floated like a boat on the water, and, though it still looked like a leaf, it became the size of a good large tea-tray, and then stopped growing.

Moonflower, who was up to her waist in water, clung to the wonderful leaf, and at last succeeded in seating herself upon it; she then helped Grimaçon to do the same, for the little fellow had been swimming for the last ten minutes. What was their surprise when they got into this strange boat to find that the water had not wet them, and that their clothes were perfectly dry.

The flood rose and rose, and the leaf and its burden rose with it, till at last they were half way up the wall, and, in a surprisingly short time, had reached the level of the window.

The water began rushing out of it, carrying the leaf so swiftly that the Princess thought they would be dashed against the window-bars. What was her wonder on finding that, as the foremost point touched them, they melted away, and with a cry of joy she and her faithful dwarf sailed into the open air.

"Hold tightly, your Highness," he exclaimed, "for the pace we are going at is terrific."

The water rushed headlong over fields and pastures, carrying them for several miles, at the end of which it joined itself to the stream the Princess had met in the wood. Moonflower sailed smoothly along, past forests and meadows, past castles and huts, till she came to the city where her own palace stood. On the terrace of the garden she beheld her wicked aunt walking up and down (for the stream ran close by the palace walls). She saw her gesticulating as she went, and heard her cry out, “Miserable girl! Thank heaven she may never return—the throne may yet be mine!”

On sailed the leaf, on and on, for seven days and seven nights, till they came to a land which lay far away from the Princess’s kingdom. The people who saw her passing by in so singular a manner held up their hands in wonder at the strange sight. Never had they beheld whirled by them a beautiful girl, sitting on a green leaf, with such a quantity of golden hair. It flew out as she went like a golden fringe, and when the sun struck upon it she looked as though she were appearing in a cloud of gold. On account of the brightness they could not see Grimaçon, who sat behind her. Soon they came to a place where the water ran between high trees, and where great blue lotos-flowers were growing as high as a tall man, covering the brink to the water’s edge.

While the Princess was admiring such rare and beautiful flowers, the leaf ran against a protruding stone and was carried by an eddy into the bank. Moonflower jumped out and the dwarf followed her example.

“Let us trust we may find something fit to eat, if only roots and berries,” said he, “for we have had neither meat nor drink for many days and nights.”

Once on shore they were much astonished to find that, on reaching land, their boat shrank to its original size, and that Moonflower was able to take it up in her hand. She thrust it again into the bosom of her dress.

The dwarf Grimaçon began at once to look with great diligence for something to eat, and soon discovered some delicious fruit which grew in great masses upon the surrounding trees. When they had both enjoyed a hearty meal the Princess was overcome by fatigue, for her long journey had exhausted her.

“Lay yourself on yonder grass, Madame,” said Grimaçon; “and, while you rest, I will watch over your slumbers.” So she flung herself down under a tree where the moss was like a cushion of green satin, and was soon fast asleep.

Now it happened that there passed that way an aged wood-cutter, who, with a load of faggots, was on his way to the Palace belonging to the King of that country, and who, as he went by, was much surprised to behold, under a tree, the most beautiful maiden in the world, with hair shining like gold and lying spread on the grass like the rays of the moon. He was yet more taken aback by the sight of Grimaçon, who sat beside her, shading her from the sun with a branch which he also used to drive away the flies.

"What is the name of this country, grandfather?" cried the dwarf.

"This is the kingdom of the King of the Crystal Mountains," replied the greybeard, "and I am now on my way to his palace."

"And how far off may that be?" asked Grimaçon.

"A half league," was the reply.

As soon as he had reached the palace the old man begged to be allowed to see the King, who, with the Queen, his mother, was seated at his second breakfast.

The King, who was young, handsome, accomplished, and a great monarch, desired that the wood-cutter should be brought before him. When he heard that a lovely maiden, with hair like the moon's rays, was asleep on the banks of a stream scarce half a league distant, watched over by a dwarf, his curiosity knew no bounds; so, having rewarded the venerable man with a gold piece and a fricasseed goose from the royal breakfast table, he commanded his chariot to be brought, and was soon on his way to the banks of the stream, accompanied by the Queen, his mother, who was also dying to behold so wonderful a sight.

When the Princess awoke some time afterwards, what was her amazement on beholding a large body of people, headed by a chariot of crystal, the wheels of which were of silver and the cushions of velvet, and which was drawn by six Spanish horses, advancing towards her. In this equipage was seated a lady, magnificently dressed, and a handsome young man, who, stopping the chariot, desired the Princess and Grimaçon to approach.

"Ah!" exclaimed the dwarf, "this is none other than the King of the Crystal Mountains, Madame; let us try to propitiate so great a monarch, for we are completely in his power!"

So saying, he bowed till his back hair swept the ground.

The Princess was then questioned by the Queen as to who she was and where she had come from, but, as she did not wish to give her real name, for fear that Blackwig might by chance hear of her, Moonflower only told their Majesties that she was a stranger, obliged to fly from her country, and craved their protection. She did not know that she was in a kingdom more than a million leagues from her own, and, moreover, one of which Blackwig knew nothing. He was an ignorant fellow, and had forgotten all the history and geography he had ever learnt.

"Your Majesties," said the dwarf, "if it may be permitted to one so humble to speak in such august company, I would like to mention that we have had no food for several days but the wild roots and berries which grow here."

The Queen, who had espied the Princess's marvellous hair, was enchanted with the sight, and at once thought she would like to have her for a maid-of-honour. "Such a person in my train would make me the eighth wonder of the world," she said to herself.

"Will you come back with me to the palace?" she inquired aloud. "I will admit you into my household."

Moonflower fell upon her knees and thanked her.

"Get into the chariot," said the Queen, "and let us be off!"

"But we must have him too," said the King, pointing to Grimaçon, "for he is a brave little fellow and speaks well." And he directed one of the men-at-arms to place him before him on his horse.

"This is the second ride of the sort I have had lately," observed Grimaçon to himself, "but I think it is likely to end better than the last!"

When they arrived at the palace the Princess was appointed to a place among the Queen's maids-of-honour; they gave her a white satin gown covered with golden lilies to match her hair, in which she looked more beautiful and brilliant than the seven stars of heaven. Grimaçon was still allowed to attend upon her. The King had a great regard for him, and esteemed his talents and good sense very highly.

The Queen's maids had, upon the whole, a very pleasant existence; it is true that she led them the life of dogs now and then, for her temper was very bad, and she was a proud, jealous woman. But, as the Court was gay, they amused themselves capitally and joined in all the festivities. They had balls three times a week and hunting-parties every day. At the hunting-parties Moonflower rode a magnificent strawberry-coloured mare, with a silver

bridle and shoes, while Grimaçon ambled by her side on a huge mastiff, which had been trained to carry him, and which he managed to perfection.

The King was so much attracted by the lovely Princess that he cared to speak to none but her. At all the balls he chose her as his partner, and at all the hunting-parties he rode beside her; but, unhappily, the more his admiration for her increased, the more the other maids-of-honour resented it, and spared no pains in annoying and mortifying her.

"There is no living at court now that this wretched Moonflower has come," they said to one another; and at last they determined to do their best to set the Queen-mother against her.

"Madam," they said to her, "your Majesty has no idea of the intriguing character of your new maid; we can hear the sly creature talking sometimes to her miserable puppet of a dwarf, and we know that she is plotting to become possessed of the King's affections, and intends to supplant your Majesty in the influence you have always had with him."

At these words the Queen turned pale. She was furious.

She knew not upon what pretext she could injure Moonflower, for she could find no fault with her sweet temper and modest demeanour. That afternoon, as the whole court was setting out upon a hunting expedition, the Princess was about to mount her horse at the palace-door as the Queen passed by in her carriage.

"Why do you always ride that ugly brute?" called out the Queen crossly, pointing to the strawberry-coloured mare.

"Madam," replied Moonflower, curtseying, "because his Majesty, the King, presented me with the animal."

"Little wretch," hissed the Queen between her teeth, "she would ride a pig if the King asked her to!" And she drove off in a fury.

The King was so much in love with Moonflower that he could neither eat by day, nor sleep by night, and, as soon as they came to that part of the forest where they intended hunting, he rode beside her; he never quitted her all day; he said a thousand tender things to her; in fact, he was so devoted that Grimaçon, who was trotting behind them on his mastiff, was overjoyed, for he felt sure that the King, as well as being an excellent *parti*, was worthy of her in every respect.

When the Queen-mother heard of this, her rage knew no bounds; she caused her chariot to be turned and went straight home. To add to her

troubles, a heavy thunderstorm came on, and the rain drenched her to the skin, so that, by the time she arrived at the palace, she was almost beside herself. On the Princess's return that afternoon she was summoned to the Queen's apartments, where she found her Majesty in a towering rage. She stormed and raved, she called her by a thousand bad names, she would not hear a word the poor girl had to say, and, at last, flung herself upon a couch, breathless with anger.

"And what is the reason of your Majesty's displeasure?" inquired Moonflower, terrified. "May I be informed of my offence?"

"Intriguing hussy!" cried the Queen, "you know too well! But you will never be mistress here—the King has too much sense to stoop to such an alliance!"

"Madam!" exclaimed Moonflower, "I do not understand you."

"Oh, indeed," replied the Queen, ironically, "so you don't know what I mean. I mean that you are trying to entangle the affections of my son, the King, with your soft looks and sly ways; but, believe me, such unmaidenly conduct will never succeed."

When the Princess heard these cruel words she was ready to die of mortification and misery, and her anger against the Queen grew almost beyond her control. "Ah!" she cried, "what a cruel position I am in, and who is there that will help me?"

Then she suddenly bethought herself of the stream, and, without waiting to reflect whether she was right or wrong in her impulse, she cried,

"River rise and river fall,
Send the help for which I call."

and, as she said this, she wished in her heart that the stream might rise and drown the Queen.

Immediately a voice was heard to say, "Unhappy Princess, why have you neglected my warning?" And a fountain in the garden below the windows of the Queen's apartments began throwing itself higher and higher into the air until it dashed against the casement, breaking the glass, and pouring into the room.

The Queen rushed to the door as fast as she could, tore it open and flew downstairs, followed by Moonflower. But the water pursued them down the staircase and into the garden. When it had reached thus far it flowed across the terrace into the river which ran below, leaving the garden dry, and the

Queen shrieking among the flower-beds, where all the beautiful flowers—roses, lilies, tulips, marguerites and marigolds—were torn up by the roots. Moonflower felt herself carried away by the water; her cries and struggles were of no avail, and, catching and clinging to every object she passed, she was whirled away and very soon lost consciousness. In this condition she floated along the river for leagues and leagues, with her long hair spread out like a fan behind her, to where it flowed at the foot of the Crystal Mountains.

Here she awoke from her trance and found herself being hurried swiftly forward towards a dark spot visible in the base of one of the highest hills. She drew closer and closer to it, but could not stop herself. Picture her terror on finding, as she approached it, that the dark spot proved to be the mouth of a huge cavern! In another moment she had entered it and was sinking down, down, down.

It was completely dark, and the water continued transporting her into the very bowels of the earth. At last, after what seemed to poor Moonflower several hours, a faint light began to show itself far below her, and to grow larger every moment, until the stream all at once emerged from the darkness, and she found herself in a wide and solitary marsh. She clung to some rushes that grew at the water's edge and dragged herself out.

"Where am I?" she cried, "and what horrible place is this in which I find myself? My last hope is the enchanted leaf,"—and she put her hand into her dress, but oh, horror! she had dropped it. *Where?*

She wept until she was weary, and then, as she began to feel the pangs of hunger, she arose, and, looking over the vast expanse of marsh, tried to see whether there were any house or cottage where she might beg a piece of bread and a lodging.

In the far distance she soon beheld a building, toward which she directed her steps, and, after walking for hours, she came to an enormous palace, built entirely of mud. At the gate there lay a great crocodile, at sight of which the Princess almost fainted with fear; but, perceiving that the creature was asleep, she timidly approached and rang the doorbell, the handle of which was made of a crocodile's tooth.

Now, the country in which Moonflower found herself belonged to a terrible and wicked Enchanter, who lived there entirely by himself but for thousands of crocodiles, which were his only companions, and for which he had a singular fancy. When he heard the bell ring he looked out, and saw the Princess standing before the door, so he immediately went down to meet her. When she beheld him her terror increased a thousandfold, for he was indeed

more frightful than sin itself. He was clothed from head to foot in the skins of crocodiles, and carried in his hand a rod made of black wood, upon which was represented a crocodile's face. He had but one glaring eye, and his mouth was furnished with huge pointed teeth, which caused him to look fiercer than an ogre. When he set eyes upon her he cried: "Ho! here comes another mortal to add to my collection of crocodiles!" And he raised his magic wand to change her into one of these loathsome beasts, when, as he was about to put his wicked design in practice, an idea struck him. "No," he said, "I am getting up in years, and require some one to look after me; my crocodiles are stupid brutes and perform the services of my house but indifferently. Now here is a servant ready to my hand." So he dragged the terrified Moonflower into his horrible palace, where he set her to scrub the floors, wash the dishes, cook the food, and perform the most menial offices. At night she had only the bare boards to sleep on, and nothing to eat but dried frogs.

In this way many days passed. All night she wept and all day she worked hard. "Oh, if death would but come to relieve me!" she sobbed, "what a blessing it would be. But alas! he alone comes to those who do not want him, and forgets wretches like myself."

Now the Enchanter had a great glass tower on the top of his house, on which was reflected everything that took place on the marsh in which it stood, and every day the Princess would go up and look out to see if, by any chance, help might be approaching; and, as day by day she came down disappointed, she began to fear that she would have to spend the rest of her life with the Enchanter and his hateful crocodiles. "If I had but my dear Grimaçon," thought she, "but alas! how can he know where I am, and, even if he did, how could he get here?"

We must now return to the palace of the King of the Crystal Mountains.

When the flood caused by the fountain had subsided and the Queen had been put to bed in hysterics, the excitement somewhat calmed itself, and only the dwarf went running about calling for the Princess. When one of the servants informed him that she had been carried away by the water his grief knew no bounds. He sighed, he wept, he tore his hair, his cries were heard all over the palace, where he wandered about from room to room, giving way to his sorrow, and at last he came to the room where the Queen and his mistress had been talking at the time of the flood. As he walked along, with his head bent, looking the very picture of desolation, he caught sight of a little dark thing lying on the floor. He picked it up.

It was the Enchanted Leaf, which had been dropped by Princess Moonflower.

At the sight of this, which so forcibly brought back to him her memory, his tears began to flow afresh. He sat down upon the ground, looking at it, and thinking of the late tragedy. Suddenly it occurred to him that the Princess might not indeed be dead, but that she had probably called upon the stream to help her, and had been carried away by it. “Perhaps,” conjectured the unhappy little creature, “she desired its aid without a good reason, and has been overtaken by the flood as a punishment. The voice warned her of it. If so, I must seek her to the very ends of the earth. Perhaps this leaf may be of service to me also, for, though I am not the Princess, I have her happiness as much at heart as if I were.”

He then resolved to go to the King and to tell him the whole story, concealing only the fact of Moonflower’s high birth, which he had solemnly sworn not to reveal without her permission. At that moment he looked out of the window and perceived the King walking about round the fountains and up and down the terraces as one distracted. He tore his hair and even his moustache. It was fortunate that the Queen, his mother, was in bed and could not see him.

Grimaçon went out into the garden, and, with a low bow, presented himself before the afflicted monarch.

“Ah!” cried the King. “My worthy Grimaçon, what a blow is this! Alas! alas! how terrible to think that Moonflower is drowned!”

“Take courage, your Majesty,” replied the dwarf. “I hope that we may yet behold her again.”

And he told the King of the Crystal Mountains the whole story, craving his Majesty’s permission to go in search of his dear mistress.

“Go! go!” exclaimed the King, “most excellent dwarf, and I will go with thee. We will seek her together, though we should traverse the whole universe.”

When the Queen heard that her son was about to depart on a long journey accompanied by the dwarf, she was furiously angry, for she guessed that they were going to look for Moonflower. But she was soon appeased, as she was to have the management of the kingdom during the King’s absence.

The King and Grimaçon started quite alone, the King taking nothing with him but a sword which he had inherited from his grandfather, and which he thought might bring him luck. The hilt was made of a single topaz,

and the blade was of such superfine Damascus steel, that when it was forged it was considered the eighth wonder of the world. The dwarf carried with him nothing but the Enchanted Leaf.

"I think, your Majesty," he observed, "that we shall do well to follow the course of the stream that has taken Moonflower away; and if so, we will have recourse to this."

And he pulled the Enchanted Leaf out of his pocket, and, touching it with the third finger of his left hand, he thought of the old woman who had given it to the Princess, wondering whether it would be of the same use to him as it had been to her.

Instantly it began to grow larger and larger, until it became big enough for the King and Grimaçon to sit upon it. In another moment they were being whirled onward upon the face of the water.

"Now that we are fairly launched," observed the dwarf, "I am sure that your Majesty has never travelled in this way before and with such a companion."

"As to the travelling," answered the King, "I would put up with anything in order to reach Moonflower; and I shall indeed do well if I never start upon an enterprise with a less brave and loyal friend."

The dwarf was greatly pleased at finding himself so much esteemed by the King, and, as they sailed along, his heart grew lighter, for he felt sure that they would find the lost Princess some day.

They journeyed on, stopping here and there to gather the fruits that grew on the banks, and at night resting at the water-side, for the King, being strong, they were able to stop their boat and pull it ashore. After a weary journey they saw in front of them the same dark spot that Moonflower had remarked at the foot of the Crystal Mountains. When they became aware that it was a deep cavern towards which they were rushing, they were rather startled.

"Well, well," sighed the King, "if she has perished, let us also perish, and in the same manner."

When they entered the mouth of the hole and found themselves sliding down, down, down, deeper and deeper, even Grimaçon grew frightened, and held tightly to his Majesty's doublet.

At last they beheld a tiny speck of light shining far below them.

"Courage, Grimaçon," exclaimed the King, "For I see a light."

Here the dwarf peered round the King's elbow (for he was seated behind him), and, when he saw the little spark, he felt that, after all, fortune might yet permit them to land somewhere in safety.

At last they came out, as Moonflower had done, into the lonely marsh.

The stream sailed on, but much more slowly, and the King and his companion began to find the leaf on which they sat decreasing in size. "I feel sure that it is a sign of our voyage being at an end," said Grimaçon.

The King stepped into the shallow water, picked up Grimaçon, and set him on the bank, drawing the leaf up after him. It immediately shrank to its natural size, upon which his Majesty gave it to the dwarf, who put it in his pocket. As they sat resting upon the bank they espied the Enchanter's mud palace towering in the distance and resolved to go there, hoping to find some one who might give them news of the object of their search.

They walked and walked across the wet marsh, stumbling and sinking in the slimy mud, until the dwarf grew so tired that he could go forward no longer.

"I can go no further, sire," he exclaimed, "and your Majesty must go on and leave me; I do not fear death now that I am robbed of my dear mistress."

But the King would not hear of such a thing, and, being a strong man, he took him on his back and proceeded onward as best he might, for Grimaçon was no light weight, on account of the hump on his back, which made its owner as heavy as an ordinary person.

Now it happened at that moment, that Moonflower was looking out of the Enchanter's glass tower, and saw, in the far distance, a man advancing with something on his back. With the exception of her wicked jailer, she had seen no one since she came to his house but the hideous reptiles which surrounded it, and her heart leaped with joy.

Picture her transports of delight on beholding, as they approached, that they were none other than the King of the Crystal Mountains and Grimaçon!

"But," she thought, bursting into tears, "the dreadful Enchanter will but turn them into crocodiles as soon as he sees them!"

She flew downstairs and met the King and the dwarf at the door.

The crocodile which was lying across the threshold snapped his horrible teeth at them as they advanced, but, drawing his sword, the King pierced him to the heart, when, to the intense astonishment of the Princess and her rescuers, he at once became a young man.

“How can I thank you?” he exclaimed, embracing the King. “You have liberated me from a frightful prison.”

And he explained to them how the Enchanter, by a touch of his black wand, had transformed him into a crocodile, until he should be released by the sword of a fellow mortal.

“But,” he continued, “he will do the same to you, if he gets near enough to strike you also.”

At this moment the Enchanter, who, during this conversation, had been asleep indoors, came out with the fatal wand in his hand. With a howl of rage, he rushed towards them, but, in so doing, he fell over the carcase of the crocodile and his wand slipped from his fingers. He stretched out his hand to catch it, but Grimaçon was too quick for him, and, seizing the little rod, he broke it into a thousand pieces and scattered them to the four winds of heaven. The King waited until his enemy rose, upon which, drawing his sword, he fell upon him. A deadly combat then ensued, for the cruel monster had a club made of crocodiles’ bones, which he used with great skill and with which he laid about him like a madman.

But, at last, he sank, mortally wounded by the topaz-hilted sword, and expired at the King’s feet. At the same moment a shout of joy was heard, and all the crocodiles appeared in their true shapes, for the Enchanter’s death had set them free from their captivity.

There were upwards of a thousand beautiful youths and maidens, who had, at one time or another, fallen into the stream and been carried down through the cavern into these dark and awful dominions.


A · DEADLY · COMBAT · THEN · ENSUED ·

The King then fell upon his knees before Moonflower and implored her to become his wife. The dwarf added his entreaties to those of his Majesty, and the Princess promised that, if they lived to reach the kingdom of the Crystal Mountains, she would bestow upon him her heart and her hand.

So they started for the cavern's mouth, followed by the troop of those rescued from the Enchanter's malice.

When they had traversed the marsh they heard a sound like thunder, and, looking back, perceived that the mud palace had sunk into the earth, and that, in its place, there had arisen a grove of palm-trees the stems of which were of gold and the leaves of emeralds.

The marsh, too, had changed its aspect in a very wonderful manner. The brackish water had become as clear as amber, golden fish darted about in it and shot to and fro among the rushes, which were of crystal and aquamarines. A thousand will-o'-the-wisps with diamond lanterns flashed about and the air was full of the songs of birds.

At the cavern's mouth they stopped, not knowing how to go on, when Grimaçon took the Enchanted Leaf from his pocket and gave it to Moonflower. She touched it, and behold, it blazed up like a star in her hand, throwing light into the mouth of the cave and illuminating the falling water. Then they observed a little staircase cut in the rock which wound upwards, ascending high out of their sight. It had a crystal balustrade which made the ascent quite easy, and in a few moments they were all on their way up it.

It took them two days to reach the top and the poor Princess nearly fainted with weariness, but, supported by the King, she at last accomplished it, after which they sat down to rest awhile at the foot of the Crystal Mountains.

All at once they perceived flying towards them in the air two magnificent chariots, so glorious and brilliant that never, in the whole world, had anything appeared like them.

The first was drawn by twenty silver swans. In it sat a lady from the border of whose cloak hung fringes of pearls and jacinths. She alighted on the ground, close by the Princess, who, pale with astonishment, was watching the second chariot approaching. This was drawn by twelve peacocks, and made entirely of emeralds. It was driven by the most lovely lady imaginable, no less gorgeous than her companion, wearing a crown of opals which shone like the stars on a summer night.

The two Fairies stepped out of their chariots, and thus addressed the astonished King:

"This," they said, pointing to the Princess, "is the Princess Moonflower, daughter of a rich and powerful sovereign now dead. She has been compelled to fly from her kingdom by her wicked aunt, who has usurped the throne."

"I am the Fairy of Rivers and Streams," continued the lady who had first arrived, "and, as she once did a kindness to a subject of mine, I have protected her; and, had she not disregarded a warning I gave her, these late troubles would never have taken place."

The Princess fell upon her knees and craved the Fairy's pardon for her folly.

"Rise," answered she, lifting her, "you have, with the King's help, overcome your difficulties, and you certainly ought to make him happy."

The other Fairy then came forward.

"Moonflower," she said, "I am the Fairy of the Green Woods, and it was I, in the guise of an old hag, whom you so graciously conducted on my way. It was I who gave you the Enchanted Leaf, which you must always keep as an heirloom in your family; and now, I beg of you to marry this brave and devoted monarch, who seeks your hand."

At these words the Princess embraced the two Fairies, who invited her, with the King and Grimaçon, to go with them to the palace of the King. The released youths and maidens then dispersed to their several homes, and, mounting the chariot of the Fairy of the Green Woods, Moonflower soon reached the palace, followed by the King and the dwarf, who accompanied the other Fairy.

The nuptials of the King of the Crystal Mountains and Princess Moonflower were soon afterwards solemnised, and the two Fairies honoured the festivities with their presence; all those who had been rescued from the Enchanter's cruelty by the King were invited, and the rejoicings lasted for twenty days, after which his Majesty made war upon the Princess's aunt, and recovered her kingdom, killing the wicked Blackwig with his own hand.

A terrible fate was in store for the King's proud and cruel mother. On the day of her son's marriage she was returning in her chariot from the ceremony, much mortified and incensed by what had just taken place. Noticing, as she drove along, that her coachman had not brought out the team of horses she had ordered, and being already furious, she leaned

forward to strike him with the golden sceptre in her hand, and, in so doing, overbalanced herself, and fell under the chariot-wheels, where she was almost crushed to death. She was conveyed to the palace with all speed, but, before she reached her apartments, she expired, muttering vengeance against everyone.

The fate of the dwarf Grimaçon was very different. He was made Prime Minister and was the most honoured person in the King's dominions. The King and Queen never took any step without first consulting him, and he lived to an advanced age beloved by all, but especially by their Majesties, who went to visit him every day in a magnificent palace which they built for him close by their own.

# THE DOVECOTE

IN a wide stretch of pasture, in the middle of a lonely field, with its back to the bleak north blast which swept over the shuddering grasses, making them hum and sing like complaining voices, stood a Dovecote.

The solid masonry of its walls, in the crevices of which tufts of stone-crop and shepherd's purse had sown themselves, and the irregular outlines of the crow-steps which ran up either side of its slanting roof had been familiar to the sight of so many generations that, as it had remained unused within the memory of the oldest, no one thought more of it than if it had been a stone-heap in the road, nor noticed the curious fact of its never falling into disrepair. At each end of the roof, above the crow-steps, two large stone balls stood out against the sky, and on these the rooks, going home in the red sunsets to a neighbouring rookery, perched from year's end to year's end, and no one but themselves, or a few inquisitive sheep, who might rub their woolly heads against the walls, seemed to remember the existence of the solitary building. At some little distance behind it the land rose in a steep slope, rolling upwards to where a fringe of fir-trees looked down upon the Dovecote, the fields, and the scattered habitations below.


THE DOVECOT

Anyone standing beside them might see over a vast area of land. Looking to the west, the hills rose in bold relief, and towards them ran a white road which lost itself now and then, only to reappear in patches till it faded into the distance; looking eastward, there lay spread a long stretch of wooded country, over which the lights and shadows floated and the clouds sailed before the west wind on their way to the sea, which could be seen on a sunny day lying like a blue sapphire upon the horizon. Looking straight southward towards the pastures, the sloping ground at the foot of the trees was all one fertile cornfield, as yet uncut, and, half way up it, where the hill was steepest, stood three elms, growing close together and making a dark spot of shade in the middle of the yellow grain. These were called "Maddy Norey's trees." What Maddy Norey's history had been no one alive knew, but tradition said that she had lived in a small cottage under the shadow of the elms, and men ploughing the field in the late November days had run their ploughshares against deeply-embedded stones at their roots, and told each other that they had struck the foundations of Maddy Norey's house. They did not know that the witch, Maddy Norey, was alive still, and living hardly out of the sound of their voices in the Dovecote.

But in spite of the lonely quiet of the old place, and the peace which seemed to brood over the standing corn, there was war and strife in the land. The young King, with his Queen, had been forced to fly from his palace, a fugitive and wanderer, not knowing where to seek shelter for his head; his step-brother, a wicked and unscrupulous man, having, with his plots and cunning and his smooth, lying tongue, stirred up the people in revolt against their sovereign. Through the treachery of some of the soldiery the palace gates had been broken down, the King's capital was in the hands of the mob, and he and the Queen had made their escape, trying to reach the distant sea-board, and from it to take ship across the Northern Sea to a neighbouring land ruled by one of their closest allies.

Under cover of night they fled through the streets of the capital, passing unnoticed in the confusion, and slipping through the city gates deserted by the treacherous guards. Once in the open country, they hid themselves in the woods by day, and travelled forward on foot by night, hoping against hope to elude the pursuers sent out after their flight had become known, and to reach the nearest point of coast from which they might set sail for the friendly land opposite.

At last, after many days, they came to a place only a few dozen miles inland, and the King, who knew the country well, encouraged the weary Queen, telling her how short a space lay between them and the sea. They

were on the borders of a birch-wood through which they had travelled all night, and, as they came out and saw the wide pasture stretched before them in the early light (for it was dawning) the Queen sank down on the ground, worn out, declaring that she could go no further.

At this the King was in despair, for day was breaking and there seemed to be no place of safety in which they could conceal themselves until night should come round again and cover the two lonely wanderers with her dark curtain.

"Lie still and rest," said he, as he drew off his cloak and spread it over his wife, "I will go a little way forward and find some place in which we can shelter for to-day. Do not move until I come back. I shall not be long away." And he wandered off into the field towards a strange pile of building which he saw rising like a watch-tower from the level plain.

When he reached it he found it to be a deserted Dovecote, and he walked round it, wondering why such a solid structure had been built for the harbouring of a few doves and pigeons.

As he passed round the north side he came upon a wooden door, so low that a man entering would be obliged to bend himself almost double, and he cleared away the nettles and tufts of ragwort which grew by the threshold, pushing with his shoulder against the half-rotten wood. The door opened easily.

The Dovecote was quite dark inside, and only the light from the open door behind him enabled the King to see a crazy staircase running up the side of the wall to what was apparently a room overhead. As he stood irresolute whether or not to venture up, another little door opened at the top of the flight and the bent form of an old woman peered out, illuminated by the sky-light in the ceiling of the room she had just left. The King stood amazed.

"And so you have come at last," she said, in a voice which seemed far too soft to proceed from such a crooked body, "and why have you not brought the Queen? Do not be afraid," she added, seeing the look of consternation on his face, "I have expected you for some time. I am Maddy Norey, and I have lived here for more years than you and the Queen put together could count if your ages were doubled twice over. Go at once and bring her back with you, for here she can find a safe hiding-place."

The astonished King could only lean against the wall, and stare up at the strange figure above him.

“Go!” cried the old woman, stamping on the floor.

He turned to obey her, and began groping for the little door by which he had entered; but the more he went from wall to wall, the more amazed was he, for there was no sign nor vestige of such a thing.

Maddy Norey laughed softly.

“Now,” she said, “do you see how safe a castle mine is? If I had not chosen that you should see my door you might still be wandering round the walls among the briars outside. Is not this a safe retreat for the Queen?”

“Let me go, Maddy Norey, and bring her to you.” And as the King said this he perceived the open door close to him, with the sun’s early beams shooting through like golden lances and striking the cobwebs which hung from the lintel.

A short time later saw him standing in the birch-wood by the side of the Queen, who had fallen asleep from exhaustion among the silver stems. The leaves quivered in the breath of sunrise as they emerged together from the wood and took their way to the Dovecote. The wooden door was open to receive them, and Maddy Norey was at the top of her stair, peering down upon the Queen as she ascended, weary and faint, with her beautiful dark hair, which had slipped from its golden comb, falling in masses over her cloak.

“Now,” said the old woman, when they had reached her attic, “look round at my house and tell me what you think of it.”

The King and Queen were silent, for they knew not what to say. They saw nothing but a small bare room with a sky-light in the roof. The light was struggling in among the cobwebs and a cold air blew through the little row of holes among the tiles, by which bygone flocks of pigeons had entered to roost, or emerged to plume themselves in artless vanity on the slanting roof and the crow-steps outside. An oaken three-legged stool stood in one corner with an old-fashioned spinning-wheel beside it, and this was the only furniture or sign of a human inhabitant visible in the little attic.

Maddy Norey smiled.

“I can see your thoughts,” she said, turning to the King. “But you must not think that I have made no better preparation for the Queen than this. I know a great deal. I know that she will spend much time with me here, and I have arranged all that I can to help you in the time that is coming. Now look into that dark spot in the wall and tell me whether I have not prepared my house well for you.”

MADDY · NOREY · SHOWS · THE · QUEEN · THE · ROOM · BEHIND · THE · FIERY · ROSES

As she said this she raised her bent figure and spread out her arms widely. A thin blue mist drove across their vision like a smoke-cloud, and through it broke a glow as of burning coals. It rolled past them, leaving only a faint vapour, behind which they could see a thick hedge of fiery-hearted roses that seemed to burn like living embers. Through a division in the midst of this radiant tangle the light from the glowing flowers shone upon a floor and walls of black oak which could be seen behind it, reflecting itself in the polished darkness beyond, as stars reflect themselves in deep water; and, at the further end of the room, in an angle where the dark walls met, stood a bed carved with designs which could be only dimly seen, and hung with curtains of a rich deep colour that might have been either green or blue.

Then Maddy Norey took the Queen by the hand and led her through the roses into the soft darkness. She combed out her long hair, took from her her travel-stained garments, and made her lie down in the carved bed. Then her weary head sank back upon the pillows, her tired eyes closed, and she drifted away into a dreamless sleep under the blue hangings.

The King and Maddy Norey sat talking in the little dusty attic all that day and far into the evening. His gratitude knew no bounds when she said that he might leave his wife in her charge while he pursued his journey.

"When you arrive at the sea-shore," she told him, "you will find a boat lying on the sand; you must manage so that you get there in two days from now, and during the night-time, when the fisherman to whom it belongs has gone home from fishing, and you must take the oars and row straight out to sea. You will find food and water for three days stored in the boat, for the owner is going a journey in it to an island some way off."

"Maddy Norey," said the young man, "promise me that you will care for the Queen."

"I will," answered the old woman, holding out her wrinkled hand. "But be advised, O King, and spare her the parting, for it may be a long parting, and even I do not know the end of it. She will never consent to let you go alone, which, by reason of the hardships you may have to undergo, is necessary. I might have to prevent her from going with you by not allowing her to find the door. Surely you will spare her this? Look," and she pointed to the darkening sky-light, "it will soon be night, and there is no moon. Go *now*—at once. By to-morrow morning you will be many miles on your way, and if you conceal yourself during the day, another night's travelling will bring you to the shore. Go; it is best."

The King stood up.

“I may go in and look at her?” he said.

Maddy Norey nodded. “I will not wake her,” said he, “it would be too cruel.”

There was silence in the Dovecote for a few minutes before the King re-appeared. He made a sign of farewell to Maddy Norey and went down the rickety stairs, through the wooden door and out into the night alone.

When the Queen awoke next morning and found that he had gone, her heart seemed broken, and she lay weeping quietly in her carved bed.

“Why did I not awake when he came to say good-bye?” she sobbed in despair to Maddy Norey, who was sitting by her.

“My dear,” said the old woman, who did not tell her that she had caused her to sleep so soundly on purpose, “it was better it should be so, for it helped the King through it. And he hoped that you would be strong and keep a brave heart. You must summon all your courage and be helpful to him when he returns, for we do not know how soon that may be.”

With such words did Maddy Norey comfort the Queen. And she, when the first freshness of her grief was over, tried with all her strength to be cheerful and affectionate to the old woman who had done so much for them both. But every evening she used to steal away to a dark corner to weep a little and think of the King, perhaps still in hiding near the bleak coast, perhaps tossing alone on the sea.

When several days had gone by the Queen began to feel the monotony of her life very much, and to long with a great longing for the fresh air, as she dwelt in the cramped seclusion of the Dovecote. It was impossible that she should venture out alone, even for the smallest distance, in the rebellious state of the country, more especially as the search for the fugitive pair was still going on. But her strength and spirits were declining daily, and Maddy Norey began to fear that the confinement was telling upon her. One evening as they sat within the windowless walls which surrounded them, the Queen laid her hand on the witch’s knee.

“If I could only have one breath of air,” she sighed, “and one look at the fields and the sky. May I go to the door and out for just a short, short way into the pasture?”

“No,” she answered, “you must not do that. I have to remember my promise to the King to keep you in safety. But I can do this. To-morrow I will work a spell upon you. I will turn you into a white pigeon, whose presence, were it noticed about the old place, would seem but natural. So

long as you remain standing on your feet or touch the ground in any way, you will be a woman; but, if you make ever so small a spring upwards, the moment your feet leave the earth you will become a white bird, and you may fly for a little distance round the Dovecote, though I do not wish you to go far away. There is a clump of elm-trees in the cornfield which runs up the hill-side, and to them you may go, hiding yourself among the branches, and returning here should you find yourself noticed by even the most insignificant passer-by."

On the following day, accordingly, Maddy Norey took from a recess behind the blue-green bed hangings a strangely-shaped goblet which had two crystal wings springing from either side; into this she shook a powder which smelt aromatically; then she cut off the head of one of the burning roses and threw it upon the top. A subtle perfumed smoke rose and filled the room, blinding the eyes of the Queen. She felt her senses going from her, and clung to the witch's protecting arm. She heard her repeating to herself a slow, monotonous rhyme:—

"Sun-spells and moon-spells,
(Silver wings and red roses)
Voice that in the wind dwells
(Golden wings and white roses).

"Sun-power and moon-power,
(Wild wings and pale roses)
Love for life or love an hour
(Witch-wind and dead roses)."

As the words ceased she swooned away, and when she came to herself, she was lying upon the attic floor with the air from the open sky-light blowing in, and Maddy Norey bending over her. She rose, rubbing her eyes.

"Now," said the old woman, "spring from the ground."

The Queen obeyed, and in an instant was standing on the window-sill in the flashing sunbeams, a pure white pigeon. She looked at the cornfield sloping away northward, and at the green clump of elms standing rich and heavy in the still heat, then spread out her new-found pinions and sailed away towards them.

Now, one day, as the white pigeon sat among the elm-boughs, her eyes wandered over the slope of golden grain to where the fir-trees stood on the

top of the hill; for she knew that from that place could be seen a far wider view, and one that stretched away to the coast and the ocean. What would she not give to have but one glance at the distant leagues of water, one possible chance of seeing some sign of hope on the horizon! She thought of how Maddy Norey, the witch, had commanded her to go no further than the three elms; but she thought also of the aching, unsatisfied heart she would carry back to the Dovecote if she obeyed her. The temptation was too strong for her, and she finally looked out from her shelter, and, seeing nothing living but a few sheep grazing in the mid-day sun, flew upwards over the corn and alighted on one of the topmost branches of the firs. Then she turned her eyes eastward and almost fell from her resting-place.

For the blue sea was all alive with white sails—the sails of a great fleet advancing in a double line to the land.

Prudence, her promise to Maddy Norey and her own safety were alike forgotten; all that she could think of was those approaching vessels which would so soon be landing, and, without fear or hesitation, she spread her wings, and in a moment was flying madly seawards. Over the woods she sped, over the plains and marshes, only now and then passing above a solitary dwelling in the thinly-populated country she crossed. Sometimes she saw a little knot of soldiers encamped in secluded places, and guessed that they were the scouts posted about by the rebels to watch for and capture their sovereign. With a thankful heart she observed that, being stationed in low-lying parts of the country and among the woods, they could not see the sight which she saw from the height at which she flew. It was evident that none suspected the King of having left the country. She hastened forward with redoubled speed as the space between the fleet and the sea-shore lessened. Just before sunset she had almost reached the coast on which the ships were already landing, and could plainly see boats rowing to the shore to empty upon it their loads of armed warriors and going back again to return with more. The sands were black with hurrying figures.

All at once, below her there rose a shout from a watchman who had been climbing to a greater eminence than the others, and, realising that in an hour the country might be up in arms, she strained every nerve to reach her husband in time to prepare him for an attack.

Scarcely a mile lay between her and the invading army; she was thinking how, in another few moments, she would be once more with the King, when a man, loitering about on the waste land with his crossbow saw the bird passing over his head, took an arrow from the quiver and fitted it to the string. He was a good marksman.

Suddenly a shock of pain passed through the white pigeon and the earth seemed to rise up to meet her; then a giddiness, a drop, and a heavy blow, and she was lying on the wet ground, no longer a bird, but a terrified and wounded woman with an arrow sticking in her arm. Her wing had been broken.

She raised herself a little and saw that her persecutor was rushing forward, and, as the remembrance of her mission came back, she staggered to her feet and tore the arrow from her arm. She was so near safety and succour—so near—she *must* make one more effort; gathering all her strength together, she bounded on, half faint from loss of blood.

As the King stood on a green mound giving orders for the encampment of his army, he heard a sound of rushing footsteps and turned round. A woman with flying hair and outstretched hands was dashing towards him, through the sea-grass, through the stones and driftwood, and, as she fell fainting at his feet, he recognised the Queen.

The King and his wife sat in the royal tent together. Her arm was stiff and painful and the King was uneasy, for he longed to place her under more skilful care than any which could be got in their present position. They sat at the tent door under the stars; just before morning, when all was beginning to be astir with preparations for the march, a star dropped from its place and fell across the Northern heavens. It travelled slowly along, leaving in its wake a little train of blue sparks.

“That is a good omen,” the Queen said.

Soon the rebels got news that the King had landed, and they came with their troops to meet him. There was a great battle that lasted from noon until the evening, and all day the King rode unharmed through the fray with a white pigeon on his shoulder—a white pigeon with a broken wing. The enemy looked upon this strange sight with superstitious awe, and many an arrow tried to find its way to the mysterious bird’s heart. But none succeeded, and when, at the end of that hard day, the King stood victorious on the field, the only signs of blood to be seen upon him were the drops that dripped upon his shoulder from the wing of the white pigeon.

At last he was able to go to his tent and lay aside sword and armour, and he placed the bird tenderly upon the ground. The Queen at once returned to her own shape, half dead with pain and fatigue and scarcely able to stand.

A great fear took hold upon the King. How if he were even now, in the hour of his success, to lose her?

It took him but one moment to make up his mind. He would take her to Maddy Norey, for, if there were help to be found under heaven, he knew that the witch would give it to him.

Commanding a fresh horse should be brought, he mounted as the moon rose and rode out into the night, holding the bird in the folds of his cloak. The people, when they heard of the advance of the troops and the great defeat from some fugitives who had escaped from the battle, had abandoned their houses and fled in all directions, so it was through a desolate country that the King spurred his good horse. He rode grimly on with his sword drawn in his hand, ready to cut down the first obstacle that might present itself, his eyes fixed steadily in front of him, looking neither to the right nor the left. In the early dawn he stood, as he had stood not so long since, at the foot of the Dovecote. There was the little door in front of him, with its rusty latch and hanging cobwebs. He threw himself from the saddle and rushed into the building and up the crazy stair. Maddy Norey's voice came from inside the attic.

"Be quick, be quick," she said, holding out her hands for the bird, "you have not come a moment too soon. Give her to me."

They laid the fluttering creature on the ground, and, when her natural shape had returned, the Queen was carried to the carved bed where the witch dressed her wound, and, with charms and spells, charmed back her sinking life; and, having been assured by the old woman that all danger was past, the King left her with hope in his heart, and returned to meet his troops.

From that day everything went well; the march to the capital was but a triumphal progress, and the victors were soon joined by bands of those who had remained loyal during the rebellion, but who had not been able to gain the day for their sovereign by reason of the tremendous odds against which they fought.

The cornfield below Maddy Norey's trees had been cut, the stooks were standing on the hill-side, and the elm-trees were beginning to be faintly touched with autumn, when, one blue, misty morning, the King rode through the pastures to fetch the Queen. He came alone, leading a grey horse by the bridle; and he tied the two animals to an iron ring in the Dovecote wall while he went up to the witch's attic.

He found the old woman at her spinning-wheel with the young one beside her.

“When he comes to fetch me,” the Queen was saying, “you will leave the Dovecote, will you not, dear Maddy Norey, and come with us? For our home shall be yours. You have been so good to us that we cannot bear to part from you. Say that you will come.”

“No,” said the witch, “it is impossible. I have lived in this room for such countless years that I can never leave it now. When you have gone no one will ever find the little door again.”

And nothing that they could say would make her consent.

So they went down the wooden stair together, and Maddy Norey came to the top to bid them farewell. For one moment she laid her hand on the King’s curling hair as he bent over her wrinkled figure, and she kissed the Queen, who threw her arms around her crooked neck; then she stood a little space at the head of the stair, looking at the two bright figures as they went out from her into the light.

At the threshold they turned and saw that she was holding up her hands as if in blessing.

Very silently they rode out of the pasture, and, as they were about to turn the corner of the birch-wood, they reined in their horses to take a last look at the curious old building as it stood solitary in the morning mist.

There were tears in the Queen’s eyes.

# THE PEACOCK'S TAIL

THERE was once a widow of respectable family who lived in a house in a retired part of the country. Her only companion was her daughter, Ella, who was exceedingly beautiful, and continually on the look-out to see whether a wandering prince would come by and marry her.


NOW · I · AM · SIMPLY · PERFECT · SAID · SHE · ·
NAT SAMOHEIM

There was also an old witch called Mother Grindle, who lived up a tree in the orchard. A deep pool was at the foot of this orchard, but in spring the sight of the water was almost shut out by the mass of blossom which covered the apple-trees. There was a peacock, too, who strutted about all day; he was not a bad fellow really, but intolerably vain. Only one thing in the place was vainer than himself, and that was Ella, the widow's daughter. Mother Grindle and the peacock got on very well together, though the witch would sometimes laugh and rock about till the tree shook, which annoyed him very much. It was most odd.

One day he was walking along the grass; he took very high steps, and sometimes he dragged his wings on the ground. Then he would stop and set up his tail like a fan behind him, arching and twisting his neck in the sun. The apple-tree shook till the petals fell in showers.

He looked up and saw Mother Grindle sitting in the branches.

"Really!" he exclaimed. "A stranger might almost think you were laughing at *me*!"

"What an idea!" said the witch, "you must be mad."

So he went on trailing and prancing. The tree shook again, and he could see Mother Grindle rocking from side to side.

"What are you laughing at?" he cried. "It can't be me, because there is nothing about me to be amused at. Now, if *I* were to start laughing at that pointed hat you wear there would be some sense in it."

At this moment Ella came out wearing her best gown, for it was Sunday; she was not, as a rule, very civil to Mother Grindle, for she also did not admire the pointed hat. But she did admire the peacock. She looked over her shoulder at her own train and was forced to admit that, for colour and design, the peacock's tail far outdid it.

"Ah!" she sighed, "how I wish I had that tail."

"You may have one wish—two wishes—three wishes," sang out Mother Grindle from the apple-tree.

And before you could say "Jack!" the beautiful tail became fixed to Ella's waist—eyes, moons, quills, fringes and all.

"Now I am simply perfect," said she; and she ran to the hedge and looked over to see if a Prince were coming down the road. But there was no one. As for the peacock, he was furious, naturally.

Ella knew there was no mirror in the widow's house large enough to reflect her and all her glory, and she went down to the pool and looked in at herself; she stood on the edge and leaned over, putting up her tail behind her head. All at once there came a gust and caught it like the wind catching a sail; over she went, straight in. It was very deep.

"Help! Help!" she cried. But there was no one close by but the peacock, and *he* wasn't going to put himself out. He was delighted, and walked stiffly away to the yard at the back of the house; he was much consoled, and he knew very well that he would grow a new tail next year.

"La! husband, how paltry you look!" cried the peahens. They had long thought it rather hard that he should be so much better dressed than themselves.

Ella screamed and shrieked. She caught hold of some rushes, but the tail was so heavy that she could not drag herself out.

"You shall have one wish—two wishes!" sang out Mother Grindle from the tree.

"Oh! if I were only on shore!" cried Ella. And sure enough she found herself standing on the brink, dripping with water, but safe. She ran into the house as fast as ever she could go.

She was put to bed at once in hot blankets. "How you are to lie with that tail on, I can't imagine," said her mother. However, in she got, arranging it as best she might, and so tired was she after all she had gone through, that she fell asleep and never woke till the next morning.

She got up and dressed, but alas! alas! she had rolled about in the night, and the beautiful feathers were all broken and torn and matted together; they hung like so many limp rags, and, do what she would, she could not make them hang properly. She went into the orchard, hoping that the sun and wind might freshen them up; but though she spent some time in taking out the tangles, the effect was horrid, and she looked more draggle-tailed than words can say. The peahens peeped over the fence and tittered.

At this moment a Prince came riding by, and saw her walking in the orchard.

"Heavens! What an absurd sight!" he exclaimed, as he rode on.

Ella sat down on the grass and cried bitterly.

"You may have one wish—one wish!" sang out the witch from the tree.

“Oh! take away this dreadful thing,” sobbed Ella.

And before you could turn round it was gone. Then Mother Grindle began to sing again very cheerfully. But Ella was not cheerful—far from it.

“You may have one wish more—one wish more,” sang the witch.

But Ella has not made up her mind what to ask for yet. One cannot be too careful.

# THE PELICAN

In the land of Egypt, where the Nile runs and the palm-trees grow and the great Sphynx sits alone in the Desert, there lived a young man who kept a jeweller's shop in a crowded street. He was tall and grave, and he wore a yellow kaftan which clothed him from head to heel.

In the afternoon, when the street was full, he would sit in front of his shop looking at the people, and sometimes exchanging a word with the passers-by.

It chanced that, as he sat in his accustomed place one day, there passed a countryman carrying under his arm a young Pelican, which he had caught on the river. He held it very roughly, and a crowd of boys followed behind jeering at the strange, half-fledged creature, and sometimes pulling its tail or its legs and laughing when it opened its mouth in terror. Now the young man was angry that the bird should be so used, for he had read many books and thought many thoughts, and he knew that birds and beasts had feelings like other people. He pitied the poor frightened Pelican, and as one of the boys passed, he gave him a great cuff which nearly knocked him over.

"Good man," said he to the countryman, "where are you going with that Pelican?"

"To the other side of the city," replied the countryman, "where I know a man who will buy him and cut his throat when he grows older for the sake of his skin and feathers."

"You need not go so far," said the young man in yellow, "for I myself will give you what price you name for him."

At this the countryman was glad enough, for he was tired of carrying the bird, and the young man paid him and took the poor Pelican into the court behind his shop, where he put him down near a small fountain in the middle of it.

As time went on, the Pelican grew so big that there was scarce room for him in the little tank, and the young man took him to sit in front of the shop.

THAT IS THE MOST CHARMING GIRL I HAVE EVER SEEN.

One day, as they were there together, there passed before them a girl carrying a basket of melons on her head. She was slender, and her naked feet and ankles were as fine as though she had been a great lady; she had long, dark eyes, and the plait of her hair hung down behind her, below the edge of her veil. With one hand she drew the black folds over her mouth.

The young man in yellow was so much struck that he could not refrain from speaking his thoughts aloud. “That is the most charming girl I have ever seen,” he said. “I wonder where she lives.”

“On the banks of the Nile some way down stream,” said the Pelican, who was standing behind him.

At this, his master was so exceedingly astonished that he nearly fell off his seat, for he never suspected that the bird could talk.

“How do you know that?” he asked.

“There is a patch of brown Nile mud upon the border of her garment,” replied the Pelican.

“That is very well,” said the other, “but how can you tell what distance she comes from?”

“Her face is unveiled,” was the reply, “like those of the women in the remoter country places.”

“And how do you know that her home is down stream?” asked the young man again.

“Sir, I observed that the stems of the melons were freshly cut, and must have been gathered this morning. Those who bring melons to the town embark early, as soon as their load is ready. Had the owner of these lived up the river he would have arrived with his merchandise before noon, being carried by the current. But it is now afternoon.”

“You are a great reasoner,” exclaimed the young man, “but how do you know that the girl has not been in the city since morning?”

“Her basket is full,” answered the bird.

“Since you are so clever,” continued he, “perhaps you will inform me if she often comes this way. I have never seen her before.”

“Neither have I,” rejoined the Pelican, “but I can answer, for all that. She draws the end of her veil over her mouth as she goes; this is because she has seen much of the ways of city women who veil themselves. You may also have noticed that she turned under the gateway by the mosque. Now that

gateway is small and mean, and only those acquainted with this street know that there is a passage through it to the thoroughfare where the cloth-merchants live; where every man is rich and keeps a pile of melons behind his wares for the entertainment of visitors. Doubtless she has been there many a time."

The young man was still more astonished. "I perceive," said he, "that one of the jewels in my shop is the rare jewel of wisdom."

At this the Pelican rejoiced in his heart. "Wisdom is like other wildfowl, and roosts with its kind," he replied.

"I perceive also that you have learnt to speak with great civility," continued the young man.

"Sir," said the bird again, "while sitting here I have observed the manners of the grave and reverend persons who pass by, and of the aged sheikhs who come on their donkeys to drink coffee with the merchant opposite."

After this the two lived together in great content till, one day, the young man in yellow spoke his mind.

"Friend," said he, "we have now been companions for some time; but I must tell you I think this no suitable life for a bird of your talents. You see nothing of your own kind here, nor anything outside my shop. It is time we began to think of your future. You should marry and rear a family instead of sitting here. Wisdom is good, but it is also portable, so you can carry it away when you go. I have been thinking this over, and I have found a good opening for you; my uncle's brother-in-law is keeper of the garden at Prince Hassan's palace outside the city. There, there are great trees, lakes, islands, fruits, and a very high family of Pelicans has been settled there for many years. At my request you would be well received, and you could then marry and live respectably. I shall be grieved beyond measure at parting from you, but, having your welfare at heart, I shall make up my mind to it. Besides, I will go to see you regularly every Friday."

At first the bird was very unwilling to agree to this plan, for he was much attached to his friend, but at last he consented: and the young man hired an ass and rode to Prince Hassan's garden with the Pelican sitting before him on the saddle. His uncle's brother-in-law received them warmly, and installed the Pelican on a fine lake where there were islands covered with long grass, and, at one side, a mass of tall scarlet flowers standing by the banks with their roots in the water.

The Pelican was attracted by these beautiful plants and made his home in their midst, having an eye for colour; the life suited him but for one thing, and that was the dull company which he found among the other birds. He hardly cared to speak to them, for, though they were civil and pleasant enough, he had been so long accustomed to the talk of the young man in yellow that all other seemed dull in comparison. As for marrying, he gave up the idea, for he could not find one hen-pelican whose silly chatter did not drive him mad. In spite of the luxury in which he lived, he counted the days of each week till Friday should come round and bring his friend to sit with him for an hour or two among the scarlet flowers.

Now it happened that the girl who sold melons, and whom the young man in yellow had never seen since the day on which the Pelican first spoke, was sitting one afternoon by the Nile. The reason he had not seen her was that her father, a cross old man, had begun to sell his fruit on the bank of the river, and now made her sit by it from morning till night.

One day it was very hot, and the sun was so fierce that she grew sleepy and laid herself down under a palm tree to rest. While she slept a string of camels came by, and one of them knocked its foot against the pile of fruit; with a great splash all the melons rolled, one over the other, like round balls, down the bank, and were carried away by the running water. The girl jumped up, wringing her hands, and calling to the camel-drivers to save them, but they only laughed and passed on. “Who sleeps long at noon weeps long at night!” they shouted.

The poor girl did not wait till night, but sat down at once in the dust and cried. When she looked up she saw her father coming along on his donkey, for he had been to admire his melon beds on the river-bank some way off. She was so frightened that she began running away as fast as she could.

She ran and ran till she came to a great wall in which a door was standing open. Through it she went and found herself in a fine garden full of jessamine and orange trees. She was so tired that she looked about for water to bathe her hot face, and a shady place where she might rest and hide from the burning sun. Not far off she could see the shine of a lake, and a scarlet patch of high water plants in which a white Pelican dozed, half asleep.

“By the beard of the Prophet!” exclaimed the bird, “this is none other than the melon girl! O Master! Master! Would I could see your yellow kaftan approaching through the trees!”

But it was only Thursday, and there was no chance of the young man coming till the morrow.

When the girl had bathed her face and drunk some water he came forward, and, with much politeness, invited her to rest among the tall cannas, as the scarlet flowers were called. When he had heard her story his face grew subtle.

"If you are wise," said he, "you will remain with me till to-morrow afternoon. To-day your father's anger will not have cooled; in the morning he will go to the mosque (for it is Friday) and, when he has prayed, his heart will be softened. Then you can return in the afternoon and ask his forgiveness for losing the melons."

This the Pelican said because he knew that the young man in yellow would come on the following day.

"But I have no food," said the girl; "I shall be half-famished by to-morrow."

"Are there not fruits in the garden?" asked the Pelican, "and have I not a bill a yard long? Lie down and rest and I will see that you do not starve."

He gazed at her as she slept and saw that she was very beautiful. Her eyelashes were longer than a finger's breadth, and her mouth scarlet like the canna-flowers over her head. When the evening was come, he went out and took as much fruit as he could get and brought it back in his pouch, washing it and giving it to the girl, who ate thankfully. Then the stars came out and they slept side by side among the cannas.

Next day, at the hour when he expected his friend, the bird went to the gate and stood watching. When he saw him approaching he went forward crying, "See what I have done for you! I have here got the melon girl for whom you spend your life in searching. Come in, and I will bring you to her."

At this the young man was overjoyed and embraced the Pelican, and the two hurried into the garden.

At sight of the girl he fell more deeply in love than ever, and all the time he had meant to spend with his friend he sat with her by the water. The Pelican stood by. "See," said he, "he has forgotten my very existence, though he has come all the way from the city for my company."

But he understood too much to be angry, for he knew such things had been since the foundation of the world.

When the young man found that the girl was afraid to go back to her father, he saw a way by which he need not part with her. "Return with me,"

said he, “my mother is old and lives with me; you shall wait upon her and cook the food for my house.”

So he took her back with him and presented her to his mother.

Now the young man’s mother was a jealous woman, and, though she liked the girl and was well pleased to have her work done for her, she soon began to do everything she could think of to make her miserable, because she saw that her son loved her. So unhappy did she make the household that the young man said, “I must go immediately and consult the Pelican, or there is no knowing what may happen.”

And, although it was not Friday, he went off to Prince Hassan’s garden and laid his difficulties before the bird.

“There is only one thing to be done,” said the Pelican; “I must come back to keep the peace.”

Now, wise as he was, he did not know that, where there is a jealous woman, not the Prophet himself and all the Khalifas can save a household. All the difference his coming made was that the old woman was jealous of two people instead of one, and there was no peace from morning till night.

It chanced, one day, that the young man had gone out and the Pelican was near the fountain. In a top room the girl sat at a window, looking down on the street where the merchants were lighting their lamps. The afterglow spread high over the roofs, and, in a patch of sky, she saw the evening star rising behind the mosque. She could hear the old woman’s voice talking to a butcher in front of the shop. “At noon my son will be out,” she was saying. “You must then come with your knife and slay the Pelican who lives in the courtyard. I will afterwards wash the blood from the stones and tell him that the impious and deceitful bird has flown away.”

Next morning the girl rose before anyone was stirring and hired an ass. “Come,” she said to the Pelican, “if you want to save your life, come with me. The old woman has hired the butcher, and, when the lord of this house has gone out, he is to come and kill you. Mount quickly in front of me and I will carry you through the town under my veil. When we get to the river you shall fly to Prince Hassan’s garden, and I will return before any one awakes and tell her that you have died in the night, and that I have buried you near the fountain. I will make a little mound beside it.”

“Alack! Alack! I shall never see my master again!” cried the Pelican.

“I will tell him the truth privately,” said she, “and on Friday he will go to see you as before.”

So the two fled before the cocks crowed.

When they reached the banks of the Nile the Pelican flew away across the bridge to the garden, and the girl turned about and set her face to the city.

But, before she had gone ten yards, a hand was laid on her, for her father had seen her ride by from his boat. He dragged her on board, beating her, and took her away to his melon beds on the river-bank where he set her to drive the ox that worked the well.

When the young man in yellow rose and found that his friend and the melon girl had both disappeared, he made a great to-do and caused the bazaar to be searched from end to end. Criers went about describing them and calling on all who might have seen them to bring news to the jeweller's shop, where they would be rewarded handsomely. But no one had seen them pass. The mother was as much astonished as anybody.

"Son," she said, "no doubt the Pelican, in his wonderful wisdom, will return, and certainly, no one will run away with that ugly slut of a girl. She will come back fast enough."

But the young man would not be comforted. He bethought him of Prince Hassan's garden, and, next day, he set out to see if haply the bird had gone back to the scarlet cannas and the fresh grass growing by the lakes. He had no sooner entered than he saw him in his accustomed place.

"Friend!" he cried, "this is a sorry trick you have played me! My heart has despaired, and the voice of the crier, searching the bazaar with beat of drum, has not ceased since yesterday morning!"

"One day longer and he would have found my skin in the butcher's shop," replied the Pelican. And he related everything that had happened.

The young man was so enraged at what he heard that he beat the grass with his staff till the sods flew. "When I get home," said he, "I will hire a house in a different street for my mother, and she shall abide there; and when I meet the butcher, I will make every bone in his body ache."

"That is right," said the Pelican, enjoying the thought.

"It is; and I will do it," said the young man; "but oh! where is the beautiful one? Her eyes were like stars shining on the Nile, and her mouth like the canna-flowers. When she walked, her passing was as the wind in the lebbek-tree, and when she drew her veil across her face, it was as though a trail of river-mist crossed the moon."

And he wept bitterly, making many holy vows that, when he had found her, he would marry her, taking none other to wife. The Pelican was much moved.

"Through silence everything is heard," said he, "and by waiting everything is attained. May the young Pelicans laugh at my pouch if I do not find her for you yet again."

Now it chanced, very soon, that Prince Hassan, with all the beauties of his harem, returned to the palace which had stood empty more than a year. Among the ladies was one who surpassed all the others, and with whom Prince Hassan was deeply in love. One day, while walking in the garden, she fell into conversation with the Pelican, becoming so much charmed with his polite manners and sentiments that she would spend some time daily in his company.

"My lord," she said to Prince Hassan, "I beg of you to come with me into the garden and divert yourself with the conversation of the Pelican who lives there. He is the most wonderful bird, and he assures me that he knows the whole of the Koran by heart."

When the Prince was made acquainted with the bird he commended the lady's wit in discovering such a companion, and he gave orders that nothing he desired should be denied him. But, in spite of the honour paid him, the Pelican never ceased to think of the young man in yellow and the melon girl, and to wonder how he could bring them together.

"Lady," he said one day, "it is long since I looked upon the world. When you are carried abroad in your litter by the banks of the Nile I have a desire to go with you. While you remain inside, veiled, I can put my head through the curtains and see something of the river-life I once knew. If you will allow this my gratitude will not die while I breathe."

The lady laughed heartily at the strange request, but she did not refuse it, thinking of the Prince's orders; and, one evening, when the sun was low behind the Pyramids, she set forth in her gilded litter with the Pelican beside her.

While they went along the Nile bank they passed many places where melons were sold, and at last he saw the girl he sought beside a cloth spread on the ground and full of fruit. As the litter passed he stretched out his neck and cried: "The Sheikh's tomb by the Nile! The Sheikh's tomb by the Nile!"

She jumped up and would have approached the litter, but the slaves surrounding it pushed her away.

“Full moon!” cried the Pelican. “The Sheikh’s tomb by the Nile at full moon!”

Next day, when the lady came out to talk to the Pelican, he made a new request.

“Lady,” said he, “if you will make me your debtor once more, you will grant me another wish. Send a slave to the young man in the yellow kaftan who keeps a jeweller’s shop in the street of Selim Baba’s Mosque to tell him to go to the Sheikh’s tomb by the Nile at full moon.”

The lady marvelled, for she had fallen asleep in the litter, and had not heard the words he had cried to the girl.

“I will do what you please,” she said, “but, first, tell me who is the young man in the yellow kaftan?”

Then the Pelican began to describe his friend in such terms that the lady was filled with admiration, and calling a black slave, sent him immediately to the city. All that night she could not sleep for thinking of the young man in yellow, and, on the evening of full moon, she determined to see him for herself. So she bribed a servant to bring her the blue gown and black veil of a peasant woman, and, having dressed herself in them, she hid her own clothes in the jessamine-arbour in the garden and slipped out by a little hidden gate in the wall.

Now the black slave whom she had sent with the message was full of greed and cunning, so he went straight to the Prince on his return and said, “My lord, give me money, for I have discovered an infamous plot.”

And he told him how the lady had summoned a young man from the bazaar to meet her, at full moon, at the Sheikh’s tomb by the Nile. Prince Hassan was filled with rage, for in Egypt it is not the custom that ladies go alone to meet strange young men; and he also dressed himself and mounted his horse to ride to the tomb, having wrapped himself in a cloak that none might know him. The only person who was not on the road, journeying to the spot, was the Pelican.

The first to arrive at the tomb was the young man in yellow; his heart glowed, for he knew that the Pelican had sent the message and guessed that the wise bird had made this plan that he might meet his love. So he sat down to wait under the palm-trees and listened to the creak of the well-wheels in the fields. Presently he heard a footstep and saw a woman come gliding between the stems, but as he rushed forward to embrace her, he perceived that it was not the melon girl but a stranger.


HE·RAN·FORWARD·AND·HELD·HER·IN·HIS·ARMS·
MAY SANDHEIM

“What are you doing here?” he cried, in wrath at his disappointment. “Off with you, or I will throw you into the river!”

The lady, who had hoped that her beauty would have made him fall in love with her on the spot, was terrified and ran away; but when she had gone a few yards, curiosity overcame her and she turned back, unnoticed by the young man, and slipped behind the tomb.

He sat waiting till he saw the melon girl approaching softly like a shadow in the moonlight; then he ran forward and held her in his arms, kissing her and praising the Pelican who had brought them together.

While they sat under the palm-trees thus happily employed, a sound of galloping hoofs drew near, and Prince Hassan, in his dark cloak, rode into the palm grove, and, drawing his sword, rushed upon them. But, when he found the melon girl and not the lady he expected, he stood still.

“Where is the lady who was to come here at full moon?” he cried.

“Sir, there is no such person,” replied the young man. “A peasant woman came by not long ago, but she has gone into the fields.”

At the sound of Prince Hassan’s voice the lady behind the tomb nearly died of terror, for she knew that if he caught her he would certainly cut off her head. So she slipped away and ran to the river-bank while the Prince remained behind, questioning the lovers, and it chanced that the first person she met was a man on a trotting camel.

“If you will take me as fast as you can to the wall of Prince Hassan’s garden,” she said, “I will give you as much money as will make you rich for the rest of your life.”

The camel-driver asked nothing better, so he took the lady up behind him and went like a flash of lightning to the place to which she directed him.

Then, having asked his name, she entered by the little door in the wall and went to the jessamine-arbour, where she put on her own clothes, hid the others, and sat cooling herself in the night air and thanking heaven which had protected her.

In a short time Prince Hassan came riding back and entered the palace, calling her loudly.

“She is not here,” said the slaves, “we do not know where she has gone.”

Then the Prince ran, raging and stamping, into the garden, and as he passed the arbour, the lady called him softly.

“Where have you been all this time, my lord?” she cried. “It is but dull work sitting alone thinking of you as the stars wane and you do not come. Alas! what a hard fate it is to have a cold-hearted lover!”

Then the Prince, who was so much relieved in his mind that he could almost have cried, rushed into the arbour and embraced the lady, vowing that he would never leave her again for so much as an hour. The Pelican looked on from his canna-flowers by the lake. Wise as he was, he did not understand what was happening, for the subtlety of woman was a thing too great even for him.

And the young man in yellow took the girl home and married her next day; and when he grew rich, which he soon did, he built a house by the Nile and raised a fine garden of oranges and pomegranates. In it the Pelican lived to a ripe old age, sustaining the household by his wisdom, and standing sponsor to the children.

# THE CHERRY TREES

THERE were once two little boys who played in the great gardens of a palace; one was the son of the King to whom the palace belonged, and one was the son of the King's head gardener. The palace lay at the mouth of a valley, and the garden had a stone balustrade surrounding it on which the two would sit when they were tired of their play. They were both of the same age, and, as the Prince had neither brothers nor sisters, the gardener's son was allowed to come every day and keep him company. They learned the same lessons and amused themselves with the same games; and, at nightfall, the gardener's boy would go back to his father's cottage to return early next morning. The gardener was a wise man, and brought him up very well, but the King was foolish and spoilt the Prince most dreadfully, which was all the worse, as he was selfish and rude by nature, and sometimes very unkind to his friend. But his friend loved him dearly in spite of that.


THE DAFFODIL PRINCESS

The King lived all the year in this palace, although he had another fine house in his capital city; for he hated business, and liked the idle life he led with his Queen and all the beautiful ladies and gentlemen who formed his court. He never troubled himself about anything; he did not even hunt, nor fish, but sat the whole day listening to the gossip of his fools and jesters, and writing very silly poetry. Then he would read it aloud to all the beautiful ladies and gentlemen, who threw up their hands and said: "How clever!" But behind his back they laughed at him.

One day, when the little boys were playing, the head gardener came by and gave each of them a fine branch of ripe cherries, so they stopped their games and sat on the balustrade to eat the fruit.

Suddenly a poor old beggar man passed by outside the garden and looked up at them; he was tattered and torn and he had no shoes on his feet; his face was lined with fatigue and misery.

"I am very hungry," said the beggar, addressing the Prince, "and I have got nothing to eat. Please, young gentleman, get me something from the palace, for, if I have to go any further without food, I am really afraid I shall die."

"What? *I* go in and fetch you things from the palace? A pretty idea! I tell you I am the King's son. I never heard of such impudence."

"You may be the King's son," said the poor old man; "but I am starving, for all that."

For answer the Prince leaned down and struck the beggar with the end of his cherry-branch.

The gardener's son had eaten every one of his cherries but three, and he held them out to the old man. "I have nothing else to give," he said, "but you may have these."

The beggar ate all three cherries and laid the stones in a row on the ground; he chose one, and, when he had polished it on his ragged coat, he gave it back to the gardener's son.

"Take that," he said, "and plant it in the earth somewhere outside this garden. I will keep the other two."

Then he bade him good-day, taking no notice of the Prince, and was soon out of sight.

When the boys grew into young men they still remained friends; as they had been practically brought up together, and had learned the same things,

strangers often took them for brothers, more especially as they were not unlike in face. But the curious thing was, that, when the strangers found out that one was the King's son and one the son of the head gardener, they always took the gardener's son for the Prince. It was very awkward sometimes, and it used to make the Prince rather cross.

As time went on the King did not grow any wiser; he was very foolish and self-indulgent. He never attended to his business, and let everything in the kingdom get into a dreadful mess. At last his subjects became so much disgusted that they broke into rebellion, and rushed to the palace meaning to put an end to him altogether. He had heard rumours of discontent, but he did not mind them, and would not believe people when they told him that his life was in danger; so, one day, thousands of rebels came pouring down the valley brandishing knives and spears and great flaring torches, and set fire to his palace, murdered him and the Queen, and took all the beautiful ladies and gentlemen prisoner. Then they rushed about searching for the Prince, but could not find him as he was walking with his friend, the gardener's son, in the park which surrounded the palace garden. At last a dozen men on horseback set off with their swords to look for him, and saw the two young men strolling about together some way off.

Now the cherry-stone which the beggar had given the gardener's son had been planted not far from the spot on which they were standing when the rebels saw them. It had grown into a magnificent tree, and, as it was now springtime, every branch and twig was a mass of blossom. The Prince and his companion heard a great shouting, and, looking round, they saw the palace in flames, and a number of horsemen bearing down on them with drawn swords. As they were standing unarmed in the midst of an open plain, they knew the only thing they could do was to run to the shelter of a wood in front of them, and try to escape among the trees; so they set off as fast as they could go. The horsemen redoubled their pace with loud shouts.

They were nearing the wood when the Prince, who was in advance, tripped and fell just as they passed the cherry-tree. He flung his arms round the trunk to save himself, and the gardener's son stopped running, for he would not leave him alone to be killed. He made a terribly fierce face and stood in front of his friend with his fists clenched. Then a wonderful thing happened.

The petals of the cherry-blossoms began to fall like snow; hither and thither they went, blown by a wind which had suddenly risen, and filling the air with a whirl of blinding white. It was a storm of whiteness. Soon they lay knee-deep for yards round the tree. It was impossible to see a yard in front

of one's face, and the horsemen galloped about this way and that, bewildered by the showers of petals and calling one to the other in great dismay.

The young men leaned close against the trunk, listening to their cries. Suddenly the gardener's son put his finger on a little rough place in the bark and, to his astonishment, something moved under his hand. A door opened in the trunk. He went in, drawing the Prince after him, and shut it behind them.

They were at the top of a narrow stair which led far down to where a glimmer of light could be seen below. They descended, one after the other, and found themselves in a country they had never seen before. They were standing by a winding stream that ran between alders whose roots were almost in the water; all along the bank was a perfect forest of daffodils, golden and shining. Above, the sky was primrose-yellow with sunset, and a little crescent moon hung in mid-air. There was an island in the water, and on it was sitting the most lovely pale Princess that ever was seen, with a wreath of daffodils in her hair. As they looked at her she waved her hand to them and they both fell in love with her at once.

The Prince and the gardener's son did not know whether to take their way back again up the steps or not, but, when they tried to do so, they found all trace of them had disappeared; besides, they could not tear themselves away from the Princess. She rose and sprang over the little bit of stream that divided the island from the bank and came to meet them. They took off their caps and bowed to the ground.

When she heard how they had reached her country she was much astonished, and invited them to go with her to the palace of her uncle, which was not far off. Her uncle was a King, and, as she had neither father nor mother, he had taken her to live with him and his Queen.

They arrived at the palace and the Princess presented the two friends to her uncle, who asked them to stay at the court as long as they pleased; the Prince was in a very bad temper, for he thought that the Princess seemed to like his companion better than himself.

"*I* will stay with great pleasure," he said, "but this fellow is only the son of my father's gardener. He ought to go to the kitchen."

The King could hardly believe him.

"Is that true?" he asked the gardener's son.

"It is, your Majesty," said the young man.

So he was sent off to live with the servants, and the only comfort he had was the thought that the Princess looked sorry.

The Prince enjoyed himself very much in the palace, but his pleasure was spoilt because the Princess did not take much notice of him and seemed glad when she saw the gardener's son anywhere; she always stopped and spoke kindly to him. This made him furious.


INSIDE THE HUT THE WITCH WAS SITTING BY THE FIRE

One day he went to the King and told him that his former companion was a good-for-nothing fellow, and that he had heard him trying to stir up mischief among the palace servants, and he suggested that he should be sent away and made to work for his living. So the King told the Queen, and the Queen settled that he should be apprenticed to a witch who lived not far off, and who wanted a man to work in the garden and help her to keep her magic books and tools in order. So the gardener's son went.

When the day came for him to go he took his little bundle in his hand, looked up at the Princess's window, and set off for the witch's hut, which lay in the cleft of a hill. When he arrived there he saw, to his great surprise, that a cherry-tree, just like the one in the world he had left, was growing close to the door.

Inside the hut the witch was sitting by the fire; she was the most horrid-looking old woman imaginable; and her double chin hung down below the strings of her cap. Beside her, on the hearth, sat a little half-starved black cat with green eyes.

"I suppose you are the young man from the palace," said she.

"I am," said the gardener's son.

He then made a bow to the witch, and being very well-mannered, he made a bow to the cat too.

"You needn't do that," said the witch. "I am one thing but the cat is quite another. His name is Sootface."

"It's not a very nice name," said the cat, apologetically.

"And you are not a very nice cat," said the witch; "so it is all the more appropriate."

The gardener's son soon found out that the witch was far from being a pleasant person. She was dreadfully unkind to poor Sootface and would beat him unmercifully, and much of his time was spent in trying to defend him from her anger. Besides this, he had to sweep the hut, carry water, dig in the garden, prepare the horrid dishes which she liked to eat, and take care of her magic instruments. As he was clever he did his best to learn all the magic he could; this he did by the cat's advice. When the old woman was out, Sootface would show him where her book of magic was kept and they would take it out and read it together. The cat admired him immensely.

One day the witch set off on a journey and Sootface and the gardener's son went out for a walk. When they had gone some way they sat down by a

hill-side to rest, for the day was hot and they were glad of the shade of a spreading tree which stood by the path. In a few minutes they saw the beautiful Princess who lived in the King's palace approaching them.

She looked very sad, but, when she saw the gardener's son, she smiled and sat down beside him under the tree, telling him that she had run away from the palace when no one was looking because she wanted to consult the witch.

"But the witch is away from home," said he.

"Oh dear! oh dear! what *shall* I do?" cried the Princess, wringing her hands.

Then she explained that her uncle the King wished her to marry the Prince, but that she hated him, and meant to ask the witch for some magic spell to help her to escape from him. She wanted to go far away to the country where her sister lived; for her sister had married a great King and had a kingdom of her own.

"And when will the witch come back?" she asked.

"Not for six weeks," said the gardener's son.

The poor Princess began to cry, which made him very sad, and Sootface mewed at the top of his voice for sympathy.

"If you will stop crying," said he, "I will go with you on your journey and take care of you till you reach the end of it."

"And I will go too," said Sootface.

Now the cat and the gardener's son had brought out the witch's book of magic to study as they rested by the wayside, and they determined to see if it would give them any advice for the journey.

The cat placed the book open before them on the grass and repeated a song he had heard the witch sing:

"Flames and salt,
And queens and kings,
And monkeys' tails,
And golden rings."

Then they all could see how the letters on the page were jumping about, and how they were arranging themselves into a verse. When the verse was made they read it, and found that it told the gardener's son to go back to the

witch's hut before starting and cut a stick from the cherry-tree; so he obeyed at once, and presently returned with a good strong staff in his hand, and at sunset they set off for the kingdom of the Princess's sister.

For some days they got on very well. Sootface marched first, capering and dancing with delight at having escaped from the cruel old witch; the gardener's son followed, his cherry-stick in his hand, and giving his arm to the Princess when she was tired. But, as they were on foot, their progress was very slow, and, having very little money between them, they began to wonder how they should get enough food for each day. The gardener's son and the Princess did not like begging, so the cat ran forward to every village as they approached it, and, with many a sad tale and wonderful antic, asked alms from door to door. Sometimes he said that his father had died and required decent burial; sometimes that he was the eldest of fourteen and was charged with the education of his brothers and sisters, and he always managed to bring back a little money from the charitably disposed persons whom he met.

But, at last, they came to a part of the world where everybody was mean and misers were found in abundance; in one village twenty of them lived in a row in the principal street. They would give Sootface nothing and even leaned out of their windows to shake their fists at him as he passed, and he returned empty-handed to his friends. Finding that things had come to such a pass, they opened the book of magic and Sootface sat in front of it repeating his verse. When he had done this the letters jumped about as before, and soon there was quite a clear verse upon the page. This is what it said:

"When the moon is young and new
Take the cherry-stick with you,
Throw it up into the sky,
Where it falls there let it lie;
Dig beneath it in the grass,
Who knows what may come to pass?"

It happened that that night was the first night of the new moon, so they took the cherry-stick into a field and the gardener's son tossed it high into the air. It fell a little way off, and when they had run to the place where it lay, Sootface began digging with his paws underneath it. Soon he came upon something hard, and, when they had taken it out of the hole, they found a leather bag stuffed full of gold.

After this their troubles vanished, and they began to live in a very grand manner; at each town through which they passed they hired splendid

lodgings and gave largely to beggars, and instead of travelling afoot, they bought two fine horses; Sootface sat on the crupper behind the gardener's son, bowing affably to the people who passed. They bought some magnificent new clothes—those they wore being nearly worn out—and thus they proceeded till the next new moon, when they again tossed up the cherry-stick and found another bag of money.

In time they drew near their journey's end and approached the capital town in which the Princess's sister lived, and they halted and sent the cat before them with a letter to the palace.

When Sootface arrived at the town he took some gold, and, going into a shop, bought a feathered hat and two yards of green satin ribbon with which he ornamented his tail. He then went to an inn, where he purchased a fine piebald horse with an embroidered saddle, and, having thus prepared himself, galloped to the palace. Everyone in the street turned round to look at him, and all the little boys cried "Hooray!" as he thundered by.

After he had presented his letter, the Princess's sister herself received him with much politeness, and a messenger was sent with a great escort of carriages and horsemen to bring the Princess into the city.

IN·THE·VERY·MIDDLE·OF·THE·FEAST·THE·PRINCE
STOOD·UP·IN·HIS·PLACE·CALLING·ON·ALL·TO·LISTEN·

When she came all were charmed with her, and she was asked to make her home at the court; and, as the handsome appearance and fine manners of the gardener's son impressed everybody, he was immediately made captain of the bodyguard and treated with every consideration.

For some time they lived happily, hunting and dancing and feasting and enjoying themselves, and all went well until one day who should arrive in great pomp and style but the Prince from whom the Princess had fled! He had discovered where she was and followed her to her sister's kingdom. When he saw the gardener's son at the head of the bodyguard he was enraged beyond measure.

That night there was a banquet, to which all the celebrated people in the kingdom were invited; if I were to describe it, it would take pages. Everything glittered with cloth of gold and silver and jewels. The table was covered with golden dishes and lamps and white roses, and the Princess was there looking more lovely than anybody, with the Prince at her right hand and the gardener's son at her left.

In the very middle of the feast the Prince stood up in his place calling on all to listen. Then, as silence fell, he told how the Princess had been ordered by her uncle, the King, to marry him, how she had refused and run away, how the young man who had accompanied her was the son of his father's gardener, and how, though he was such a low fellow, he ventured to be in love with her; he demanded that the Princess should be made to marry him the next day and the gardener's son punished. Then he sat down scowling and leaving the Princess's sister and the guests horrified.

"Can you wonder that the Princess ran away from him?" said the cat, from the other end of the table.

Everybody agreed with the cat, for they admired the gardener's son very much, and nobody liked the looks of the Prince; but they did not dare to say anything. That would never have done at all.

"What defence have you to make, sir?" roared the Princess's sister's husband.

"None," said the gardener's son. "I love the Princess and shall do so as long as I live."

"*That* won't be for long," said the Princess's sister.

Then the Princess threw her arms round the neck of the gardener's son and vowed that she loved him too, and that nothing would induce her to marry such a hateful person as the Prince.

All the banquet broke up in confusion, and everyone rushed out of the hall except the cat, who waited to conceal a carving-knife upon his person with which he intended to murder the Prince. But the Prince, who was a coward, had gone off to his room and locked himself in when he saw the way in which some of the guests looked at him.

Next day the gardener's son was put in prison; the Princess cried and Sootface tore his hair, but he had to go. What was his astonishment, on arriving at the prison door, to find that a cherry-tree was growing beside it. He was taken up a winding stair and locked into a cell with a tiny window protected by iron bars. When he looked out he could see into the boughs of the tree, and, above them, a new moon beginning to shine in the sky as it drew towards evening.

When it was night the cat, who had hidden the witch's book of magic as soon as the gardener's son had gone to prison, took it under his arm, climbed into the boughs of the cherry-tree, and began to try and console his friend, who was looking out of the barred window. He opened it, reciting his song:

"Flames and salt
And queens and kings,
And monkeys' tails
And golden rings."

And, by the faint light of the new moon, he saw the letters jumping about till they made this verse:

"When the moon is young and new,
Take the cherry-stick with you;
Toss it up into the sky,
Where it falls there let it lie;
Dig beneath it, you will see
In the ground an iron key.
Master-key of master-keys
Every lock it turns with ease."

The cat ran as fast as he could to the house where the gardener's son had lived and got the cherry-stick; he then took it to a quiet place and flung it up into the air. When it came down he began scraping and digging underneath it till he came upon a heavy key made of iron.

As soon as the people in the palace were safely asleep he unlocked the stable door with the master-key, saddled three swift horses and tied them up

in a thicket a little way off. Having done this and also ascertained that the jailers were sleeping, in the belief that it was impossible for their prisoner to escape, he climbed the cherry-tree again. He crept along a bough which almost touched the barred window and handed the key through the bars to the gardener's son; then he got into the palace and, stealing into the Princess's room, told her what he had done.

The Princess was in bed, but she rose, dressed herself, and went out with the cat. When they reached the thicket they found the gardener's son, who had let himself out with the iron key, and they mounted and rode away as hard as they could go.

They got safely out of the kingdom after a few days' riding, and, in the first city to which they came, the lovers were married. The cat was best man, and a fine figure he made; for, though he had not been able to bring his feathered hat and green ribbons with him, he bought a new one even grander than the first, and a white rosette for his tail in honour of the wedding.

The gardener's son became very rich by reason of the cherry-stick, which brought him a bag of gold at every new moon, and he built a castle for his wife and a fine villa for the cat, with a fountain in the garden which played tunes, and a vinery which was the envy of the civilised world. He became very friendly with the King of the country in which he settled, and, at his death, inherited the kingdom. So the Princess became a Queen after all.

# JACK FROST

## A STORY FOR VERY LITTLE CHILDREN

THERE was once a little old man called Jack Frost who lived up in the sky. He was very small and very wicked and he had a long, long nose and the most dreadful crooked hands in the world. His beard was thin and pointed and stuck out in front of him; and, on his head, he wore a pointed cap made of ice which glittered in the moonlight. When the moon was a crescent he would sit astride of it, looking into the earth below and thinking what horrible mischief he could do next.


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HE·CAME·DOWN·
ON·A·WEATHERCOCK·WHICH·
WAS·FIXED·ON·TOP·OF·
A·LARCH·TREE·
MAY SAFFORD

His favourite amusement was to come jumping down into some nice garden where the flowers were still blooming at the end of the autumn and pinch all their beautiful heads until they died. Sometimes, too, he would pinch the birds' toes, and sometimes, in the winter, he was so cruel as to kill the poor little things outright. He had a heart as hard as a stone, and the more wickedness he could do, the better he was pleased. The birds hated him, and the squirrels hated him, and the gardeners hated him, and no wonder, too.

One day he sat on the moon in a very terrible humour thinking of all the bad things he meant to do; and he took a great jump and came down on a weathercock which was fixed on the top of the larch-tree near a big stone house standing in a garden. Inside the house a little boy in his night-shirt stood at a window; the curtains were closed behind him in the warm room, but he had got out of bed to admire the stars which were bright overhead. He saw Jack Frost swinging about on the weathercock and he did not know who he was.

"Nurse!" he cried, "come and look at the funny little man who is sitting all by himself on the weathercock!"

"Nonsense!" said the nurse. "How can a man sit on the weathercock? Get back into bed this minute or you will have a cold in the morning and I shall be obliged to give you nasty medicine."

"But come! come!" he cried again.

The nurse went to the window and looked out, and, just as she did so, Jack Frost jumped off the weathercock into a holly tree.

"There! did you see that?" shouted the little boy, clapping his hands.

The nurse saw it very well but she could not account for it, so she pretended it had not happened.

"Stuff!" she said; "it was only a bird flying."

"But a bird hasn't got a pointed cap, and a long beard, and a coat with long tails!"

"If I said it was a bird you may depend I was right," said the nurse, pushing him back into bed rather roughly. But she tucked him up well and gave him a kiss, for she was a very kind person, really.

As Jack Frost sat in the holly tree, a robin who happened to be awake came to get a few holly berries, for they were beginning to turn red.

"What are you doing on the holly tree?" he asked as he saw him.

“What’s that to you?” said Jack Frost, who had no manners.

“I am sure he is up to some harm,” said the robin. “I will just wait about and see.”

Jack Frost sat mumbling and laughing to himself; what he really wanted to do was to go into the garden and spoil the flowers.

Presently a squirrel who was out of bed late ran up the trunk of the larch-tree close by; he flourished his tail and stopped to look at Jack Frost.

“Good evening,” he said very civilly, for though he did not like Jack Frost he knew how to behave.

For answer Jack Frost took out a fir-cone he had in his pocket and threw it at the squirrel’s head.

“He has been badly brought up,” said the squirrel, who had several children and was very particular about their behaviour. Then he went and sat at the foot of the tree to watch Jack Frost, for he knew he was wicked, and he thought it better to keep his eye on him.

All this time the horrid little man was looking at the garden wall; he sat very still till he heard “Tu-whoo! Tu-whoo!” close by, and saw a large, soft-winged owl flitting among the branches.

“Tu-whoo! Jack Frost!” he cried, as he sat down beside him. “How are you this evening?”

For answer Jack Frost kicked up his heels very rudely in the owl’s face. The bird flew silently away, but he did not go far; he knew Jack Frost was up to no good, so he perched hard by and watched him with his round, burning eyes.

When all was quiet again, Jack Frost went hopping from tree to tree till he got close to the garden wall, where he could see over into the flower-beds; he did not know that the robin, the squirrel, and the owl were all looking at him from the places in which they had hidden themselves.

Such a lovely garden as it was! There were green walks and hedges and borders of heliotrope and pansies; and, all round the hedges, rows of dahlias and hollyhocks stood like kings and queens, red, yellow, pink, white, and gorgeous orange. When they saw the little wicked man they were terrified, poor things, and though they tried to look bold and stand up straight, they knew in their hearts that he had come to kill them.

Close by stood a cottage in which the gardener was asleep in his bed, wearing a fine red nightcap with a handsome tassel on the end of it. He was very kind to the little boy who lived in the stone house, for he had no children of his own, and he liked to take him out and show him birds' nests and flowers, and teach him to dig and plant and water the garden.

In the middle of his sleep he was wakened by hearing a strange noise outside. He sat up in bed.

"Tap, tap," it went on.

"Who's there?" cried the gardener, jumping out of bed and opening the window.

The robin was on the window-sill, very much excited and dancing about. "Please, sir," said he, "Jack Frost is sitting up in a tree close to the garden."

"Thank you! Thank you!" said the gardener, beginning to put on his trousers. "I'll get up this moment!"

He had just got them on when a loud scraping began on the window-sill.

"Who's there?" cried the gardener, again.

"Me!" said the squirrel; "quick! quick! Jack Frost is sitting on the garden wall."

"Thank you! Thank you!" said the gardener, beginning to put on his boots.

In another moment there was a great cry outside. "Tu-whoo! Tu-whoo!" and a great flapping of wings.

"Come out! Come out!" screamed the owl. "Jack Frost has jumped down into the garden."

"Thank you! thank you!" cried the gardener, catching up a big stick and running out of the house.

Jack Frost was in a flower bed looking up into the face of a beautiful pink hollyhock and thinking which of its blossoms he would pinch first, when he heard a loud shout and saw the gardener with his red nightcap and his big stick coming in at the garden door. He was most dreadfully frightened, and began to run with all his might. The gardener was after him at once, so he tried to reach the gooseberry bushes and hide himself among them, hoping it would be too dark for anybody to see him.

But the owl, who could see everything at night, flew after him, calling out, “There goes Jack Frost among the gooseberry bushes! There he is! This way! This way!” So he found it impossible to hide himself. It was a good thing for him that he could run much faster than the gardener, because he was so thin and had such long legs.

He ran and ran, and the gardener puffed and blew and could not catch him, so at last he took up a flower pot and threw it as hard as he could at Jack Frost. It hit him in the very middle of the back and knocked him flat on his face on the path. He tried to get up, but the gardener got hold of him by the collar and shook and beat him with his big stick till he prayed for mercy. Then he took him by the ear and dragged him out of the garden.

At last Jack Frost wriggled out of his grasp and ran for his life; he dashed into the larch-tree and climbed up the branches to the topmost bough where the weathercock was. There was no moon for him to get on to, for she had gone to bed and the sky was so high that he could not jump up all the way at once, so he was obliged to sit hidden in the tree until the next night.

The next night was misty and the moon came only occasionally out of the cloud. The little boy who lived in the stone house got out of his bed again to see her.

While he was looking, Jack Frost took a mighty leap and sprang up right through the clouds.

“Look! Look!” cried the little boy, “there is the funny man again!”

“It’s you who are funny,” said the nurse; and she hurried him back into bed and gave him one of his favourite toys to put under his pillow.

She knew nothing about little men who jumped among the trees.

Jack Frost landed safely on the moon and then flew high, high up. But he never came down into that garden again.

# THE END

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# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Golden Heart* by Violet Jacob]