

STORIES TOLD BY
:: THE MILLER ::



VIOLET JACOB

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STORIES

TOLD BY THE MILLER

BY VIOLET JACOB

AUTHOR OF "IRRESOLUTE CATHERINE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

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1909

TO
MY BOY HARRY

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STORIES TOLD BY THE MILLER

Janet and little Peter lived in an old white-washed cottage that stood in a field by the border of the mill-pool. It was a tiny, weather-stained cot, to which a narrow path led through a gap in the low wall of the highroad. Across the road stood the mill itself, grey, windowless, and solid, with stone steps leading up to a door, through which, on a grinding day, you could hear the noise of the machinery and see the dusty atmosphere within. Peter and Janet thought the mill-field over the road a charming place; and so it was, for at one end the overflow from the tree-hidden dam poured down its paved slide in a white waterfall, to wander, a zigzagging stream, through the field and out, under the road, to the pool near their cottage. From the farther side of the dam the mill-lead ran evenly below the gnarled roots of the trees shadowing its course, and was lost in that dark hole in the wall behind which the flashing wheel turned. The water came racing out to join the overflow and dive with it through the causeway, coming up in the pool beyond. From there it meandered over the country into the river, which carried it to the sea. On wild days in winter you might hear the roaring sound of the North Sea beating against the coast.

Janet and her brother were orphans, and their lives were very hard; for their grandmother, with whom they had been lately sent to live, was a cruel old woman who beat poor little Peter when she was out of temper. Janet came in for rough words, and blows, too, sometimes, although she was almost seventeen, and old enough to take care of herself. Many a time she longed to run away, but in her heart she knew that she would never do so because she could not leave her brother alone. She was a good girl, and a pretty one besides, for her hair was like the corn and she was as slender as a bulrush. The neighbours whose boys and girls passed on their way from school would not let their children have anything to do with little Peter, for many thought that his wicked old grandmother was a witch. The children had made a rhyme that they used to sing. It was like this:

“Peter, Peter, the witch’s brat,
Lives in the house with a green-eyed cat!
Peter, Peter, we jump for joy,
Throwing stones at the witch’s boy!”

And then sometimes they would throw them, but not when Janet was by, for she would catch them and shake them.

“*You* are the green-eyed cat!” they would shout, as they saw her angry face. But they took care to run as they said it.

In spite of their troubles, the brother and sister were not always unhappy, for there were many things they liked. One was the crooked old cherry-tree that grew between their cottage and the pool, and when the leaves turned fiery rose-colour in the autumn Peter would pick them up as they dropped and make them stand in rows against the wood-pile, pretending they were armies of red soldiers. The brightest and reddest ones were the generals, the paler ones the privates. And the wild cherries tasted delicious.

One day Peter was crying bitterly. The old woman had beaten him and he was very sad.

“Come away,” said Janet. “We will go to the mill, for I can hear the grinding going on. No one will notice if we slip into the field, and we can look right in and see the wheel itself.”

Peter forgot all about his trouble and stopped crying, for she had never allowed him to go so near the wheel before. They set off and went round the back of the mill buildings. Oh, how charmed he was! Janet lifted him up and he looked through the big hole. Round and round went the great spokes of the wheel, and the water, clear as crystal in the darkness, dripped from it and fell in showers into the brown swirl below. The sides of the walls were green with slime and little clumps of fern, and the long mosses streamed down like tresses of emerald-coloured hair. At last he drew back and she sat him on the ground. Then they turned round to go home, and nearly jumped out of their skins, for there was the miller looking at them. He was a tall young man, with a brown face and clothes covered with white dust; even the leather leggings he wore were white, and his hat, which he had pushed back, was white too.

“Well, my man,” said he to Peter, “and what do you think of the wheel?”

Peter did not know what to say, he was so much taken aback.

“When I was a little boy,” said the miller, “I was just like you, and couldn’t keep away from a mill-wheel if there was one within twenty miles. ‘When I’m a man,’ said I, ‘it’s a miller I’ll be.’ And a miller I am.”

But little Peter was still too much startled to understand friendliness. He pointed to the cottage over the road.

“You won’t tell grandmother we came here?” he asked, his eyes filling with tears.

“Not I,” said the miller.

“She would beat him if you did,” remarked Janet.

“That’s bad,” observed the miller, pushing his hat farther back. “I had a grandmother, too, when I was a little lad; she had a great cap and horn spectacles.”

“And did she beat you?” said Peter, gaining courage.

“Not she!” exclaimed the miller. “But she used to comfort me if anyone else did. Such fine tales she used to tell me, too—some out of a book and some out of her head! I’ve got the book in the house now.”

Little Peter loved stories more than anything in the world, and every moment he was growing less afraid of the miller.

“Oh, tell me one!” he cried. “Please tell me one!”

“Sit down, then,” he said, “and you, too, my pretty lass. The first I can mind her telling me was about this very mill. Would you like to hear about that?”

“Yes, yes!” cried little Peter.

And so they sat down by the mill-lead, and the miller began his story.

THE STORY OF THE WATER-NIX

My grandmother was a wonderful woman (said he): there was nothing she heard that she ever forgot and she had a good education at her back, too. Not a thing happened but she could make a story out of it, and on the days when she went to market she used to take me with her in the cart; she would drive and I sat up beside her, and it was then I heard from her what I am going to tell you now.

Long ago there lived in the deep water round the wheel a Water-Nix. She was the most beautiful lady ever seen, though it was not many had the luck to catch sight of her, for she seldom came out of her hiding-place near the walls. A body might live here a year and never see her. But sometimes, on light nights, she would dive under the door and swim out, and even sit up on the bank, with her thin white smock trailing in the water. Once—so grandmother said—the miller's man saw her perched upon the wall by the road, just where the stream runs under it. The drops were falling off her white feet on to the grass—so he told grandmother—and though there was only a little crescent like a sickle in the sky that night, he could see the water-lilies twisted in her hair. She was laughing and holding up her arms at the moon.



“ONCE . . . THE MILLER’S MAN SAW HER.”

And have *you* ever seen her? inquired little Peter, his eyes round.

Never, said the miller. Well, to go on: Sometimes she would get through the causeway and go and lie in the pool over yonder near your cottage, floating and sending the ripples widening in great circles round her.

Now, it happened one day that the Nix was in her place, hidden behind the door near the wheel, when a pedlar passed by on the road. He had a pack on his back, gold rings in his ears and a staff in his hand; for he was a lusty fellow, landed off a ship that had come in from the Baltic, and was travelling inland to sell what wares he could carry. He was singing as he went, and the Nix came out and swam close under the walls to hear him. He sang of the sea, and there was something in his voice that reminded you of the wind droning in the rigging. (How grandmother knew that I don't know, for she wasn't there to hear him; but she had once been in a ship off the coast of Jutland, so I suppose she guessed it.)

“Out and home and out again,
As the tide rolls heavily,
With the ship to steer and the fog to fear,
By the grey banks near the sea.

“Hand to the helm and heart to the blast,
And face to the driving rain,
And the sea runs high to the glowering sky
As we sail for the North again.

“Hark to the mermaids off the shore,
As they sing so bonnilie
Through the rocks and caves to the sounding waves
In the grey lands out at sea,
In the caves across the sea.”

She had never heard such words or such a tune in her life, and she rose, head and shoulders, out of the water, crying to the pedlar to sing it again. But when he saw the yellow hearts of the water-lilies round her head, he took them for gold, and he leaned over the little wall and made a snatch at them. The Nix dived under again and went back like a flash to the darkness by the wheel.

But all day long she sat there, singing to herself all she could remember of the song of the pedlar; she was like one possessed:

“By the grey banks near the sea,”

she sang, rocking herself about,

“In the caves across the sea.”

Now, as time went on her longing grew stronger and stronger: all the day she thought of the sea and the grey caves of the coast, and all night she sat

on the wall, looking out eastwards and listening for any sound of water that might come inland. (It was at this time that the miller's man saw her.) Why this happened to her I can't tell, for I don't know. Perhaps her relations were those sea-kelpies that haunt the Baltic.

Be that as it may, one night she crept out of the pool and followed the banks of the wet ditch by which it escapes, making for the river. It must have been a queer sight to see her as she went, with her wet garments clinging round her, running down the fields; I always used to fancy when I was a boy how she would look from side to side, afraid of being seen, and how she would stop here and there to listen for the sea. She reached the marshes and ran out till she felt the incoming tide about her feet. The steeple of the town and its lights were strange to her, but long before she got near them, the water was deep, and she swam under the bridge and out through the shipping in the harbour till she heard the surf and saw the white line over the bar.

Outside the sea was thundering and booming, and the salt spray flew in her face, for a rough night was setting in. Farther and farther she swam, and soon she felt the current running strong with her towards the cliffs that stand miles out and look towards Denmark. The gulls came swooping over her, but she did not care; she had seen them at times screaming behind the plough in the fields round the mill. But, as the wind rose and the waves lifted her up and tossed her, she grew frightened; for all she knew of waters was the stillness of the pool.

The storm was louder as night went on, and by morning she was so much buffeted about that she lay floating among the seaweed. She had no strength left to go one way or another, and at last she was cast up on a bit of sandy shore and sat under the cliffs wondering what to do, for the place was strange and she was afraid of all the world. A track wound upwards, so she followed it till it brought her out high above the sands. The size of the sea bewildered her and she gazed about for some place in which to hide.

Close by was a little circle of tumble-down wall; she looked over it into a tangle of weeds, and saw what seemed to her the strangest thing of all, for she did not know it was a deserted graveyard. If she had she would have been no wiser. The crosses leaned sideways out of the rank thistles and hemlock. Some of the stones lay flat, with only their carved corners sticking out and some had the shape of tables; some were no more than broken pieces. But one of the graves had once been a very grand place, with a little building over it to shelter the stone; its roof was battered in, but it had a helmet and strange words cut above the doorway. The Nix made her way to

it through the hemlock; in she went and crouched against its farthest corner. It was the quietest spot she had seen. She was so weary that she did not know what to do, and the sun dazzled her, for it was growing strong and she was accustomed to dark places.

She had lain there some time when she heard steps not far off. Someone was coming along the ridge of the cliffs. In another minute a brown goat had jumped into a gap in the circle, and stood staring in as though it were counting the tombstones, moving its upper lip from side to side. Goats seldom passed the mill, and she was half scared at its beard and wagging ears and the horns above its solemn face. As she looked a boy appeared behind it—a rough-looking boy, with a shock of yellow hair and a switch in his hand to drive the beast with. When he saw her he set up a loud cry of terror, for he did not expect to find anyone in such a place, and he had never seen a Water-Nix in his life. Then he took to his heels, and the goat galloped after him, baaing as it went. The Nix lay quite still; she could not think why anyone should run away like that.

She curled herself closer into her refuge.

Presently she heard a noise like the beating of pots and pans and voices coming nearer. She crept to the wall and looked over. A whole crowd of boys was coming with sticks in their hands, shouting, and as they caught sight of her, they cried louder, brandishing them. Some even had the handles of old brooms and the goat-boy was at their head, beating a tin kettle. “*There she is!*” he cried.

Then the poor Nix understood that they had come out after her, and she climbed out of the graveyard on the side nearest the sea and began to run for her life. She rushed down a narrow path winding among great boulders, and, when she was exhausted, she crept behind one of them and lay there till the voices had died away and she thought her pursuers had given up the chase. When all was still she rose and went on, not knowing where to go for peace. Great tears stood in her eyes as she thought of the mill and the trees by the dam.

In time she came to a huge crag standing out into the waves and joined to the land by only a neck of rock no wider than the top of a wall. She had no fear of growing giddy, for she knew nothing of the uncomfortable things that happen to human beings, so she crossed it. The place looked so lonely that she was sure there could be nobody there. When she was over she turned the corner of a rock and found herself at the foot of a high wall, pierced by little shot windows and broken by a heavy iron door. In her

astonishment she sprang back, for in front of it stood a tall man with a fierce face and eyes like a hawk. The Water-Nix turned and fled. Poor thing! she did not get far, for he bounded after her and caught her by the wrist. She struggled and fought, but it was no good; he seized her in his strong arms, and carried her in through the door.

Now, inside the door was the court of a great tower, which was hidden on the landward side by the top of the crag, and the man with the fierce face was a robber who had made his home in it. The people who lived in the country round were terrified of him, for he would come out at night and harry their villages, robbing both rich and poor. No one could catch him, because the narrow crossing over which the Nix had come was the only way of getting at the tower, and he and his men would shoot from behind the loopholes, killing all who approached. They could not get at him from the sea, for the rock ran straight down into it like a wall and nobody could climb it.

The robber dragged the Nix into his tower, not because he wanted to kill her, but because he had no wife to be mistress of it, and he thought that so beautiful a lady would be the very person. He was not at all cruel to her, and he brought her all the finest things in his treasure-house. He offered her jewels he had plundered, necklaces of pearls and diamonds stolen from the merchant ships he had attacked; for he was a pirate too and his galleys were anchored in the deep water of the caves below his rock. But she scarcely looked at them; the only ornament she cared for was her wreath of water-lilies that she used to pluck from the mill-pool.

But at last the time came when he got angry. "To-night I am going out," he said. "The only thing I have not stolen is a wedding-ring, and now I want one. I shall land at the first village up the coast, for I know that the fishermen are at sea, and at the first house I go to I will seize the wife's wedding-ring. To-morrow we will be married with it."

Among the robber's captives was a priest he had taken prisoner, so he told him that he must be ready to marry them as soon as he could get back with the ring. The priest was sorry for the Water-Nix and did not want to do it.

"You will have to," said the robber, "or you shall be thrown into the sea."

Then the poor Water-Nix wrung her hands and cried and sobbed so piteously that the priest's heart smote him, and he cudgelled his brains to think of some plan to save her. At last he found one. As soon as the robber's

back was turned he said: "Bring me the diamond necklace that he gave you and I will see what we can do."

When he had got it he went to one of the robber's men.

"Look at this," said he. "If you will open the great door to-night when your chief is gone, and let us all three out, you shall have it the moment we reach the mainland. It is so valuable that, if you sell it, the price will enable you to live honestly for the rest of your days."

"But I don't care for honesty," said the robber's man.

"Well, never mind about being honest," said the priest. "You can be rich without that."

"That is a grand idea," replied the other. "The robber is a cruel master, so I will do as you say. But if you don't give me the necklace the moment we get out of sight of the tower, I will kill you and the Water-Nix too."

So when it was dark, and the robber's galley had rowed away, the priest took the necklace, hiding it under his clothes, and he and the Nix stole out to the door. Everyone was asleep or drinking but the man who waited for them with the key he had contrived to get.

They let themselves out so noiselessly that no one heard them, for the robber's man had oiled the lock, and when they reached the mainland the priest gave him the necklace.

"Well, I'm off. Good luck to you!" he said, as he snatched it. Then he took to his heels and ran off with his treasure.

"And now I think that is all I can do for you," said the priest. And he left the Water-Nix standing where she was, without so much as giving her his blessing. The sooner he could put a few miles between himself and the robber's tower the better, he thought.

The Nix looked round and round about her. Below lay the sea, moaning and washing the shore, and not far off was the outline of the little graveyard in the faint starlight. She ran on along the cliffs, for far away a few lights of the town by the river's mouth could be seen twinkling in a row, and she knew that up that river lay the mill. As morning dawned she found herself in a thick wood. She was glad, for what she had seen of people made her wish to get as far from them as possible, and she determined to hide all day in the wood, and travel on all night. She ran far in among the trees, and threw herself down on a bank and fell asleep, for she was almost worn out and her feet ached from the rough ground.

She had slept a long time when she woke and saw, to her dismay, that someone else was sitting on the bank, quite near. He was a long, thin, pale young man, with lank, untidy hair and shabby clothes, and he was reading aloud to himself out of a book on his knees. As she moved he turned and saw her over the fallen trunk behind which she lay. He shut his book, taking care to keep a finger between the leaves to mark the place, and looked calmly at her. He was the first person she had met who did not seem surprised to see her. All the same, she prepared to run away.

“You needn’t be afraid,” said the student—for that is what he was. “I notice that you are a Water-Nix, and, that being so, you are the very person I should wish to see. This is a poetry-book that I am reading; the writing is fine enough, but there is nothing in it as fine as what *I* am going to write. I am going to make a poem. Three days, I assure you, have I wandered in this wood trying to think of a subject for it, and now I have it. It shall be no less than my meeting with yourself.”

And he said a long sentence in Latin, which the Nix could not understand; but, then, neither could she understand much of anything else he had said, so it didn’t matter.

“Ah, yes, you are a Water-Nix,” he continued—“*Nixiana Aquatica.*”

And he took a pencil out of his pocket and scribbled down a note on the margin of his book.

It was some time before he left off saying learned things, and began to consider how his companion had come to a place so far from the river, where not even a stream ran through the trees. He listened to the tale she told him with astonishment, and at last he put aside his book and promised to help her to find the way to the mill. He was very sorry for her, though now and then he would forget her presence as he pulled out his pencil to write down the beginning of the poem he meant to make.

When night came the student and the Nix started off. He walked in front, and she went after him, like a dog following its master. In the morning they hid in an overgrown quarry, for she was much too frightened to go abroad in the daylight; and thus they travelled till, after midnight on the second day, they found themselves close to the highroad which ran towards the mill-pool. They sat down to rest. All was so still that you could hear sounds ever so far off, and they soon made out that someone was coming to meet them. Then a man passed on the road; they could not see him, but he was singing to himself. And what he sang was this:

“Out and home and out again,
As the tide rolls heavily;
With the ship to steer and the fog to fear,
By the grey banks near the sea,
In the caves across the sea.”

The Nix held her breath as the pedlar—for it was he—went by, and when he began the second verse the thought of everything that had happened went from her. All she could hear or remember was the beating of the grey sea, calling her with its compelling voice.

Without a word she got up and followed the pedlar and left the student sitting by himself in the dark. He sat open-mouthed.

Back to him from the distance came the sound of footsteps and the floating refrain.

“Bless me!” he exclaimed. “Bless me! *Nixiana Maritima!*”

But it was too dark to write that down on the margin of his book.

The pedlar walked on singing, and she kept a little way behind him, treading softly. On they went till the first streak of daylight broke in the sky, for he was on his way to the town; he had sold all his wares and meant to go to sea again in the first ship he could find leaving the harbour. When they entered the streets all the world was asleep, and they passed through the town unnoticed. Beside the quay a forest of masts stood dark against the sky, and here the pedlar halted, looking about him. Then he turned and saw the Nix.

“Hullo!” he cried roughly. “What’s this?”

But before he could get nearer she dived into the water. The pedlar began to shout. In a minute the place was awake, for at the sound of his voice men sleeping in their boats at the quay’s edge leaped ashore to see what was the matter, windows were opened in the houses, and everyone was calling out to know what had happened.

The Nix looked back and saw the crowd collecting. She swam for the harbour’s mouth with all her strength, and she was so afraid that they might put to sea and follow her that by the time the sun rose she was miles out in the clear waters. All was blue around her, sky and wave, and the land lay behind, a faint line in the sunshine. The great ocean was as calm as her own pool by the mill and her heart sang as she went out farther and farther. It seemed to her that the voice’s of the mermaids the pedlar had sung about

were resounding from all the caves on these haunted shores. She had never been so happy.

She went on and on. Time and space and distance were as nothing; everything was falling from her but the sense of a great joy.

Far in the distance something was steering fast to meet her, making white splashes on the blue expanse, and soon she could see a face and brown arms rising above the surface. A great sea-kelpie was coming towards her, the seaweed trailing from his hair and his shoulders breasting the water. As they met he held out his hand.

She put hers into it. Then they swam out till the coast was no more, and the remembrance of the world of men was no more, and disappeared together into the mists of the North.

The miller ceased, and little Peter sat spellbound for a while, for he had forgotten everything but the adventures of the Water-Nix.

“And what happened to her?” he said at last.

“I can’t tell you any more,” replied the miller; “and how grandmother knew as much as that I don’t know, though, to be sure, she understood more than most people about everything.”

“The kelpie would take care that she came to no harm,” said Janet.

“You’re right there,” said the miller. “I make no doubt but they’re living happily among the sea-caves hundreds of miles away.”

“But the man with the untidy hair—you haven’t told what happened to him,” said the little boy.

“Ah yes, there’s more to be said about him,” answered the miller. “He wrote his poem, and it made him rich. There was so much Latin in it that people thought it wonderful. That brought him in a heap of money. He married and had a large family, and one of his daughters was my grandmother. She was a fine girl, and it seemed to him a bad come-down in life when she married the miller and came to live here. But they were very happy, for all that, and it was from the miller’s man she heard the story of the Water-Nix.”

“Is it because your great-grandfather was a poet that you can tell stories so well?” asked Janet, with some awe.

“Well, it might be,” said the miller. “Anyhow, it’s a fine notion. I never thought of it before.”

THE KING OF GROWGLAND'S CROWN

It was almost a week before the brother and sister saw the miller again, but one evening as Janet was coming down the road he jumped over the wall from the mill-field.

“Where’s the little boy?” he asked. “I hope your grandmother has not been bad to him again.”

“No,” said Janet, “she’s very cross, but she hasn’t beaten him for more than a week.”

“You go and fetch him,” said he. “I have been looking for the book I told you about—grandmother’s story-book. I’m not busy to-night, and we can sit in the field, and I’ll read him a story.”

“How lovely!” cried Janet. “I’ll run and bring him at once.”

“Yes, and mind *you* come back, too,” called the miller after her.

In a few minutes she returned, with Peter jumping and clapping his hands beside her, and when they had found a nice place, they sat down to read.

They sat on the roots of a tree by the mill-lead, with the water babbling at their feet. The book was old and tattered, and, unfortunately, there were no pictures in it, but they did not mind that. They could see just as good pictures for themselves, in their own minds’ eyes.

“I will read you a story about three brothers,” said the miller to Peter; “and there’s a magpie in it, too, and a pretty young woman like your sister.”

And he opened his book and began:

There was once upon a time a widow who had three sons; they were fine, strong young men, and the two elder thought themselves more than commonly clever. The youngest did not think much about anything but his business, which was to keep the sheep, look after the horses, and supply the pot with the game he brought home. He was a hard worker, and when he lay down at night, he was glad enough to sleep, though the others would usually sit up scheming how they might grow rich. He thought them rather grand fellows, all the same, and quite expected they would do something wonderful.

One day the widow called them all and told them it was high time they saw something of the world. "To-morrow morning you shall all be off round it," she said to the eldest. "You must start facing east, your next brother facing west, and when you meet in the middle at the other side you can compare all you have learned. As for you," she went on, turning to the youngest, "you shall start southward, and no doubt will be in time to fall in with them and profit by their knowledge." She also had a great opinion of her elder sons.

So off they went, and when they had gone half round the world, the two elder brothers came face to face at the other side in a sandy hollow. They sat down and began to talk.

"Well, brother, and what have you done?" asked the second.

"*Done!*" exclaimed the first brother; "what do you mean? I haven't made a penny or seen anybody I think as well of as myself. There is nothing to be got by giving oneself all this trouble. The world is an overrated place, I can tell you. What have *you* got out of it?"

"Nothing," said the second; "and I agree heartily with every word you have said."

At this moment they looked up and saw the third brother coming over a hillock. He did not look much more prosperous than themselves.

"We won't tell him," they said; "we will pretend we have done wonders and made our mark, and then we'll get a pretext to be rid of him before he finds out the truth. It would never do for him to lose his respect for us."

"Hi!" cried the youngest brother, "this is luck indeed!" And when he had greeted them he sat down beside them in the sand.

"Hullo! how are you?" said the eldest.

"Oh, well enough," replied he.

"And how have you got on, and how much money have you made?"

"Oh, no money," replied the young man, "but I think I have picked up a little experience."

"Pooh!" cried the others in a breath. "That's all very well, but it isn't good enough for *us*."

"Are you rich, then?" asked the youngest.

“Rich?” cried the eldest, “did you say rich? I am rolling in gold. I have a great shop in which the merchandise of four kingdoms changes hands, and my counting-house is so fine that two Emperors drove up last Sunday and asked if they might be allowed to go over it. I said yes, of course. There was a Bishop in the carriage, too.”

The youngest brother’s eyes grew round. “Well, that’s grand indeed,” he said.

“And I,” broke in the middle brother—“I have no taste for buying and selling; in fact, I think it rather low. But a lady fell in love with me, so I married her. She inherited money from a Duke, who is her uncle, and she asks nothing better than I should spend it.”

“Well, well, well!” exclaimed the youngest.

Then he looked curiously at his companions. “And how is it,” said he, “that such great people as you have come here on foot? I should have imagined you would have arrived on horseback or in carriages.”

“Oh, we live so close by that it was not worth while disturbing the servants,” they replied quickly.

“Then you live in the nearest town and in the same house?” continued he.

“Yes, yes,” answered the second. “My wife cherishes me so that she insisted upon my brother living with us, for fear I should feel homesick. It was very good of her, but what an idea to be homesick for such a hole as our mother’s farm, when I live in the finest house in the market-square!”

“Indeed, brothers,” said the youngest, “I think all this is capital, and so much so that I shall certainly go back with you at once. I will start for home early to-morrow, but you shall give me a lodging for the night, and I promise you that I shall rejoice at the sight of your prosperity. I have slept under the stars every night since I began journeying, and a good soft bed will be a treat to me. Besides which, I shall see my sister-in-law and be able to tell mother all about her.”

At this the elder men’s faces fell, but there was nothing for it but to go back by the way they had come to the nearest town. However, their brother walked behind as they went, so they had time to invent a way out of their difficulties. When they reached their destination, they paused at the town gate, telling him to stay where he was while they went to prepare for his coming.

“All right, then,” said he, “but in five minutes I shall follow.”

They could not help smiling at his innocence, for they intended to escape as quickly as they could.

“How are you going to find the way?” they inquired.

“Why, haven’t you been telling me that you live in the finest house in the market-square? I shall soon find that.”

This was rather a blow to the others, for they knew that he was swift of foot and that they would not get far in five minutes.

“It doesn’t matter,” whispered the middle brother; “I know a fine trick. We will have dinner and a night’s lodging at his expense, and in the morning we will be off before he is awake, and leave him to pay the reckoning. Come, look sharp, or he will be after us.”

With that they ran to a large, handsome inn which stood in the middle of the market-square. It had a tower on it, and an entrance good enough for an Alderman’s family.

“Landlord,” said the middle brother, “I am a gentleman from a distance, and in a most unexpected dilemma. Help me out of it, and I can assure you you shall profit. A great lord, finding that I am in the town, has sent me a message. You must know that he is under heavy obligations to me, and has sworn that on the day I am married he will give me a thousand crowns as a wedding gift. Now, I am not married at all; but if he arrives and can be made to believe I have a wife, he will immediately redeem his word. My plan is simply this: I shall entertain him well at your inn, and, if you have a daughter—or even a decent-looking serving-maid—who will sit at the head of the table during dinner and act as though she were mistress of the house, I will divide the sum with you the moment I receive it. Should he go back from his word, there will be no harm done, and I will pay you liberally for your hospitality. I will give the girl a new gown, too, as a remembrance of her assistance.”

Now, the landlord was the first rogue in the kingdom, and the scheme so pleased him that he nearly died of laughter.

“You are a sharp one!” he exclaimed. “Why, I have a daughter clever enough to act any part in the world, and she shall do her best, you may be sure. Come, I will get ready a good dinner and take down the signboard, so that the place shall appear as a private house.”

By the time he had done this and acquainted the girl with the plan, a loud thumping was heard at the door, and the third brother stood outside.

Now, the landlord's girl was goddaughter to a witch, and very beautiful; she had also learned some useful things from her godmother, who had brought her up till she was sixteen and obliged to return and help her father with his inn. So, when the plot was explained, she said: "I hope no harm will come of it," and before getting ready to preside at the table, she took a good look at the two men.

"They have rascals' faces," she said to herself.

She then ran to a top window, and looked out to see what sort of a person the great lord who was coming to dinner might be.

It chanced that, as she leaned out, the third brother glanced up.

"If that is my brother's wife," said he, "she is indeed a beauty!" And he sighed, wishing that such luck had come his way.

When the girl saw his face, she thought:

"That is no great lord, but he is a handsome fellow, for all that. I will see, at least, that he gets the best of everything in the house."

So when the table was spread, and before the three brothers came into the dining-room, the girl said to the magpie that hung in a cage behind the window-curtain:

"Take notice of every word that is said to-night, and repeat it to me, or I will wring your neck!"

The magpie promised, and she went forward to receive the guest.

"Here," said the second brother, "is madam, my wife."

With that the youngest brother kissed his sister-in-law heartily.

"I knew he was no fool," said the girl to herself.

As dinner progressed she made herself so pleasant that the room rang with joy and merriment, and she pressed all the most delicate dishes on the youngest brother; nor did she fail to notice that whenever he addressed either of his companions as 'brother,' which he did frequently, the two exchanged covert glances of annoyance.

"All is not right here," she exclaimed under her breath, "for, were he the great lord they say, there are no two men alive who would more willingly call him a relation!" And she smiled rather slyly.

“Why do you smile, wife?” asked the second brother.

“My love,” replied she, “at finding so great a personage a member of your family.”

No one knew what to say, for the youngest brother feared she was laughing at them all, and the two elder were sure of it.

However, time flew, the wine sparkled, the hot roast dishes smoked, and it was hard to say which of the four was in the best humour.

When the feast was done the girl got up, and, taking a silver candlestick from the table, said:

“Husband, I see that our guest is weary with travelling and his eyes heavy with sleep. I myself will show him the guest-chamber, and assure myself that the servants have made his bed well.”

So saying, she led the youngest brother to the room prepared for him, walking before him with the lights. As he went he could not cease admiring the fine plaits of dark hair which hung down her back and regretting that the evening was over and he would be so soon deprived of her company.

When they got to the bedchamber, she made every pretext to remain away from the dining-room as long as possible, smoothing the pillows and drawing the window-curtains close, that the starlight might not disturb his sleep. When she had bidden him good-night, she went downstairs as slowly as she could.



“THEN THE BIRD TOLD HER THE WHOLE PLOT.”

“I had no notion it was so late!” she exclaimed as she entered. “Now that my part is done, I may tell you two gentlemen that the longer you sit here burning our oil and occupying our best room, the more you will be charged for it. Now, tell me if you are satisfied with my performance, and then take

my advice and go to bed for the sake of your pockets. There is a good room ready for you upstairs.”

The brothers congratulated her on the way she had played her part, and went off. Nothing could have suited them better, for they meant to slip out of the house and be gone long before dawn broke.

When the girl had showed them the way, she ran downstairs to the magpie’s cage.

“Quick, quick!” she cried, “tell me everything those knaves said to each other while I was taking the stranger to the guest-chamber.”

“Oh, mistress,” exclaimed he, “we have indeed dined in evil company!”

“You have not dined at all,” she said, “and never shall if I hear not every word of their talk.”

Then the bird told her the whole plot, for the brothers had discussed it openly in her absence. “Besides all this,” he concluded, “they mean to run away in the night and leave the young man to pay the reckoning.”

At this the girl ran straight upstairs and locked the two brothers in; she took off her shoes and turned the key so softly that they heard nothing. Afterwards she slipped out into the yard, and, taking a harrow which lay in the outhouse, drew it under their window and turned it with the spikes uppermost, to deter them from jumping out. She then knocked at the door of the guest-chamber.

“Come out!” she cried through the keyhole; “there is knavery afoot!”

When the youngest brother opened the door she told him all, and when he had hurried on a few clothes he came down to the dining-room to hear what the magpie had discovered.

“I shall be out of this as quick as I can,” he remarked when the bird had finished. “My only grief is that I shall never see you again. I am really very glad you are not my brother’s wife, for I had much rather you were mine.”

“So had I,” said the girl.

So they determined to depart together.

“You are never going to leave me behind!” exclaimed the magpie.

“Well, then, come along,” said the young man, opening the cage door. “When you are tired of flying you can have a lift on my shoulder; I am not going to let my wife trouble herself with your cage.”

“I am not your wife yet,” said the girl, tossing her head.

“That’s easily mended,” replied the youngest brother.

So they crept softly out of the inn and took the road long before the sky showed signs of morning. But at last the east grew grey in the darkness and bars of rose-colour hung over the sea of primrose and gold from which the sun was about to rise. They sat down beside a stream to rest, for they had come a good long distance.

“Fly into the nearest tree,” said the youngest brother to the magpie, “and wait till the risen sun shows you the nearest steeple. Where there is a church there will be a priest, so, when you have directed us to it, you can go there yourself and rouse him. We will follow and wait in the church porch till you bring him to marry us.”

As soon as it was fully light the bird obeyed, and having lit on a church steeple, he called to a man in the road below to direct him to the priest’s house.

The priest was just getting out of bed, but he ordered the magpie to be admitted. When he had heard his request he promised to set out with his prayer-book as soon as he had eaten his breakfast, and the bird, after thanking him courteously, flew off again to the church. “I forgot to ask who you are,” called the priest after him, with his mouth full.

“I am a near relation of the bride’s,” said the magpie as he sailed away.

By the time the engaged couple reached the porch they found the holy man awaiting them, and were immediately married. The magpie gave the bride away and offered some advice upon the married state, for he was a widower and knew what he was talking about. “Now go,” he said, “and I will return to the steeple, where I shall find snug enough quarters. Three is an ill number for a honeymoon.”

So the husband and wife went to the village and found a suitable lodging; they meant to stay there for the next few days, till they should decide where they should live.

As the sun set that evening the magpie sat on the steeple meditating on life. The bright glow struck through the ivy-leaves, and he was much astonished at seeing something glittering so brightly in the light that he was almost dazzled. The shine came from behind a great tangle of foliage which clothed the tower. He hopped down and thrust his beak in among the ivy. There, in a hole scooped carefully among the stones, was a heap of jewels such as he had never seen in all his days. There were ropes of pearls, chains

of diamonds and rubies, and emeralds in heaps. It was with difficulty that he could resist screaming aloud, so great was his astonishment, and he was all the more shocked when he reflected that this cunningly-made storehouse of wealth must be the handiwork of robbers.

“I fear that the world is a terribly wicked place,” he observed; “I must look into this. I will remain here till night and see what roguery is going on.”

So when night was come he concealed himself with great caution in a niche. When midnight had struck and the moon—now at her full—blackened the shadows, he heard a rustling below and saw the head of a man appearing above the belfry stair. He was a wicked-looking ruffian and was followed by another who held something hidden under his cloak. The magpie poked his head round the corner of his niche. The two thieves went straight to the hole behind the ivy, and, having looked in at their stolen wealth, sat down on the church roof.

“And now,” said the one who had come up first, “what is this great treasure that you have taken?”

“You may well ask,” replied the other, “for it is no less than the King of Growgland’s crown. Here—you may try it on if you like.”

And he pulled out a bundle wrapped in cloth. His companion snatched it, and, when he had untied the knots, there came out such a blaze in the moonlight that the magpie was almost blinded.

The crown glowed and shone. It had spikes of gold with knobs of rubies on the top, and pearls as big as marrowfat peas were studded round the circlet. In front was a fan-shaped ornament half a foot high and one mass of emeralds and diamonds. The thief set it on his own knavish head and turned round and round that his friend might admire his appearance.

“There now, stop that,” said the other at last; “I have had enough of your masquerading. Not even a crown can make you like a gentleman.” And he whipped it off and thrust it into the hole. Then he drew the ivy across it, and, after a few more rough words, the robbers disappeared as they had come.

When morning dawned the magpie flew to the house where the youngest brother was lodging with his bride. He pecked the window with his beak and cried to the young man, “Here is great news! Follow my advice, and you will find your fortune made. Now tell your wife to go to the town and buy a piece of fine silk to make a bag. While she is doing this you must procure a hammer, a piece of pointed iron and a yard of string; you can get a pickaxe and shovel from the shed where the sexton keeps his tools. All these you

must hide in a bush which I shall show you in the churchyard. Ask no questions; and, when evening falls, meet me with the bag and all these things behind the church.”

So saying, he flew away.

Now, the girl knew very well that the magpie was no ordinary bird, and she obeyed him carefully; she rose and went into the town and bought a piece of red silk. Having made the bag, she gave it to her husband, and, at the time appointed, he met the magpie behind the church with all the implements he had got together.

The bird directed him to leave the pickaxe and shovel in the porch, and they went up to the roof by the belfry stair. When the youngest brother saw the treasure he was speechless, but the magpie gave him no time to examine the jewels.

“Listen to me,” he said, “and we are rich for ever. (I say ‘we’ because I feel you will not forget my poor services.) Do you see an iron bar that sticks out into space on the side of that flying buttress? It is placed there to hold a swinging lamp, and there are five steps by which the sexton approaches it to hang up the light. As you see, they also stand out into space. Tie this piece of string round my leg, and, when I have flown up and alighted on the iron bar, twist the other end round it, so that I may seem to be fastened to it as to a perch; but do not knot it, or make it really secure. To do this you must reach the bar by these steps.”

When the young man heard this, his flesh crept, for he was not accustomed to high places and, the steps being on the outer wall, the least giddiness might plunge him headlong into the churchyard, fifty feet below; but, being a manful fellow, he climbed up and twisted the string so neatly round the bar that no one could have supposed the magpie to be anything but a prisoner.

“Now,” said the bird, “take your hammer and the piece of iron and loosen the three top steps till they will not bear more than a child’s weight.”

When the youngest brother had done this, the magpie told him to hide himself in a ditch in the churchyard, and not to come out till he was called by name.

After midnight the robbers came to look at their treasures, and did not notice the magpie sitting on the bar. Indeed, had they done so, they would have paid little heed, supposing him to be some ignorant bird who had no interests beyond his own food. They sat down on the roof as they had done

before, and, taking out the jewels, began to count them. They made a large heap and placed the crown on the top. All at once the magpie flew up in the air as far as the string would permit, and cried in a loud and dreadful voice, "*Help! help! The King of Growgland's crown is stolen!*"

At this the thieves were so much horrified that they dropped their booty, and ran wildly to and fro on the roof searching for some hidden person, and, when they came close to the place where the iron bar was, the magpie flew up again, crying the same words more terribly than before.

"We'll soon choke his noise," exclaimed the robbers; and with one accord they began to climb the steps. But the youngest brother had done his work well: the stones were loose, and in another moment they had fallen headlong through the air, and were lying with their necks broken in the churchyard.

The magpie then called his friend, who brought the pickaxe and shovel, and when they had buried the two robbers they went up again to the roof, and put the King of Growgland's crown into the red silk bag.

"We know who this belongs to, and we will certainly restore it," said the magpie; "the rest we will keep as some slight remuneration for our trouble."

There were enough jewels to make fifty people rich for life. It was a haul! The youngest brother praised the magpie, and, taking off his shirt, knotted the tails together and filled it up to the neck with precious stones. It was almost light before he got back to his wife and showed her what the magpie's good sense had accomplished.

In a few days the magpie set out for the kingdom of Growgland, scarcely more than a hundred miles away, and demanded to see the King. He found the whole city in a ferment and everyone distracted. The King had grown quite thin, and the head of the police had been sent to prison for being unable to find the thieves.

"If your Majesty will start the day after to-morrow," said the magpie, "and go a day's journey from the city, you will meet a young man and a girl on horseback carrying a red silk bag. Your Majesty may wring my neck if it does not contain the crown of Growgland."

At this everyone was electrified, and the King, with a great retinue, started and encamped a day's march off, that the crown of Growgland might be received with all due ceremony. As evening came on the magpie grew a little nervous, for the King had placed a guard over him to do him honour (at least, that was what he said); but the bird knew very well that it was done so

that he should not escape if the crown failed to appear. But at last he saw his friends approaching. Being now rich, they rode fine horses and were dressed as befitted great personages. The King sat on the royal throne (which was a folding one, and so had been brought with him), and the youngest brother, having related his story, gave the red silk bag into his hands. Before parting with him His Majesty presented him with a sum of money that, even had he not been rolling in wealth already, would have made him independent for life.

After this, the magpie and his friends set out for the town in which they had left the two elder brothers and a few days later dismounted before the inn. The harrow was still in its place, prongs uppermost, and at the window, far above it, two forlorn-looking faces were to be seen.

The landlord came out, transported with surprise at the fine appearance of his daughter and the youngest brother.

“There,” he said, pointing to the upper window, “are the two knaves who have deceived me, and whom I have kept locked up ever since you left.”

At this the imprisoned pair perceived who it was that had arrived.

“Here,” they shouted, “here is the great lord come to pay our debts! Did we not assure you that he would come?”

And they rained abuse upon the landlord.

“Let them out and I will make it good to you,” said the youngest brother.

So the two miscreants were freed, and a sorry sight they were; for, as the price of each day of their detainment the landlord had demanded a garment, and their clothes were almost at an end. One had only a shirt left; and the other one garter and a piece of an old tablecloth in which he had wrapped himself for decency. The inn servants shouted with laughter as they came running out. The youngest brother and his wife laughed too; and as for the magpie, he was so delighted that he nearly choked, and had to be restored with strong waters.

“I still prefer my experience to your money,” remarked the youngest brother to his relations.

THE STORY OF MASTER BOGEY

“This time it will have to be a tale I remember hearing grandmother tell,” said the miller one evening, “for I’ve left my book in the town. The cover was so battered that it had to be mended.”

They were sitting on the steps of the mill. Every week now, and sometimes twice between Sunday and Sunday, they spent a delightful time with their friend. Little Peter thought he was the finest man in the world; and Janet, though she said little, was quite sure there was no one like him. And, indeed, they were not far wrong, for he was the most splendid miller that anybody ever saw; he was like a big boy at heart, though he was a grown-up man with a mill of his own and a horse and cart in the stable.

There was once a square house (he began) that stood in a garden. Outside the garden were great trees which had been there for more than a hundred years, and when the wind blew high and the gales raged in the autumn, they swayed about and creaked so that anyone might think they must fall and crush everything near them; but they never did. Up in the top story of the house was a row of windows belonging to the rooms where the children lived, and, as the blinds were often left up, you might see the lights inside and the shadows of the nurse and the little girls moving about.

Now, high up in the highest tree visible from the nursery lived a family of Bogeys. They were very nice people. There was Father Bogey and Madam Bogey and young Master Bogey, their son.

The children had no idea that they lived there, for they never showed themselves, but lurked hidden in the dark shadows of the boughs. When the wind blew they swayed hither and thither with the branches, and when the nursery blinds were up and the firelight shone behind them, Master Bogey, who was inquisitive, would sit staring and trying to make out what was going on in the room.

“How I should love to get in and see what it is like!” he would say to his parents.

And Madam Bogey would answer: “Nonsense! Your father and I have lived here for ages, and have never tried to get in. We know very well what is our business and what is not. You can see the little girls every morning as they come down the avenue with their nurse, and you know that their names are Josephine, Julia and Jane. What more can you want?”

And Master Bogey would say no more. But that did not prevent him from being as inquisitive as ever.

Every day as the little girls came out for their walk he would peer down on them, unseen. Each had her doll in her arms, and the two elder ones would talk to theirs and carry them as carefully as though they were babies. But Jane was always scolding hers; once, even, she threw the poor thing roughly on the ground. She did not suspect for a moment that Master Bogey was looking down at her, horrified.

At last, one night in winter, his curiosity grew more than he could bear; for he had not heard the front door bolted nor the key turned, and he knew that he might never have such a chance of getting into the house again. The snow lay deep, and his parents were snoring in the fork of the branches in which the family spent the winter months. Overhead, the stars were clear and trembling in the frost and the nursery firelight shone red through the curtains. He slid down, ran across the white ground and up the front-door steps. Yes, the handle went round in his grasp, and in another moment he was standing in the hall.

It was easy to see that the servants had been careless that night; not only was the door unlocked, but the lamps were left burning too. As Master Bogey paused at the foot of the wooden staircase, it was all he could do not to turn and run, for the wall beside it was hung with family portraits of fierce gentlemen and bedizened ladies who stared at him dreadfully. But he was a sensible fellow, and, as most of them were half-length pictures, he decided that people who had no legs couldn't run after him. He ventured to touch one, and, finding it wasn't a living thing at all, he grew as bold as brass and began to look about him. Christmas was not long over; the yew and the holly were still wreathed above the frames, making him wonder how these little pieces of trees could have got inside the house. There were swords and spears and old fire-arms too, whose use he could not understand. Up he went softly, nearly jumping out of his skin when a step creaked under his foot, and he found himself at last on the nursery threshold. The door was ajar and the firelight bright in the empty room, so in he went.

But suddenly he gave a most terrible start, for the room was not empty at all; three dolls were sitting on three chairs, watching him intently, and two of them were looking very severe.

“May I ask, sir, who you are?” demanded the one nearest to the hearth.

Master Bogey was speechless. He turned to run away.

“Stop, sir!” cried the doll again, “and be good enough to answer me, or I will alarm the house. Who are you? I insist upon knowing.”

“I am Master Bogey,” he stammered.

“La! what a name!” exclaimed the doll upon the next chair. And she held up her fine satin muff and giggled behind it.

“Yes, and what a shock of hair!” said the other. She held up her muff and giggled too.

Poor Master Bogey was ready to cry.

The two dolls who had spoken were almost exactly alike: they had round pink faces and round blue eyes; on either side of their cheeks hung beautiful golden curls—no wonder they laughed at the black mop on his dusky head. They really were the most elegant ladies. They wore frilled silk pelisses, with handsome ruffles at the neck; large silk hats, tied under their chins with bows, and enormous sashes. On their feet were openwork socks and bronze shoes with rosettes; their muffs we know all about. The only difference between them was that one was dressed in blue and the other in pink. Their mouths were like rosy buttons; to look at them, who could guess that such rude words had ever come out of them? (My grandmother always used to make that remark, for she had a good bringing-up and knew manners.)

The third doll was not nearly so fine as her companions. To begin with, she had no muff, and her sash was tied round her waist, and not halfway down her skirt, which showed at once she was out of the fashions in the doll world. Her frock was plain and torn and she had lost one shoe; all the same, she had a dear little face. When she saw poor Master Bogey’s downcast looks, she got off her chair and went to him.

“Don’t mind what they say,” she said. “They have just got new dresses and it makes them proud. They mean no harm. Your hair is very nice, and it is a great blessing to have so much.”

You may fancy how grateful Master Bogey was!

She held out her hand, and he took it.

“Come,” she said, “let us go and sit at the other end of the room. You are a stranger, and I have heard nurse say that one should always be polite to strangers.”



“SHE HELD OUT HER HAND, AND HE TOOK IT.”

So they went, and the ladies in blue and pink cried out “Pooh!” very loud and both at the same time.

“Take no notice,” whispered the doll.

It was not long before she persuaded Master Bogey to confess his curiosity about the house and the people in it, and he began to enjoy himself immensely. He heard all about the pictures that had astonished him so much, and how the holly and yew branches had managed to get on to the frames, and about the Christmas party which was just over. He saw the rocking-horse, and even had a ride on it; the cupboard where nurse kept the jams for tea, and the door which led to the attics overhead. But the most delightful part of all was when he led his companion to the window and showed her the tree in which he lived standing black in the whiteness and the starlight.

“You can’t see my parents, for they are asleep,” he remarked; “but I *think* that round sort of bump where the branches fork is the back of my mother’s head. I wish you could see all of it.”

“Does she know where you are?” asked the doll.

“Well, no,” replied he, “she doesn’t; she had gone to bed when I left, and I really couldn’t wake her. But I’ll tell her everything in the morning, and all about you, and how charming you are.”

“I’m afraid she’ll punish you,” said the doll, sighing. “I only hope she won’t throw you out of the tree.”

“Gracious!” cried Master Bogey, “what an idea! Why, my mother is the best mother in the world! I know what put that into your head, all the same. I saw one of the little girls throw her doll on the ground once, when I was looking down from the branches. It wasn’t you, I trust?”

“Indeed it was,” said she; “that was Miss Jane, and I am her doll. I am very unhappy, for she is dreadfully cruel to me. Sometimes she bangs me on the floor and puts me in the corner for hours. And look at my clothes! The others are lucky—they belong to Josephine and Julia. They have each got a new dress, but this ragged one is all I have, and only one shoe.”

The tears ran down her face, poor little thing!

“Show me Miss Jane, and I will go and kill her!” cried Master Bogey, in a rage.

“Oh no, no!” begged the doll. “If you did that, I might be thrown away. No one would care to keep a shabby thing like me. I might be flung into the ashpit.”

“I would soon go and fetch you if you were,” said Master Bogey gallantly. “But show me Jane; if I could even shake my fist at her I should be happier.”

“Will you promise not to do any harm if I take you to the night-nursery?” said she.

He promised, and they went, hand in hand, down the long passage to the room where Josephine, Julia and Jane slept.

They went in on tiptoe. The sisters were sleeping in a row in their little white beds with frilled curtains; they really looked very pretty with their hair lying spread upon the pillows.

“That is Josephine,” said the doll, pointing to the eldest, “and the next is Julia, and the one nearest the door is Jane, my mistress.”

Josephine and Julia were smiling in their sleep, but as they looked, Jane turned over and tossed, grinding her teeth.

“I am afraid she is having a bad dream,” explained the doll.

“Serve her right! I wish she could have two at once!” said Master Bogey.

At last he thought it was time for him to be getting home, and the doll said she would go down with him to the hall. He was very sad, for he did not know when he should see her again; and she was sad, too.

“The very first time they leave the door open I will come back,” said he.

“Oh, I hope it will be soon!” she said. “Whenever Jane is bad to me I will think about you, and every night I will look out and try to see you.”

“And I will look for you,” replied Master Bogey, as he slipped out of the front door.

Next morning he told Madam Bogey all that he had done, and, though she read him a long lecture on curiosity, she could not help being interested.

“A good whipping is what Jane wants,” she remarked, “and if I were her nurse she should get it.”

Every night the doll and Master Bogey looked across the snowy space to try and get a glimpse of each other, but, though he could see her against the firelight through the windows, she could not see him where he sat in the dim tangle of branches. Madam Bogey watched too, but she was short-sighted and soon gave it up, though her good heart ached to think of the poor little creature and all she had to endure. She and Master Bogey talked about it a great deal.

One night, as he looked from his tree towards the nursery, he saw Miss Jane, with one of her sisters, standing by the window-sill. He knew it was

Jane, because she was the only one of the little girls who had a pigtail; he could see its outline as it hung behind her head, with a bow sticking out, like a fat insect, at the end of it.

Each had put her doll to stand on the window-sill, inside the pane. He couldn't tell whether it was the blue or the pink lady who was there, but he saw the shadow of a smart hat. He hoped very much that his friend was looking out for him, and he waved his hand. All at once she slipped on the sill and fell out of sight! He saw Jane stoop down, her pigtail sticking out farther than ever as she did so, and drag her up by the arm, shaking her—oh, so cruelly! She began to slap her, first on this side, then on that; he almost fancied he could hear her crying. Again and again she struck her, and Master Bogey shouted and threw up his arms in despair. Oh, how hard it was that he could not reach her!

“Mother!” he cried. “Oh, mother! Look! look!”

Up came Madam Bogey, hurrying to see what was the matter with her son. When she saw how dreadfully the poor doll was being treated, she was almost as angry as he was; and after Jane and her sister had disappeared from the window with their dolls, she still sat talking to him. It was quite late when he went to bed at last, and she stayed beside him and held his hand. He cried himself to sleep with rage and pity.

Now, Father Bogey had been away for some time on business, and when he returned next day his wife and he had such a long consultation that Master Bogey thought it would never be done. They sent him to a different tree while it was going on. He sat there rather crossly, looking at them as they nodded and shook their heads and nodded again. He knew it was all about something very interesting. When they called him back he was quite pettish.

“Sit down, boy,” his father began, very solemnly, “and try to look more intelligent. When I was your age I was setting up house. As you are an only child I have tried not to spoil you, and I may say that, on the whole, you have been a good son; but now it is time you were settled. I hear from your mother that you have made the acquaintance of a young lady in the house opposite. From what you have told your mother of her manners, she must be of a good disposition and naturally refined. If you have any mind to marry her she shall have a hearty and fatherly welcome, and your mother and I will give up the whole of the top branches to you. You had better think it over.”

Master Bogey did not take long to do that. He clapped his hands with joy when he thought that he might see his dear doll again, and never part from

her any more, for he knew that she would be thankful to escape from cruel Jane and the rude ladies in blue and pink. The only difficulty was, how was he to get at her?

Evidently the servants had been blamed for their carelessness. Since his adventure the front door had been locked and the windows bolted as soon as it grew dark. He ran round the house every night, looking eagerly for some chink or crack large enough for him to squeeze himself in through; but there was nothing big enough, for he was a well-grown lad, and as tall as his father.

At last a bold plan came into his mind. He decided to get in in broad daylight, hiding in some empty room till everyone had gone to bed and then making his way to the nursery. As soon as he could persuade his love to elope with him, they would steal downstairs, unlock the front door, and let themselves out. When he told Madam Bogey of this plan she was in a dreadful state, and said it was much too dangerous; but he was determined. It is terrible to think what love will do!

So one afternoon he began to make his way to the house by short stages. From tree to tree he dodged, and just before dusk he had reached a small yew growing in a shrubbery near the front-door steps without being seen by anyone. He heard the great bell clang which called servants and stablemen to tea; and when he thought they were all safe in the servants' hall, he flew up the steps like a lamplighter, and in at the door. Opposite to it was a large drawing-room, which the doll had told him was never used in winter, and in he went. There was a sofa there, with a long chintz cover touching the floor; and he crawled under this, and lay down as still as a mouse. How his heart beat when a maid came to draw the curtains! How he longed to catch her by the ankle and make her scream! But he did nothing so silly; he only lay and longed for the night, when he might get upstairs.

It was so still that his own footsteps made him jump. It was quite dark, too, as the lamps were out, and he could only feel his way; but he got safely to the top of the nursery stair, and began tiptoeing up the passage. A chink of light under the day-nursery door showed him the fire was still in.

One thing is certain, and that is that luck favours brave people. Master Bogey went in, and the first thing he saw was his dear doll at the window, looking out, no doubt, for a glimpse of himself in the tree. The pink lady and the blue lady were asleep in their chairs by the hearth, their eyes shut, their muffs in their laps and their hats tied firmly under their chins.

The poor doll ran to him and put her arms round his neck. She looked very woebegone and her clothes were more tattered than ever. She had no shoes at all now.

“I’ve come to take you away,” said Master Bogey. “You must come back to my tree and we will be married at once, and then I can see you every day for the rest of my life.”

“Do you *really* mean it?” asked the doll.

“Yes, yes!” cried he. “Come at once, this very moment, before anyone catches us. My father and mother are waiting for you, and we are to have the top branches to live in.”

The poor little thing could hardly believe her ears. She liked Master Bogey better than anyone she had ever seen, and now she was going away from cruel Jane, and the blue and pink ladies, who sneered at everything. She held his hand tight and they went stealing out. She was so happy she did not know what to do.

They felt their way along safely till they got almost to the hall, and then, alas! alas! Master Bogey missed his footing on the last flight of stairs and rolled from the top to the bottom. Bump, bump, he went, and landed in a heap on the mat. He had just time to pick himself up before a door opened and the mother of Josephine, Julia and Jane came out of her bedroom with a candle in her hand. She could not see into the hall, but she began to come downstairs.

Master Bogey and the doll went straight to a corner where rows of coats hung from pegs, and got behind the thickest fur cloak they could find. He took her up in his arms, so that her little white feet should not show underneath it; his own black ones he kept quite still. In the light of the candle they only seemed like dark shadows.

The lady held up her light and looked round. She was much prettier than any of her daughters, and though her hair was now in a pigtail like Jane’s, it really suited her. She peeped under tables and behind chests, and then she came to the row of cloaks and began prodding them to see if anyone was hidden behind them. It was an awful moment.

What saved them was the fact that Bogeys are seldom very tall; though young Master Bogey was such a fine-grown lad, he was scarcely three feet high. Jane’s mother prodded the cloak just above his head and passed on without feeling anything. Just then a man’s face looked over the banisters above.

“What are you doing there?” cried Josephine, Julia and Jane’s father.

“I thought I heard a noise,” said the lady, “so I came to look.”

“Nonsense!” he exclaimed, “you are always imagining burglars. Go back to bed, and don’t be such a goose.”

When she had gone, Master Bogey and his love came out of their hiding-place. It took but a moment to unlock the door and draw the bolts. They shut it softly after them and ran down the steps and out into the shadows, where Father Bogey and Madam were waiting to embrace their daughter-in-law.

Then they all went up into the tree, where, as I have heard, they lived happily together ever after.

THE TREE OF PRIDE

“To-day it’s the book’s turn,” said the miller to his friends as the light was fading one evening. “Last time we heard about Bogeys and people of that sort, but to-day we’ll have a Princess, and King’s Courts and fine company.”

“I like hearing about grand ladies,” observed Janet.

“Yes, I like them well enough, too,” replied he; “that is, if they’re as good and as beautiful as some lasses I have seen.”

He looked rather hard at Janet, and she blushed.

“Oh, never mind talking!” broke in little Peter, pulling the miller’s sleeve. “It’s the story I want. If you don’t begin quick the light will be gone; the rooks are coming home already, and soon we shall have to go in to supper.”

“You needn’t do that, for you shall come to supper with me in the mill,” said the miller. “How would you like that?”

“We daren’t,” said Janet.

“I’ll go and make it right with your grandmother myself,” he replied. “She’ll be glad enough, maybe, for there’ll be all the more left in the larder to-morrow. Sit still till I come back.”

And he jumped over the wall. They watched him pass the pool and disappear into the white cottage.

“Oh, how delightful!” shouted little Peter, turning head over heels.

In a few minutes the miller returned. The old woman had promised everything he wanted. It is a funny thing how often young men can manage witches. They all went into the mill.

“So now to business,” said he, as he sat down and took up his book.

In a kingdom far from this everyday earth a great city sat royally in its surrounding plain. It had domes and towers, temples and fortresses, and in it lived a Princess whose goodness and beauty were known for miles round. The plain was vast and fertile, but here and there patches of wilderness lay

like islands among the crops; and a winding stream wandered, now through their richness, now through tangled briars and unfrequented tracks.

By one of these it made a loop, encircling a spot where the turf was cleared of undergrowth and a great tree thrust its gnarled roots through the grass. The few who passed this place looked upon it with no little awe, for the tree was inhabited, and even on a calm day its boughs might be seen rocking to and fro, as though moved by some unruly breeze. Its leaves were large and glossy, its limbs spreading like the limbs of an oak, and in spring it bore white, waxy flowers, heavily scented and shaped like open tulips; in the heart of each was a cluster of stiff golden stamens.

The upper branches were haunted by an old man whose long robe gave him the appearance of a wizard. Though he had lurked in the tree for generations, time had not robbed him of his activity, for he would swing himself to earth every morning to drink of the stream, and, in summer, to wash the dust from the leaves and blossoms, which he tended as carefully as a gardener might his plants. The dwellers in the city knew nothing of his existence; but the dwellers in the fields near the tree had sometimes seen him descend from it to the earth, and remembered having heard in their childhood that it was called the "Tree of Pride."

One autumn day all the city was making holiday, for the Princess had been betrothed to a King from a far country and was starting with a great following to meet him ten leagues from its walls. Her father accompanied her, and she rode on a white horse shod with silver; she was so beautiful and charming that there was not a man in the whole retinue who did not envy the unknown King. Her brown hair, looped up behind her head, fell almost to the stirrup, and she wore a coif woven of burning gold. Her cloak was embroidered with rose and purple and patterns of stars, and its gold fringes swung as she rode. Her eyes were like the still, moon-haunted pools of a moorland.

It chanced that the procession had been delayed in leaving the city, so that by sunset the place where it was to encamp was yet many miles off. The Princess was tired, and a man-at-arms was sent out to look for some spot where the tents might be pitched and water found for the horses. He soon came back to say that within a mile was a stretch of grass surrounding a large tree and watered by a stream. In a short time they reached it, and encamped for the night.

Next morning, when they had risen betimes to continue their way, the Princess caught sight of the tree, which was a dream of beauty; for autumn

was at its full, and the fruit was heavy where the flowers had been. As she stood to admire it, a rustling was heard in the branches, and an old man descended, swinging himself from bough to bough and holding a piece of fruit, round and ripe; he leaned down and offered it to her.

When she had accepted the gift, the Princess mounted, and the whole company returned to the beaten track and went forward on their road. The sun grew hot, and as noonday came on she ate the fruit, thinking that she had never tasted anything so delicious.

They rode by brook and meadow, by hill and wood, and soon everyone began to wonder at the change which had come over the Princess. Those whom she had looked upon as friends all her life were now commanded to rein back, that they might not offend her dignity by their presence. She would scarce answer her father when he spoke, and, whereas in the early part of her journey she had taken pleasure in the beauty of the landscape, she now blamed the road as unfit for her horse's feet to tread.

“Not content with dragging me out to meet this sorry fellow,” she said, “you must needs bring me by ways only fit for peasants.”

Her father and his people looked aghast. Never before had they heard her speak in such a manner.



“SHE WOULD SCARCE ANSWER HER FATHER WHEN HE SPOKE.”

When the shadows were long they halted again, and soon they could distinguish a company of horsemen between them and the hills. The Princess withdrew to her tent, for she knew that the distant spearmen must be the unknown King's following, and that in a short time she would be

summoned to receive him. She called her maids, and when they had dressed her in her state robes, she took a knife and made a slit in the curtains that she might see the King's arrival without being seen. As she stood watching the little band advancing, she was surprised to hear her father's voice almost beside the tent. She ran towards the place, and, cutting another slit, looked through and saw him in conversation with a man-at-arms, who had just dismounted from the steaming horse he held.

He was dressed from head to heel in russet leather, and a steel helmet, with spreading steel wings, was on his head. He was tall and brown, and his white teeth gleamed as he smiled. "Sire," he was saying, "I beg you to forgive this unceremonious coming. When I saw your tents on the plain and knew that the Princess was so near, I could contain myself no longer and galloped forward with all speed. I will not dare to enter her presence till my people have arrived, and I have cast off the dust of the road. But wait I could not. I hope your Majesty will forgive me."

And so this rash, leather-clad soldier was the King—this careless, dusty fellow who was loosening his horse's girths as any common groom might do! Did he think to thrust himself thus, without ceremony, into the following of a royal Princess?

Behind her curtains she turned away, biting her lips, and she was still frowning when her father entered.

"Daughter," said he, "the King is here and I have spoken with him."

"And what is he like?" inquired she, her voice cold with scorn.

"He is the most gallant-looking gentleman that ever I saw," said the old man.

The Princess turned her back.

An hour later father and daughter waited to receive their guest in a long tent hung with fine stuffs and wreathed in garlands. The whole of their retinue stood around, and, at the far end, the Princess sat on a carved chair, her eyes on the ground and her face as pale as ivory, never looking at the opposite door, by which her suitor was to enter.

At last the hangings were drawn wide and he came in. He still wore his russet brown, but it was now of silver-studded velvet which clung to him like a glove, and as he went forward a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd; for he walked like some kingly animal, and his eyes sparkled under his dark brows. "Here is a King indeed," whispered the bystanders.

The Princess scarcely glanced at him. She curtsied low as he approached, but when he would have taken her hand, she drew back, her lip curling.

“Your Majesty does me an honour for which I have no desire,” she said; “and if I have brought you to the meeting-place only to refuse your hand, you will pardon it the more readily as you yourself like ceremony so little.”

So saying, she turned and left everyone standing speechless.

When the company had dispersed, the Princess declared that she would set out next morning for the city. There was nothing left for the King to do but to depart by the way he had come, and, furious and mortified, he returned to his own camp to throw off his velvet and resume his leather and steel; he meant to go at once. His heart was hot within him, for the one look he had had at the Princess was enough to set it in a flame. She was so beautiful that he had never seen her like, and even through his anger there was a sharp stab of regret for what he had lost. Heartless as she seemed, and ill as she had treated him, he would have given the world for her. While his men and horses were getting ready, he went out into the night, and turned his steps to a little thicket of birches which stood with their glimmering stems not far from the camp. The darkness was moist and chill, and some of the Princess’s men had lit a fire on the outskirts of the trees, and were sitting round it. He drew close to them under cover of the wood, and saw an old soldier in the centre of the circle who was talking to his companions. “If I had my will,” he was saying, “I would fell the tree to the ground, and the old goblin should die with it. He should pay for turning the sweetest, most beautiful lady in the world into such a jade! I remember her from the time she was no higher than my sword, and until she tasted that accursed fruit there was no creature more beloved in the kingdom—and with reason, too. And look at her now!”

“What is all this talk?” asked a new-comer, as he joined the group in the firelight. “Not but what Her Highness has given us enough to talk about for some time to come.”

“Why, it is just that,” continued the first speaker; “there’s the matter plain. She has eaten of the Tree of Pride. I saw it myself.”

“The Tree of Pride?” cried the others—“whoever heard of that?”

“You are young men,” the old soldier went on, “and you were not born, as I was, in a hut in these fields, where all the tales of the country round were common talk. My home was in sight of the Tree of Pride, where we camped last night, and many’s the time I’ve seen the old man sitting among

the boughs like an evil bird. Whoever tastes of it, rich or poor, man or woman, young or old, becomes mad with vanity and pride. And but yesterday the Princess stood under the branches, and the old man reached down and offered her the fruit. She took it, poor lady, and thanked him, understanding nothing. I've more than a mind to turn aside and slay him on the way back."

The King waited to hear no more; he stole through the trees and back to his own camp: he was determined to start at once for the Tree of Pride. He rode all night, taking only a couple of men with him, and in the morning sunlight he saw it raising its heavy head above the plain. He drew up almost under the boughs and dismounted. There, peering down on him, was the wizened face of the old man, smiling elusively as he plucked a cluster of fruit and began climbing down to offer it. The King waited until he had reached the lowest arm of the tree, and then, instead of taking the gift, he seized his garment and dragged him to the ground.

The old man shrieked and struggled, but the King held him fast, and, throwing him on the grass, stood over him while his two soldiers bound him hand and foot.

"Look!" cried the King, when they had done this, "here is my blade, ready to plunge into your evil body. Because the Princess ate the fruit you gave her, her whole heart is changed. You have only one chance of life. I will spare it if you tell me the remedy that can turn her into her true self."

"There is no remedy," he said, fixing his malicious eyes on the King.

"Then," said the young man, "I will prevent anyone else from sharing the Princess's fate."

And he raised his arm.

"Stop!" screamed the other. "I will tell you everything! Only let me go and I will promise never to offer the fruit to anyone again."

"Lie still," said the King. "You will tell me the cure before you move and then I will cut down the tree. Go to the nearest hut and borrow an axe," he added, turning to one of his men.

"No! no!" cried the old man again; "cut it down and all will be lost! Only unbind my hands and I vow I will make the mischief right."

"You will be loosed when you have spoken," replied the King.

"Tell your soldiers to go away," said the prisoner at last; "for the thing is a secret."

The King told his men to raise him, and when they were alone the old man began.

“You will need patience,” said he. “The winter must come and go before the tree whitens again, for it is only the blossom that can cure the poison of the fruit. When spring comes you must make a crown of the white flowers and take it as a gift to the Princess. If you can persuade her to wear it—if only for a few moments—her heart will change, and she will once more be the woman she was.”

The King’s face fell. It was full six months of waiting and it seemed like an eternity.

“Now let me go!” cried the old man again.

“I will unbind you, as I promised,” said the King, “but from now till the day we return together to pluck the flowers I will not lose sight of you—no, not for an hour—until your words are proven. Come, hold out your hands and feet, and I will cut the cords. Then we will turn our faces to my kingdom.”

And the prisoner was mounted and led away between two men-at-arms in the King’s troop.

* * * * *

While these things were happening, the Princess was on the road home. Having arrived, she shut herself up in her rooms and would hardly deign to go outside the walls of her garden, or to notice anyone. When her father was with her she treated him as though he were an intruder, and the slightest difference of opinion between them threw her into a fury.

She would pace up and down the corridor, her figure erect, her head thrown back; in her eyes was the look of one scarce conscious of her surroundings. And indeed, her soul had strayed into another world—the world of pride, and self and hardness of heart.

Time went, and the leaves of the Tree of Pride lay thick round its foot. Winter’s white veil covered plain and city, and the Princess, in her palace, drew every day farther from humanity; only the King, in his distant kingdom, hoped on, waiting for spring.

But in the old man, his prisoner, a mighty change was being wrought, and his malignant spirit was beginning to go from him. He had never before been brought so close to a noble human being. As the King had said, so he had done, and in the winter which followed his return he had hardly allowed

his hostage out of his sight for an hour: waking, he kept him at his side, and sleeping, he lay across his barred door.

But, even while so much was at stake, he could not neglect his daily work, and so it came about that where he went the old man had to go also. While he sat in council he was at his left hand; when he dealt out justice he was present; and when he was occupied with his army—the pride of his soul—he was still beside him. He saw how the King made himself as one of his soldiers, how he shirked no work, took no advantage; he saw his gay and noble heart his joy in living, his prowess in all feats of arms, the love his troops bore him—and as he saw, his withered nature grew soft. And so it was that by the time the young buds began to show on the branches and the season drew near for their journey to the Tree of Pride, captive though he was, he would have laid down his life for him willingly.

All the earth was bursting into youth as the two rode over the plain and approached the tree. The scent of its blossoms was blowing towards them, heavy on the air. The flowers were thick about the ends of the green shoots, the petals, half closing, like cups, over the golden hearts within them. The King cut a few handfuls with his knife while his companion plaited them into a wreath, and when it was made, they mounted and rode into the city.

When they arrived, they went to a small inn, and the King, not wishing his presence to be known, sent a messenger to the palace, giving him a sum of money. With this he was to bribe the servants to carry news to the Princess that two strangers, having discovered a treasure, desired to offer it to her. In this manner they hoped to induce her to receive the crown. On the following day the man returned, having reached the Princess's ear, and bringing leave for the strangers to approach. So they presented themselves.

They placed the wreath upon a velvet cushion, and the King waited in a dark corner of the Princess's antechamber, while the old man, whose face was hidden by a magician's hood which he had procured, entered and laid the gift at her feet.

“Royal lady—” he began, but his voice dropped, for the Princess's glance fell on the flowers, and she rose from her chair, her eyes alight with wrath and her lips trembling. Instead of the rich jewels she had imagined, there lay before her a simple wreath—beautiful exceedingly, but with a beauty for which she had ceased to care. There was nothing about the offering that could add to her splendour. Any peasant girl, having leisure to weave such a crown, might wear it without pride and without remark.

And as she sprang up, her eyes met those of her rejected suitor, who had drawn the curtains of the antechamber a little aside in his suspense.

When the old man raised the cushion, she seized the wreath and tore it in pieces, scattering the petals, like snowflakes, on the floor.

The King went from the palace in despair and returned to his lodging. He had hoped so fiercely and so long that life seemed almost to have come to an end. He mounted his horse, and, bidding the old man farewell, determined to return to his kingdom and his soldiers, putting the thought of the Princess from him for ever. Before he went he gave him a thousand gold pieces, and made him promise to return to the Tree of Pride and cut it down. As the city walls faded behind him, he looked back at them with a sigh. For the first time he had lost interest in everything, and he knew that it was no longer his pleasure to which he was returning; but he had not forgotten that it was still his duty.

Now, it chanced that, while the Princess refused the crown, there stood by the chair a certain lady-in-waiting. She was no longer young, but she had been a beauty in her day and had seen much of men and matters. She had been at the Court for years and her heart was heavy at the change she saw in her mistress. She was a shrewd woman, and it did not escape her notice that the person who offered the crown wore a hood like those she had seen on the heads of magicians; besides this, she marvelled that two strangers, one of whom did not even show himself, should wish to give the Princess what any one of her servants might pluck from the hedge. The old man had scarcely disappeared before she made up her mind that here was some mystery she did not understand. Unobserved, she gathered up the broken flowers, and that evening she sent a page secretly to discover where he lived, and to desire him to meet her, after dark, at the foot of the palace garden. She also sent the key of a little door by which he might enter unobserved.

When the page found him, the old man was on the point of leaving the city. He was sad, for he had just parted from the King; but he was resolved, when he should have destroyed the Tree of Pride, to follow him to his own country and spend the rest of his life in his service. When he received the lady's commands, he did not hesitate to obey them.

The watchmen were crying ten o'clock as he stood in the starlight inside the little door. He trembled, for he suspected the summons might lead him into some trap; but to serve the King he was ready to venture all, and he only hoped the morning might not find him at the bottom of a dungeon. He

was considering these things when the lady appeared. He was about to speak when she held up her hand.

“I am the Princess’s chief lady-in-waiting,” she began, “and her welfare is to me as my own. I have sent for you that I may ask you, for her sake, what reason you had for bringing such a gift. She has everything the world can offer, and I am certain that you would not have brought her such a present as a common flower wreath if there had not been some hidden virtue in it.”

The old man fell down before her, clinging to her skirt and kissing its hem.

“Madam!” he cried, “only persuade the Princess to wear it and all that I have is yours! The King, who loves her, and whose heart she has broken, has made me rich for the rest of my days, but I will give it all up to you if you will only induce her to wear it, even for a moment.”

Then the lady remembered the King, for she had been at her post when he received his dismissal, and, under her breath, she had called the Princess a fool. She had lived long enough in the world to know a man when she saw one.

“I never take bribes,” she said, “nor, as a rule, do I tolerate those who offer them; but if you will tell me the truth, I will do my best to bring the King and my mistress together.”

So the old man told her all.

When the lady returned to the palace, she took the fragments of the wreath and put them carefully together. The petals she collected and sewed into their right places with fine silk; it was so deftly done that no one could suspect them of having been broken.

The next day there was to be a banquet at the palace, and before the time came for the Princess to get ready, the lady took one of her maids aside. “While you are fastening the pins of Her Royal Highness’s veil,” said she, “and before you put on her crown, you must scream as though you had pricked your finger. Do as I tell you and ask no questions, for I myself will be present and keep her wrath from you.”

So when the Princess sat before her mirror, the maid brought her veil and began to fasten it, while the lady stood by with the wreath concealed in her wide sleeve. All at once the girl shrieked aloud: “Oh! oh! I have torn my finger with a pin!”

“You unmannerly jade!” cried the lady, “will you make all this to-do while Her Highness is dressing? Off with you, and I will fasten the crown myself.”

And she thrust her from the room and took her place.

Suddenly the Princess looked up into the glass, and saw, instead of her crown, the wreath of half-opened flowers with their golden centres glowing through her hair. She put up her hand to tear the thing from her head; but just as she was going to do so, her lips trembled, and she leaned, sobbing, against the table, her face buried in her hands.

* * * * *

Great was the joy in the palace that night. The Princess sat at her father’s side with a strange look in her eyes, but her speech was gentle and her voice soft. The lady-in-waiting watched her, smiling. She had given the true history of the wreath, and she wondered what would happen.

* * * * *

Before dawn next morning the Princess rose. Without a word to anyone, she ordered her horse to be brought, and, riding by the quietest streets, left the city while the world was yet asleep. She took with her a heavy purse full of gold, which she hid in the trappings of the saddle, and her spaniel, Giroflé, which she carried on her knee. A mantle was thrown over her head, that her face should not be seen, and under it she still wore the wreath of flowers. Her way took her past the old man’s lodging, and there she stopped.

“Come out!” she cried. “Here are some gold pieces. Go to the stable, take the best mule you can find, and follow me. I have vowed to wear the wreath from the Tree of Pride until I can mend the heart that its evil magic has broken. I have determined to seek out the King and ask his forgiveness for all I have done.”

The old man desired nothing better. In a few minutes he came from the stable, leading a fine strong mule, and, as soon as he was mounted, they set off, and passed through the city gate while the sun was still rising through the mist.

Now, the little dog, Giroflé, was not in the best of tempers, for he resented his position very much. He had spent a pampered youth in the royal palace, and was now entering on a worldly and selfish middle age. His mistress had always made a great deal of him, and she now took him with her, because she feared his arrogant manners would earn him scant consideration in her absence. She knew that he thought himself a great deal

better than her chief lady-in-waiting, and, in the days before her own pride blinded her to everything else, she had often rebuked him sharply. He sat curled up under her cloak, putting his nose out now and then, and sniffing to show his contempt for everything they passed.

“I suppose,” said he to the Princess’s horse, “that when one travels in outlandish places one is justified in addressing those whom one would not be called upon to notice at home. I shall, therefore, speak to you. Be good enough to inform me where we are going.”

Never having been inside the palace, the horse had not met Giroflé before, though he had often heard tell of him. His honest heart burned at the little creature’s insolence, but he answered civilly, not wishing to annoy the Princess.

“I have been told nothing, either,” said he.

“No one supposed you had,” replied Giroflé, “but one imagines that a beast of burden should know his way about the country.”

“Hold your peace, sirrah!” exclaimed the Princess. “I allow no one to speak to Amulet like that. It would be well for you if you were but half as useful and brave as he is.”

“I prefer to be ornamental myself,” said the little dog, impudently.

“You may change your mind when I set you down to run,” replied she, slapping him.

They travelled steadily day by day, sleeping at night in such country inns as lay in their road. These were not very grand places, but the Princess cared for no discomfort, thinking only how she might get forward on her way. The old man rode a few paces behind, sometimes carrying Giroflé. The little dog was light, but what he lacked in weight he made up in noise, for he barked ceaselessly, and nothing but threats of making him walk could keep his tongue still.

At last, one evening, as it grew late, they came to the borders of a forest which stretched, like a dark sea, across the horizon. A red streak from the departed sun glared angrily over the tree-tops, and they hurried on towards a miserable little house where they hoped to get a lodging. When they reached it, they found it to be an inn, but so mean and tumble-down was it that its walls seemed hardly able to hold together. A rough-looking man was leaning out of an upper window.

“Can we lodge here?” asked the Princess as she stopped before the door. “There are only myself, my servant, and my little dog.”

The man nodded, and came to take Amulet and the mule to the stable. She dismounted and went in, carrying Giroflé under her arm.

“Heavens! what a place!” he exclaimed, as he peeped from under her cloak. “Surely we are never going to spend the night here!”

“The forest is in front,” said she, “and we cannot find our way through it at this time of night. We have no choice but to stay where we are and be thankful that we have a roof over our heads. Listen! do you hear the wind? There will be a storm before morning.”

As she spoke a kind of moan ran through the air and the trees began to toss to and fro. A great splash of rain fell against the window. Giroflé said no more, but when food was brought and the Princess sat down to sup, he remained in a corner of the room, his face to the wall, and an expression on it impossible to describe.

“Come here, Giroflé, and have some food,” said the Princess, as she sat at the table.

“I am glad you call it food,” said he; “for my part, I should have called it garbage.”

The landlord, who was serving, looked at him angrily.

“I suppose you have never seen a spaniel of good family before, fellow?” snapped Giroflé, as he met his eye.

“Giroflé, behave yourself!” cried the Princess.

The landlord left the room, muttering.

So there Giroflé sat till his mistress had retired to bed; then he came out and went to warm himself by the hearth, for, the corner being cold, his exclusive demeanour had chilled him. Soon the landlord returned to take away the dishes.

“Oh, you are there, are you, little viper?” said he.

At this Giroflé turned upon him with such a torrent of impertinence as the man had never heard before. He had sharpened his tongue for years upon every member of the royal household, including the King himself, and the landlord, who soon found he was no match for him, grew almost frantic.

He rushed upon the little dog, trying to reach him with his foot and a soup-ladle which he held; but Giroflé tore about round the table and behind such furniture as there was, only darting out now and then to get a good snap at his heels. The Princess, who was not yet undressed, came downstairs to see what was the matter; for what between the landlord's roars, Giroflé's barks, the overturning of chairs and the wind and rain outside, the noise was really frightful.

"What is all this?" she cried, standing in the doorway.

"I'll soon show you!" bawled the landlord. "I'll show you that an honest man is not to be insulted for nothing! Out with you—you and your vile, ill-conditioned cur! Princess indeed! He says you are a Princess—but, Princess or not, out you go! Not another moment do you stop under this roof!"

Just then he managed to reach Giroflé with the ladle, and the little dog sprang out, yelping, into the passage.

"Come, off with you!" cried the landlord. And, before the Princess had time to say a word, he had opened the door and thrust her out into the night. It was fortunate for her that she had hidden the bag of gold in her girdle, for he slammed the door behind them, and they could hear the key turn and the bolts shoot into their places.

By this time Giroflé was whining. She took him by the scuff of the neck and shook him. "If I did what was right, I should leave you to perish in the nearest ditch," said she.

But, all the same, he was so small that she had not the heart to let him die, so she took him up, and ran to the stable, where the old man had laid himself down for the night beside Amulet and his mule. Giroflé whined and snarled all the time.

There was nothing for it but to start off again; they could not even remain in the stable, for the landlord was shouting from the window to a couple of men to turn them out. All they could do was to mount and ride towards the forest, where at least the branches would give them some shelter from the pouring rain.

When they entered it, the darkness was such that they could scarcely see their way. There were no stars to guide them, so, after stumbling about for some time, they began to search for a place in which they could be sheltered from the wind. By the light of the little lantern that the old man carried with him, they saw a bank covered with distorted tree-roots, some of which had been torn from the ground in a gale. They spread leaves and bracken in a

hollow underneath one of these, and the Princess lay down to rest, with her cloak drawn about her, and Giroflé, who was by this time much subdued, curled himself at her feet. The old man and his mule disposed themselves a little way off, and Amulet stood in as snug a spot as he could find. The noise of the swishing branches overhead sounded like the waves of the sea.

But at last the wanderers fell asleep, and the storm had abated and the moon come out when the Princess heard Amulet plunging and stamping, and sat up, rubbing her eyes. By the light of the crescent showing through a gap in the trees, she saw a host of dark creatures surrounding them on all sides. She could not imagine what they were. Their great wings were outlined sharply against the moonlight, and, though their faces were hidden, she was aware of their bright eyes fixed upon her. One figure in their midst came towards them holding a tall spear; a crown of pale green flickering flame was on his head. Giroflé jumped up barking and then fled to his mistress's skirts, his tail between his legs. In a moment the tall figure strode after him and pierced him to the heart with his spear. As he bent over his victim, the Princess could see that he had the face of a bat.

Then, at a signal from him, the whole host came about them; they were seized, and Amulet, who had tried to attack the Bat-King with his teeth, was taken also; for, gallop and stamp as he might, the fluttering wings closed him round on every side, so that there was no escape. The mule fled at once.

When they were all safely secured, the Bat-King went on before them and his people followed, leading their prisoners into the heart of the forest.

And there we must leave them, for we must return to the King, and hear what happened to him after his parting with the old man.

* * * * *

When he reached home, the King threw himself into his old pursuits as if nothing had happened; but his heart was so sore that they gave him little joy, and, instead of spending his spare hours in hunting with his lords and gentlemen, he only longed to be alone. When he had leisure he would ride off by himself for days at a time, searching for new scenes and new thoughts. He would go out across the borders of his kingdom, by towers and rivers and high castles, sometimes wandering through towns and sometimes passing nights alone in the waste places of the hills.

One evening he came to the foot of a chain of rocky mountains, and stopped, looking up at the crags which towered above his head. Their shapes were so weird that he wondered whether their spires and pinnacles had been carved out by human hands, or whether an earthquake had cast them up in

the likeness of men's work. A track wound up and disappeared among them, and he turned his horse's steps into it.

He had reached a considerable height when he came suddenly to a chasm so deep that he could not see its bottom. The rock on either side was worn smooth, as though with the passing of many feet, and the opening was narrow enough for a man to stride across without difficulty. The horse stopped, and the rein being loose on his neck, snuffed delicately at the strange gash that divided his path; then he picked his way over it, snorting and cocking his ears. They were scarcely ten yards on the farther side when there was a loud cracking noise, and, looking back, the King saw that the chasm had split wider asunder and now yawned behind him like the mouth of a pit. The horse dashed forward, and had gone some distance before his rider could check him. When at last they stood still, they had come to a smooth face of high rock, with a wide ledge at its foot, over which the track went.

Crowning its summit, some feet above their heads, ran a battlemented wall, and on it sat a woman who looked down at the King while she supported herself with one white arm. Whirling vapour floated behind her, through which appeared the outline of a fantastic castle whose towers seemed to climb to heaven. Her hair was bound about with cords of silver and livid purple poppies. Their petals were dropping down and falling in the King's path. A dull dark blue garment was wound round her which left only her bare arms free and trailed over the wall below her feet, mixing with her heavy plaits and the silver tassels at the ends of them.

She smiled, bending forward till she looked as though she must fall from her high place; she was like some great unearthly gull poised upon a wave's crest.

"Soon it will be too dark to travel among these precipices," she cried. "Come up, O King, before the light falls. The way winds up to my gates."

And, indeed, the path took a turn at the end of the ledge, and, twisting like a ribbon, vanished in the vapour.

There was no going back, for the chasm was behind him, and the light, as she said, was failing; so he rode upwards till he came to a gate whose top was lost in the clouds. It opened, disclosing a castle, and inside it the lady was coming to meet him, her draperies trailing behind her and the silver tassels on her plaits making a tinkling sound as they swept the stones. A noiseless person came from a doorway and led away his horse.

She was very beautiful. Her pale face and scarlet lips and her heavy-lidded eyes made him think of things he had seen in dreams, and a faint misgiving touched him as he followed her. Before the castle was a terrace, on the wall of which he had seen her sitting above him as he entered. He passed through stone galleries, over whose sides he thought he could see wild faces staring; the misgiving deepened with every step.

She went before him to a chamber hung with curtains, and when she had left him, another silent servant brought him fresh clothes and began to unbuckle his spurs. When he had put off his belt and sword, the servant took them from him and turned to the door.

“Give me my sword,” said the King; “I never part with that.”

He stretched out his hand to take it, but as he did so his companion vanished on the spot where he had stood. Then he saw that the walls were hung with images of demons, and that snakes’ heads peered from the corners. He looked out of the window, to see nothing but whirling vapours. When a messenger came to tell him that the lady awaited him to sup with her, he followed gloomily, for he knew he was in the stronghold of an Enchantress.

She was sitting at a table, on which a feast was spread, and she made him as welcome as though he had been some long-expected guest. Her voice was mellow as the voice of pigeons cooing in the woods, but it seemed to him that a gleam of cruelty lurked in her eyes. After dark, a chill fell in the air, and they drew close to a fire of logs which glowed at one end of the hall. A silent-footed company of musicians came, playing on instruments the like of which he had never seen, and one in their midst began to sing:

“Boughs of the pine, and stars between,
In woods where shadows fill the air—
Oh, who may rest that once hath been
A shadow there?”

“Sounds of the night, and tears between,
The grey owl hooting, dimly heard:
Can footsteps reach these lands unseen,
Or wings of bird?”

“Days of the years, and worlds between—
Oh, through those boughs the stars may burn;
The heart may break for lands unseen,
For woods wherein its life has been,
But not return!”

The King sat listening, his head leaning upon his hand, and when he looked up, the Enchantress's eyes were fixed on him with the cruel look he could not fathom. He sprang up and begged leave to retire; he was weary, he said, for he had ridden a long distance. At the door of the hall he asked her to tell her servants to return his sword. “We have never been parted yet,” said he.

She broke into a laugh. “To-morrow,” she said, waving him away. And when he would have spoken again, he found himself alone.

He rose very early next day and left the castle without meeting anyone; the gates were open, and he went all round the walls, hoping to come across some path which would take him out of the hills and lead him to the plains below. He was now sure that he was a prisoner. He remembered with a shudder how the rock on either side of the chasm was worn by the feet that had passed over it; and, having found only precipices on the north side of the castle, he determined to follow the track by which he had come, and see if some path, no matter how dangerous, might be found by which he could escape.

Coming down towards the chasm, he could hardly believe his eyes, for the sides had closed together, and it was no wider than when he had first seen it. He ran forward, but as he reached the brink it opened with the cracking noise he had heard before, and he found himself standing on the edge, looking into a gulf of mist. He turned back, disheartened; and as he crossed the ledge under the wall, he looked up to see the Enchantress, perched upon her height, watching him and smiling.

Day after day he lived on, a free prisoner. Each evening when he left her he asked for his sword, and each evening her laugh was the only answer he got. He did not know that the Enchantress had sat countless years upon the ramparts of her castle, waiting, like a spider, for her prey; that all her life had been spent in entrapping and imprisoning men. Some she had slain, some she had kept in dungeons, and some had dashed themselves down into the ravines or perished among them in their efforts to escape.

But she had no intention of killing the King or of casting him into a dungeon; of all those she had entrapped, he was the one she liked best, and every day she fell more deeply in love with him. She would stand by him on the highest tower of the castle, showing him all the wonders of the landscape and telling him tales which almost made him forget his captivity; she gave him rich gifts, and plied him with such wines and delicacies as, King though he was, he had never tasted. Each morning a servant brought him new clothes and jewels to choose from, but it only made him long more fervently for his russet leather and his sword. Each evening she would send for her musicians and sit by him till far into the night, listening to the unearthly melodies they played. But he cared neither for her nor for them.

His thought was always of escape, but, to throw her off her guard, he behaved as though life was growing endurable. He kissed her hand night and morning, he sought her company, he did all that he could to flatter her; but in reality he hated her false smile and soft voice, and only the hope of releasing himself made him able to play his part.

On the first night of every week the Enchantress would disappear, going out in a car drawn by great owls, and not returning till dawn. He longed to go with her, because he was weary for a change of scene, and because he thought it possible that he might find some chance of escape. So one evening, seeing that she was about to depart, he sighed heavily.

“Lady,” he said, “if you knew how long these evenings seem to me when you are away, you would never have the heart to go.”

“Are not all my dancing-girls and musicians here to while away the time?” replied she, looking very softly at him.

“What do I care for them?” said he. “Is there one who has a voice like yours, or a face to be compared with yours? No, no. If I have to part with you, my only wish is to be alone.”

The Enchantress was delighted.

“I must go, nevertheless,” she said. “For a long time past I have spent the first night of every week in a visit to the Bat-King, who rules over an enchanted forest some leagues from here. If I were to disappoint him, he would never forgive me. I have to go after dark and return before sunrise, as he can only see at night, and spends his days sleeping among the trees.”

The King made as though he were jealous.

“And who is this Bat-King that he should rob me of you?” he cried in an angry voice.

“Well, well,” said the Enchantress, laughing, “there is only one thing for it—you must come too. For I cannot vex the Bat-King by my absence, and you can delight yourself with my company while we go and come.”

Then, as though she guessed his thoughts, she continued: “If I did not know you loved me, I would tell you that you need not hope to escape from me in the forest. The Bat-King has millions of subjects, and he has only to sign to them to put you to death should you attempt it.”

They went out, and on the ramparts her chariot waited her. The King could not tell what it was made of, but it looked like one of those clouds that cross the setting sun before a stormy night; six enormous owls were harnessed to it and stood ready for a flight, their yellow eyes fixed on space. A servant handed a long scourge of plaited twigs to the Enchantress. When she and the King had seated themselves, the car rose into the air, and they were soon rushing across the sky.

Away they went, leaving the earth far under them; they flew over towns twinkling with lights and rivers which lay in the darkness like shining snakes. Sometimes a heavy bird of prey would pass on its way beneath them, and sometimes the cry of a nightjar would come up from below. At last they came upon a dark mass covering many miles, which the Enchantress told him was the forest of the Bat-King. A curious twilight shone through the branches, caused by the presence of many glow-worms. The owls lit upon an open patch among the trees, and she got out of the car, telling the King to remain beside her as he valued his life. The owls crouched near, ruffling as they settled.

In a short time they saw a dark-winged figure coming towards them, whose crown of pale flame threw furtive shadows on the tree-trunks. The Enchantress went to meet him, and for some time the two friends walked up and down at a little distance from the King. He looked above and around for some chance of escape. Once he thought of springing into the owl chariot, but the Enchantress had taken her whip of plaited twigs with her, and he

feared that without it the owls might refuse to fly. He felt under his doublet for a dagger which he had managed to lay hands on after his sword had been taken, and which he had kept carefully hidden ever since. Then a sound made him glance upwards, and he saw that the boughs of the trees were a mass of gigantic figures, winged and carrying long nets; they jibbered and laughed, making as though they would throw them over him. It was plain that there was no hope of escape, and that his only chance would be on the homeward way, when he might stab the Enchantress, and with her plaited switch force the owls downwards to earth. But he shuddered at the thought of killing a woman, even though she were a fiend. He turned over these things in his mind till he heard her calling.

“Come!” she was saying. “It may please you to see some of your own kind. His Majesty has got two prisoners he is keeping in the forest, and I am going to look at them. You need not think we shall leave you. I hear that the woman is beautiful, so you can tell me if you think her as beautiful as I am.”

They followed the Bat-King for some distance. The thickness of the forest was surprising; twisted roots were woven together in the most wonderful manner, and starry blossoms swayed to and fro in the night wind. The Bat-creatures came crowding behind, close on their footsteps.

At last they reached a place where some trees stood round a grassy circle; in the centre of it were two figures.

“See,” said the Bat-King, “here are my prisoners. In the night, when my people are awake, they are watched on all sides, and in the day, while we sleep, one touch of my spear raises such a wall of bush and brier that they may try for ever to get through it in vain.”

His eyes gleamed with malice. “Stand, woman!” he cried, “stand up and let the Enchantress see you!”

A lady rose and stood before them, and, as she looked up at her tormentor, her eyes met those of the King. For a moment he remained dumb with horror, then, with a shout, he sprang upon the Bat-King, hurling him to the ground and battering his head against the earth.

The Enchantress shrieked and the Bat-people came round in dozens. They overpowered the King, dragging his enemy from under him, and in another moment he also found himself a prisoner.

The Bat-King, who was now on his feet, rushed at him with his spear, but the Enchantress threw herself between them.

“No, no!” she cried, “you shall not kill him! He is mine! No one shall harm him. I love him and he loves me!”

At this the King, beside himself with rage, turned upon her.

“I would sooner die than be near you another day,” he cried. “I hate you as I hate sin itself! There is only one person in the world I love, and that is this Princess.”

The Enchantress’s face grew white; all her beauty seemed to have faded. She pressed close to him, her fingers opening and shutting, as though she would tear him to pieces.

“I hate you!” he exclaimed again. “Woman though you are, if my hands were free, I would kill you.”

“You all shall die,” said the Enchantress. “First you shall see the woman die, you traitor; then her companion; then you shall die yourself. No one lives to offend me twice.”

Then she turned to the Bat-King. “Send for your subjects,” she cried, “and let us kill them before I leave this forest. I will not go back to my castle till I have seen them slain with torments.”

The Bat-King held up his spear, and his creatures came flocking from every thicket till the place looked like a billowy sea of black wings.

The King’s heart sank; he cared little for torment and pain or the loss of his own life, but he could not bear the thought of seeing the Princess die. But she looked bravely at him.

“We have met again,” she said, “so I am happy. And now we are going to die for each other.” Then she turned to the old man. “Giroflé is dead,” said she, “and they have taken Amulet—I know not where; but you have stayed to the end with me. I have nothing to reward you with, but I will do all I can for you. Lady,” she continued, “neither I nor the King would ask for our lives, even if you were willing to grant them. But this old man, my faithful servant, has done you no harm. I beg you to spare him.”

“He shall die first, that you may see it,” replied the Enchantress, with a look of hatred.

But at this moment there was a sudden movement among the Bat-people, and all their dark arms were raised, pointing in one direction. For, far away eastward, beyond the tree-trunks, the first pale streaks of morning lay along the edge of the world.

“It is too late,” cried the Bat-King. “In a few minutes the dawn will be upon us, and we shall not be able to see.”

Even as he spoke the Bat-creatures were hurrying back to their trees, blinking in the growing light. His eyes were getting dimmer every moment, and the Enchantress saw that she must put off her vengeance.

“When I return, this night week, we will kill them,” said she. “Keep them for me, for I will not lose the sight for twenty kingdoms.”

And she went off in haste, for she feared that her owls might not reach the castle ere the full blaze of day.

Before the Bat-King left his prisoners, he struck his spear on the ground, and a wall of briars rose around them, shutting them in. As soon as they were alone, the King, who still had his dagger hidden upon him, began to try and cut a way through with it. But as fast as he cut one stem, another grew in its place, and he found his work useless; there seemed nothing to do but to sit and wait for the end. In a week the Enchantress would return to see them put to death, and he could only promise himself that, while he had his concealed weapon, he would sell all their lives dear. Neither he nor the Princess had any hope of escape, for even should they be able to get through the tangled walls, they knew that the Bat-creatures could easily prevent their getting out of the forest.

At night, when the Bats were astir, the Bat-King would make the wall disappear, for he liked to look at his captives and tell them how little time they had left. In this way several days went by.

Now, the Princess had worn her white wreath till every bit of blossom had fallen, so that by the time she arrived in the forest it was scarcely more than a twist of withered leaves. She had taken it off reluctantly and thrown it down close to the place where they were now confined, and one day, as she and her lover paced their prison, they saw that the damp earth had revived the dying shoots and that they had put forth fruit. It lay on the earth, ripe and purple, and when night had fallen, and the Bat-King walked abroad, he saw what he took to be a spray of plums lying tossed at the foot of a tree. He ate one, and, finding it delicious, did not stop till he had devoured the whole.

That night the Bats rushed up and down the forest in dismay, for they could not think what had happened to their monarch. He would suffer none to approach him. No one could do his bidding fast enough to escape his wrath; no one was fit to stand in his presence; no one could make a low enough obeisance as he passed. But the strangest thing of all was that, when dawn broke, instead of hastening to his tree till the light should be gone, he

protested that he was able to see as well in the sunshine as in the dark. To one so great as himself, he said, day and night were the same. He stumbled about, feeling the way with his spear, and by the time the Bats were asleep he came to the place where the Princess and her companions were. He had forgotten the wall he should have raised round them; he had forgotten how dangerous it was to approach the King unguarded; he had forgotten everything but his own fancied greatness.

The King watched him come; his hand was on his dagger, his eyes on fire. As he drew near he sprang upon him and stabbed him to the heart—once—twice. It was all over in a moment, quietly, and the Bat-King died without a groan, for his enemy's hand was over his mouth.

By noon they had dug a hole deep enough for his body, and, having taken his clothes, his wings and his spear, they laid him in it, treading down the earth and covering the place with leaves.

Then they took the old man and dressed him in the Bat-King's garments. They fastened the wings to his shoulders in as natural a way as they could. They put the spear in his hand, the flaming crown on his head, and with the dagger they cut off his long beard. With flint and steel they lit a fire, and, burning some wood, smeared his face with the ash till it was as dark as that of their dead enemy. His own clothes they rolled up and hid in a hole. When all this was done the old man made a whistling noise, such as he had heard the Bat-King make to call his subjects, and the evil creatures trooped round, staggering blindly about in the daylight.

When they were gathered at a little distance, he told them, in a voice as like that of their leader as he could make it, that the Princess's servant was dead. He showed them the mound in the grass, under which, he said, he had made the other two prisoners bury him. A murmur of approval ran through the Bat crowd. The creatures could scarcely see the speaker, but they were anxious to keep their Sovereign in a good temper, so they pretended to understand everything. It was evident that they had no suspicions.

"If we are to escape," said the Princess, under her breath, "I must have my dear Amulet back, I will never consent to leave him here."

"Now!" cried the old man, "bring me the white horse that the woman rode upon. Fetch him immediately, for I intend to go afoot no more."

"To-night, your Majesty, to-night?" cried they, astonished. "We cannot see in this blinding light!"

“Obey me at once,” roared the old man, “or I will have fifty of you executed after sunset! Is the greatest monarch on earth to walk like the lowest of his people?”

The Bats disappeared in all directions, for the Bat-King had kept the horse tied up in a distant spot; in their alarm they strayed all over the forest, but at last some of them got to the place where he was tethered.

The Princess watched eagerly for her favourite. “Dear Amulet,” she whispered to him when he arrived, “have no fear and we shall yet escape. I have sent for you that I may free you. Do all you are bid, for he who you think is the Bat-King is our friend who has come all the way with us.”

Then the old man mounted; he dismissed the crowd, but kept back one of the Bat-creatures, whom he drove before him with his spear to guide him to the edge of the enchanted forest. The Bat could scarcely see, but when he stopped, he beat him with the spear-shaft till he found the way again.

The King and Princess remained behind; they feared to rouse the suspicions of their enemies by going with him, as evening was far spent and the time when they would see clearly was drawing near. Besides which, they did not know how far distant the forest’s edge might be, nor whether the Princess would be able to reach it on foot by dark.

Before long the old man returned. He had freed Amulet at the borders, bidding him stay near the wood’s outskirts till his mistress should be able to join him. He had then slain the guide with his spear, lest he should bring word to his fellows of what had happened. The Princess rejoiced that her dear Amulet was safe, and the three companions sat down to discuss their escape. The King had a plan which they hoped to carry out that night, for the week had gone by and the Enchantress was coming.

The glow-worms were shining and the Bats going about again with open eyes when the owl-chariot was seen. The old man took a dark cloak which had belonged to the Bat-King, and, muffling his head and face with it, went to meet the Enchantress. As she stepped out of her car he cried: “Alas, lady! I have bad news. The old man is dead, and the pleasure of slaying one of these wretches is lost. I kept him alive as long as I could, but his captivity told on him and he died.”

“That is of no consequence,” said she. “It is the other two who concern me most. We will make it yet worse for them. But why do you keep your face hidden?”

“Fair one,” replied he, “flying in the daylight, I bruised my cheek against a tree, and I would not that you should see it.”

She laughed. “And why is your voice so strange?” she asked again.

“It is the folds of the cloak that muffle it,” said he.

“And how is it,” she went on, seating herself on the grass, “that you have made no preparations for the execution?”

“All is ready,” he said; “only wait till I call up my people, and you shall choose the manner of their deaths.”

Then he gave a call, and the Bat-creatures surrounded them.

“Bats!” he cried, pointing to the Enchantress, “fall upon this woman and slay her where she stands.”

And almost before she had time to scream they had set upon her, and while she raved and struggled they beat her with their heavy wings, smiting her till she died.

Then the King and Princess sprang into the owl-chariot, the old man following. Before the Bats discovered how they had been deceived, the King took the plaited switch which was lying in the car and lashed the owls till they flew up far above the heads of the tossing crowd. The Bat-creatures rose with one accord into the air and followed in a great flight, but the owls were swifter, and soon the forest was passed and the pursuers fell back, fearing the open country.

* * * * *

When the lovers and their companion came down to earth and lit on the ground, they found Amulet waiting near the place where the old man had left him, and they passed the rest of the night peacefully under the stars.

Next day they began their homeward journey, and in time reached the city in the plain where the Princess lived; and there she was married to her lover with great splendour. Amulet and the old man went with her to her husband’s kingdom, and on the way thither they stopped to see the Tree of Pride cut down.

Then they rode on, the King and his Queen side by side, and disappeared over the plain and beyond the blue hills into their new life.

THE STORY OF FARMYARD MAGGIE

One Saturday afternoon when the miller had let his man go out, he was standing at the mill door above the steps, with the white dust whirling behind him like a mist. He saw Peter and his sister near the witch's cottage, and he waved his hand and shouted to them to come. He was smoking, but knocked the ashes out of his pipe, for he was certain that little Peter would ask for a story. He liked telling him stories better than reading out of his grandmother's book, because he could look at Janet all the time, instead of keeping his eyes upon the words. He began to rack his brains for something new.

"A story! a story!" cried little Peter, as soon as he had got within earshot.

"But I have none left in my head," said the miller, teasing him.

"Then there is the book," said Peter. "I'll go for it."

It was a long time since he had stopped being afraid of the tall man in the white hat.

"No! no! no!" cried the miller. "Come here and sit on the sacks, and I'll think of something. We'll go up and shut the sluice in a few minutes, and by that time no doubt something new will come into my mind."

Janet came in and sat down, and the dust settled on her yellow hair till she looked like a snow-powdered fairy on the top of a Christmas cake. The miller thought it beautiful. As for little Peter, the creaking machinery was enough to keep him happy, and when they went to shut the sluice-gate, he danced and jumped the whole way there.

"So here we'll stay," said the miller, when the water was turned off and they were sitting on a fallen tree at the edge of the mill-dam. "I have just remembered the story of Farmyard Maggie."

Long before you were born, and before I was born either (began the miller), there lived at the farm over yonder a little girl. She was an orphan, like you, but she had not even a grandmother to share her roof with her. In summer she slept by the hedge, and in winter she would slip into the stable and lie by the farm horses. And when it was autumn, and the stacks stood in rows in the rickyard waiting to be threshed, she would crawl in under them through the little hole that is left for the air to pass through and to keep them

from heating. There she slept as snug as if she were in a house. She was called "Farmyard Maggie," because it was her business to look after the fowls in the yard.

Poor little body! she had not a very happy life of it. They were rough folk at the farm, for the farmer was miserly and his wife was cruel, and often she did not get enough to eat. But the farm men were kind and would sometimes give her a crust of bread or a bit of cheese from their own dinners; and once, when it was cold, a ploughman brought her a pair of shoes that belonged to his own little girl, for he did not like to see her poor little toes on the frosty ground. The horses were kind always, and were careful not to kick her or tramp on her when she took refuge in their stalls; but, unfortunately, they were proud, and when they had on their fine harness with the brass crescents that swung between their ears, they would not notice her. They were high creatures.

Maggie took care of the poultry well. She knew all the cocks and hens and little chickens, and even the waddling, gobbling, ducks, whom she fetched home each evening from the pond at the foot of the hill, thought well of her—that is, when they had time to think of anything but their own stomachs, which was not often, certainly. But she had two great friends who loved her dearly. One was a little game-fowl who was as straight on his legs as a sergeant on parade, and the other was a large Cochin-China cock who looked as if he wore ill-fitting yellow trousers that were always on the verge of coming off. The gamecock despised the Cochin-Chinaman a little, for he thought him vulgar, but he was a great deal too well-bred to show it. Besides which, their affection for Maggie made the two birds quite friendly.

One autumn afternoon, when the mist hung over the stubble and the brambles were red and gold, Maggie sat crying just over there by the roadside. She was most dreadfully unhappy, for a duck was lost and the farmer's wife had told her that she must go away and never come back any more. She had turned her out of the yard without so much as a sixpence or a piece of bread to keep her from starving.

Presently the Cochin-China cock passed by, and when he saw she was in trouble, he came running towards her as hard as he could, with great awkward strides and his neck stuck out in front of him.

"Oh, what *is* the matter?" he cried. And Maggie put her arms round him and told him everything.

When he knew what had happened he was in as great a taking as herself, and he walked up and down, flapping his wings distractedly and making the

most heartrending noises in his throat.

“I must go for Alfonso,” he said at last.

Alfonso was the gamecock.

I can tell you there was a to-do when the birds got at the bottom of the affair! They stood, one on either side of their poor friend, begging her not to cry; and Alfonso was anxious to fight everybody, from the bantam up to the great bubbly-jock who scraped his wings along the ground and turned blue about the neck if you whistled to him. All the fowls knew that something terrible had happened.

“But what is the use of your fighting, dear Alfonso?” said Maggie. “It would do me no good, and the poultry are all innocent. They have done me no harm.”

“I am not so sure about those sly fat huzzies of ducks. What business have they to look after themselves so badly? I have a good mind to go down and have a few words with the drake.”

“No, no—pray don’t,” said Maggie. “The best thing I can do is to go away and be done with it.”

The Cochin-Chinaman was weeping hoarsely: he had no dignity.

“I never thought to leave my family,” he cried, “but this is the last they’ll see of me. I shall go with you.”

Alfonso was rather shocked, for he had very proper ideas.

“And leave your wife?” he exclaimed.

“She is in love with the Dorking cock, so she can stay with him. I have known it for some time. There he is, standing on one leg by the wood-pile.”

“I will come too,” said the game-fowl, who was a bachelor, “but do you go on. I will just go and break every bone in the drake’s body, and I can catch you up before you are out of sight.”

“Oh, no! no! Promise you won’t do that!” implored Maggie.

It took some time to persuade him to be quiet, but at last it was done.

“It is better to get the business over at once,” said the Cochin-China cock. “If Alfonso is ready, we will start.”

“And pray, who says I am not ready for anything?” inquired the other. “Anyone who wants to eat his words has only to come to me!”

“But nobody says it,” replied Maggie soothingly. “I am sure no one ever had two such dear, brave friends as I have.”

And with that the three set forth on their travels.

They went up the road that runs north, round the other side of the dam, for they were anxious to get as far as possible without being seen, in case anyone should come after them to try and make the cocks go back. Sometimes they ran, they were in such a hurry. At last they came to where the old gipsy track crosses the way, and turned into it; feeling much safer for the shelter of the whins and bushes in that green place.

All round them there were tangles of bramble, red and copper and orange, and fiery spotted leaves. Where it was damp the dew still lay under the burning bracken and the yellow ragwort stood up like plumes and feathers of gold. Here they went slower, pushing through the broom, whose black pods rattled as they passed. In front of them a little string of smoke was rising, and when they reached it, they found that it came from the chimneys of a caravan which was drawn up in a clearing.

Maggie and her two friends crouched down and looked at it through the bracken. They saw a large blue van and a battered-looking green one, which stood with their shafts resting on the ground. A couple of horses grazed, unharnessed, a few yards away. In a circle of stones burned a fire, over which hung a black caldron, and a woman, with a string of red beads round her neck, was nursing a baby on the top step of the blue van.

“Oh, what a lovely baby!” whispered Maggie, as she gazed at them.

“So it is,” replied the Cochin-China cock amiably. Alfonso turned up his beak, for he had no domestic tastes.

“I must go a little nearer,” said Maggie. “Oh, look! the woman can see us. I really will ask her to show it to me.”

“Ma’am,” she said, making a curtsy, “may I look at your little child?”



“MAGGIE TOOK IT AND BEGAN TO ROCK IT
ABOUT.”

The woman exchanged glances of rather contemptuous amusement with a man who had come out of the van and stood behind her. Then she held the

baby out to Maggie, and Maggie took it and began to rock it about as if she had minded babies, and not poultry, all her life.

“Well, I never!” said the man. He wore small gold rings in his ears.

At this moment there arose a most furious noise from some fowls that were wandering about among the van wheels, where a fight was beginning. Alfonso had already managed to pick a quarrel with someone of his own sex, and the hens were screeching as the two birds crouched opposite to each other, making leaps into the air and striking out until the feathers flew.

“Alfonso! Alfonso! stop this moment!” screamed Maggie. “Oh! what a way to behave!”

But she could not get at him because of the baby she held.

“He has dreadful manners,” moaned the Cochin-China cock. But he would not have said that if Alfonso had been able to hear him.

“Well,” said the man, vaulting down the steps, “that’s the finest little game-bird I ever saw.”

And without more ado he separated the fighters and pushed Alfonso under a basket that stood upside down near the van. There was a hole in it, and through this Alfonso stuck his head and crowed at the top of his voice.

“What are you doing to him?” cried Maggie. “He is my friend, and we are travelling together.”

“He’s mine now,” replied the man, “for I’m going to keep him.”

“But I can’t part from him—you have got no right to take him away.” And the tears rushed to Maggie’s eyes at the thought.

“Best come along too,” said the woman, who spoke little.

“Oh yes—and perhaps I could mind the baby,” exclaimed Maggie.

“You’d have to,” said the woman. “We don’t keep people for nothing.”

“But there’s him too,” said Maggie, pointing to the Cochin-Chinaman. “I can’t leave him either. He always goes with Alfonso and me.”

The man laughed. “You’re the queerest lot *I* ever saw,” said he. “But I suppose we must have you all.”

And so it was settled.

Maggie was very much relieved to find that the party was to move away early next morning, and she took care to keep as much out of sight as

possible. But the rest of the evening passed without their hearing or seeing anything of the people at the farm, and she hoped that no one had discovered their absence. As soon as it was light next day the horses were harnessed, and the three truants set out with their new friends.

There was another member of the party who came back to the camp just as they were starting, and who drove the green van. His name was Dan, and he was the brother of the man with the gold earrings, a clean-shaved brown young fellow, with dark smooth hair which came forward in a flat lock over either ear. He wore a cap made of rabbit-skin, and he looked after the two horses. Though he took little notice of Maggie she was not afraid of him, for he had a self-contained, serious face, and was so good to the beasts that she knew he must be kind.

Besides this work he did nothing in the camp. His brother was a tinman, but Dan left the pots and pans alone; and it was only when the party was at village fairs that his talents came into play. The horse which drew the smaller van and did the lighter work was a bright chestnut with a fine coat, which Dan groomed ceaselessly. Both animals followed him like dogs, and he could do whatever he pleased with the chestnut, which could jump almost anything. When he rode him, barebacked, at the big fairs, the crowd would look on open-mouthed, shouting as he cleared the hurdles and dropping their pence into the rabbit-skin cap when it was carried round. Once an ill-natured fellow had stuck a thorn into the horse's flank as he was led by, and Dan had blacked both his eyes before leaving the fair. When the vans were settled in one place, he would often be absent for days together, and nobody knew where he went.

Maggie soon found out that they were making for some woods a few days' journey off. She was very happy, for she had seen so little of the world outside the farmyard that every new place amused her. The woman was friendly to her in her silent way when she found how careful she was of the baby. Maggie soon learnt to dress and tend it; and she swept out the vans, lit the fires, and in the evening sat on the top step, talking to Alfonso and the Cochinchina cock. They were quite contented too, though they did not live so well as they had done at the farm.

They travelled on, by villages and hill-sides, by moors and by roads. The trees flamed with autumn, and the rose-hips were turning red. At last they drew up in a grassy track which ran through an immense wood, where the sighing of the air in the fir-branches rose and fell in little gusts, and grey-blue wood-pigeons went flapping away down the vistas of stems. Maggie had never imagined such a place, and when the camp was set out and she lay

down, tired, to sleep, she promised herself that, if she had a free moment on the morrow, she would go and see more of it.

It was the next afternoon that her chance came, and off she set, looking back now and then, to make sure of finding her way home. How tall the bracken was! The bramble, that in woods keeps its living green almost into the winter, trailed over the path, and there were regiments of table-shaped toadstools, crimson and scarlet and brown. The rabbits fled at her step, diving underground into unseen burrows, and the male-fern stood like upright bunches of plumes. She was so much delighted by all this that she went on, and on, until the sound of a voice singing to a stringed instrument made her stand still to listen.

Not far off was another camp, much like the one she had left. There were several tents, and people were moving about; but the music came from close by, on the other side of an overturned fir whose roots stood up like wild arms. She stole up and peeped round the great circle of earth which the tree had torn out with it in its fall, and in which ferns and rough grass had sown themselves. She *was* surprised!

On his face in the moss lay Dan, his elbows on the ground, his chin in his hands. His rabbit-skin cap was pulled over his eyes, and the gold rings which, like his brother, he wore in his ears gleamed against his dark neck.

A girl sat near him, playing on a little stringed instrument, such as Maggie had never seen before. Her voice reminded her of the wood-pigeons, and the twang of the strings as she struck them was both sharp and soft at once. The blue of her eyes and the pale pink colour of her cheeks made Dan look almost like an Indian by contrast with her. She had ceased singing, but Maggie kept as still as possible in hopes of hearing some more.

“It’s a good thing I left Alfonso at home,” she thought; “he would have never stayed quiet. I won’t breathe, and perhaps she’ll begin again.”

Dan was silent too, though he never took his eyes off his companion’s lips. Soon she touched the strings again and played a few notes that sounded like a whisper.

“This is called ‘The Wind in the Broom,’” she said:

“Wind, wind, in the forest tall,
Do you stir the broom where my lass is waiting?
Pale lass, in the witch’s thrall—
For the witch is by, and she may not call.
(O the long, long days that my lass is waiting!)
Gold broom, with your flowers in bloom,
Wave,’ says the lad: ‘it is time for mating.’

“Lad, lad, in the witch’s wood,
There is no more hope when the spell is spoken;
Lost lad, is the sight so good
Of the empty place where your love has stood?
(O the long, long days that her heart has broken!)
Dead broom, be your bare pod’s doom
Black,’ says the witch, ‘for a sign and token.’

“Bold broom, by the witch’s door,
Will you hide my lad as his step steals nigher?
Sleep, witch, on the forest floor;
You are drugged by the broom-flowers’ scented core.
(O the smouldering fumes of its golden fire!)
Burn, broom, in the forest’s gloom,
Glow,’ says the lass, ‘like the heart’s desire.’

“Wind, wind, round the witch’s lair
There’s a lad and lass that no spell can sever;
Sing, wind, in the broom-flowers there,
For you sing good-bye to an old despair.
(O the long, long days, that are done for ever!)
Gold broom, with the silken plume,
Laugh,’ says the wind, ‘because love dies never.’”

Maggie was so much absorbed in the song that she came forward a little from behind the root. Though Dan had not turned his head she saw that his watchful eyes were on her, and she prepared to move away. The girl turned round; her face was so sweet that Maggie spoke up.

“I was only listening to the song,” she said.

“Come and sit beside me,” said the singer. “My name is Rhoda. Who are you?”

“That’s the girl from our camp,” said Dan.

Long after he had gone back to feed the horses Maggie sat talking to her new friend. She told her all about Alfonso and the Cochin-Chinaman, and how they had all run away from the farm. Though Rhoda was grown up and could not understand fowls when they spoke, she listened with great interest, and Maggie promised to bring the two cocks to visit her. When she got home Dan was putting a rug on the chestnut horse, for the nights were growing colder. He seemed to look at her with a new interest.

“Do you like Rhoda’s songs?” he asked suddenly.

“Oh yes.”

“She makes them for me,” said Dan.

“I am going to take Alfonso and the other cock to see her,” continued Maggie. “Perhaps I shall go to-morrow.”

“Then I had better come with you. There are wild-cats in the wood,” observed Dan shortly. And he went into the green van and said no more.

After that Maggie managed to slip away nearly every day to see her friend in the other camp. Sometimes she took the birds with her, and sometimes she left them at home. Dan and his brother had gone off to a fair in the neighbourhood, which was to last several days.

One afternoon as she sat with Rhoda under the trees, a man came towards them from the tents. He had a long pointed nose, and was very grandly dressed for a gipsy, for he wore a bright-coloured scarf and waistcoat and his fingers were covered with silver rings. Maggie thought him very nice, for he joined them and seemed to admire Alfonso very much. The little cock strutted about, ruffling himself out as the man watched him. He loved notice. The gipsy threw him a handful of corn from his pocket, and when he went off again to the tents, he kept looking back with a smile. Rhoda took up her guitar once more for she had laid it down at his approach, though she was in the middle of a song.

“I never sing to *him*,” she said.

It was a pleasant time they spent in the fir-woods, and Maggie began to think there could be nothing better than life in the caravan. She loved the open air and the blue mists, the silver spider webs and the winking eyes of the little fires that were lit among the trees at night. She loved the whispering branches and the red toadstools and the sceptres of tall ragwort, that were beginning to fade as the days went by. She did not want to leave the place, and, besides that, she did not want to leave Rhoda.

But early one morning, as she was gathering wood a little way from the van, she glanced up to find Rhoda standing before her. Her guitar was under her arm and a little bundle in her hand.

“I have come to say good-bye,” said she. “Yes, I am going, and you must not tell anybody. I can’t stay any more in our camp. I shall take my guitar and go and make my living by singing at fairs, as I have done before. So I’ve come to say good-bye to you first.”

Maggie was too much surprised to answer.

“It is because of the man you saw,” continued Rhoda, “the man I will not sing for. He is the richest gipsy in the country, and I hate him; but he loves me. My mother says I must marry him. He has given her presents of money and necklaces and fine clothes, and she has promised me to him. They don’t know I have gone, but by to-night I shall be miles away, and I will never come back. He is the most hateful man in the world.”

“And now I shall never see you any more!” cried Maggie.

“Oh, but I hope you will,” replied Rhoda. “I like you, and you like me, and when you are at a fair some day, you’ll hear my guitar, and come and speak to me and be glad to see me. You will, won’t you?”

And she turned away towards the edge of the wood, and Maggie went a little distance with her.

“May I tell Dan?” she asked, as they parted.

“Oh, Dan knows,” said Rhoda.

Then she went away through the tree-stems into the open country, and Maggie stood at the outskirts of the wood watching her until she disappeared among the shorn fields, looking back and waving her hand.

She was sad for a long time after that. Dan said nothing of what he knew, and when she tried to speak to him, he got out of her way. She did not even tell Alfonso or the Cochin-Chinaman what had happened; though, to be sure, it would have been safe enough, for, even if they had spoken of it, no one but herself could have understood them. Once she saw the rich gipsy with the evil face and silver rings prowling about the vans, which made her so frightened that she got into one of them and locked herself in. No one else had seen Rhoda when she came to say good-bye, and there was nothing to do but to keep her own counsel and hope that in time she might meet her friend again.

The Cochin-China cock was as happy as possible. He did not care for high company, and the few fowls that ran about the van wheels and travelled together in a basket on the roof when the family was moving were good enough for him. He forgot that he had ever had a wife and family, though he had wept so loudly when he left them to follow Maggie; and now he had chosen for a partner a young speckled hen, who was bewitched by his yellow trousers and deep voice.

Alfonso, on the contrary, had grown prouder than ever; and when he discovered that the man with the gold earrings meant to make a deal of money by backing him to fight other cocks in public, he was extremely happy. He longed for spring to come, for then the vans were to make a tour through many villages and towns, and he would have the chance of meeting all sorts of champions in single combat. He had found this out through the Cochin-Chinaman, who was a gossip, and whose new wife told him everything that went on. But Maggie knew nothing about it, for Alfonso would not tell her, and promised to thrash his friend if he did so. Alfonso knew that if anything were to happen to himself it would break her heart. Sometimes his conscience blamed him for deceiving her, but he did not listen to it; it seemed to him that he heard the crowing of whole crowds of upstart birds, and his spurs itched.

It had grown quite cold when the time came for them to leave the woods. Dan and Maggie were to go off in the green van at sunrise, and the woman with her husband and baby were to follow after midday. Dan knew the place for their next camp, and he and his companion were to get everything ready, and have fires lit and water carried by the time the family arrived with its belongings and the cocks and hens.

It was a pleasant journey; the roads were good and the sun shone. They sat with their feet on the shafts, and Dan talked more than he had ever talked before. He told Maggie of his youth and the tents among which he was born; of his half-Spanish mother, who had died in the cold of a snowy winter; and of his father, who had beaten him with a strap till he had learnt to ride better than any of the other boys. She heard how he and his brother got enough money to buy the van and the horses, and how he had met Rhoda at a great gipsy gathering; how she had sung 'The Wind in the Broom' for him by a camp-fire when all their companions had gone to sleep; how they had sat till the morning came and the stars went out like so many street-lamps in the daylight. Then he said very little more, and sat with his cap pulled over his eyes, whistling the tune of 'The Wind in the Broom' till the journey was done.

They had come to an old quarry cut into the hollow of a hill-side. Dan unharnessed the horse, and they began their work. It was getting dark when they heard approaching wheels and saw their friends coming up the winding road. Maggie could hear the Cochin-Chinaman's hoarse voice proclaiming his arrival and distinguish in the dusk the smaller basket tied on the top step of the van, in which Alfonso, according to custom, travelled alone. The Cochin-Chinaman's wife, who was greedy, was already making a disturbance and demanding to know how soon they might expect their evening meal.

It was late by the time Maggie was able to prepare it. She turned it out in a heap and let the birds loose. They rushed at it, pushing and struggling to get the best bits, the speckled hen screaming to her husband to protect her from the other hens, and to see that she was not robbed of her share. Then Maggie took Alfonso's little plate, and, putting a few nice spoonfuls in it, went up the van steps.

But she opened the basket and looked in, to find that Alfonso was gone.

* * * * *

Then indeed there was consternation in the camp. Maggie's tears fell fast and heavy down her cheeks as she sat looking into the empty basket. The whole family came out at her call and stood bewailing itself in different ways. The man with the gold earrings swore, the wife fixed her dark gaze on her weeping servant, and Dan hung about trying to comfort Maggie. But she cared for none of them, and only when the Cochin-Chinaman hurried from his food to her side did she dry her eyes.

"He's gone! he's gone!" she wailed, "and we shall never see him again. O Alfonso! Alfonso! how I loved you!"

"The basket was fastened down when you saw it first, and that shows that someone has taken him. If he had fallen out it would have been open," said Dan.

"I took fine care not to let anyone see him," observed his brother; "he was too good a bird to run risks with."

At this Maggie started up.

"It is the man with the silver rings!" she exclaimed—"the rich gipsy in the wood! Oh, it is all my fault! If it had not been for me he would never have seen Alfonso."

And that was the most cruel idea of all.

That night, when everyone was asleep, she got up and packed her bundle. She was afraid to say good-bye to her friends for fear she should be prevented from going to seek her lost comrade, and she had made up her mind to leave everything and travel this difficult world till she should meet him again. She was certain the wicked-looking gipsy in the wood had stolen him before the blue van left its last camping-ground, and she resolved to go back to the place where they had all been so happy, to see whether, by some contrivance, she might steal him from the tents. Perhaps he was miserable himself, poor Alfonso! She was broken-hearted as she crept out of the van. She could make out the heavy figure of the Cochin-Chinaman roosting with his wife upon a shaft. He got down and came running to her, striding and sprawling with his great awkward legs.

“Don’t say a word—I am going to find Alfonso,” began Maggie. “If anyone hears me I may be stopped, and then I shall die of despair. Hush! hush! Don’t open your beak to screech like that, or they’ll all come out.”

“You care more for Alfonso than for me,” wailed the cock, as loudly as he dared. “You think nothing of bidding good-bye to me!”

She could not answer, for she knew it was true. She loved Alfonso best.

“But we shall both come back together, Alfonso and I,” she replied. “I can leave you because I know you are quite happy.”

“I’m glad you think so,” replied he. “Never you marry if you want peace. What that speckled baggage has made me endure is beyond all telling!”

“And I thought you were so comfortably married!” exclaimed Maggie.

“Oh, what I have gone through!” he went on—“what I have endured! She is so greedy that I never get a bite. She is so violent that I have had to call in help or not keep a feather on my body. And she has told all the others that I left the farm we came from because I was afraid of the bantam cock. She has no heart and no manners—only claws and a tongue!”

“Then come with me,” said Maggie. “We shall be very poor, and perhaps starve, but we shan’t be lonely.”

“Family life is dreadful,” said the Cochin-Chinaman. “I’ll come.”

It took many hours to get back to the woods, and they were both tired and hungry by the time they saw the long line of dark trees stretching away before them. Maggie had brought some food with her, which she shared with her friend; but they did not dare to eat much, as they had to make it last as

long as possible. They tried not to think of their bad prospects as they trudged along. They did not enter the woods till dusk, for they knew that if the rich gipsy saw Maggie, he would guess what had brought her back, and hide Alfonso more carefully than ever. They found the spot where their camp had been, and rested there a little before going into the heart of the wood. Maggie knew every step of the way, every clump of yellowing ferns, every trail of bramble, and the Cochin-Chinaman, who was not observant, was glad to follow her blindly. When once they caught sight of the tents, he was to run on and prowl about in the undergrowth, calling to Alfonso in his own language. As nobody but the gamecock would understand what he said, he was to shout, telling him Maggie was there, and the two birds were to settle a way of escape. These were fine schemes, and would, no doubt, have succeeded beautifully; but alas! and alas! when they came to the root beside which Rhoda had sung her songs to Dan, they saw that the place was empty and the tents gone. The only traces remaining of the camp were the little black circles of ashes on the ground, which showed where the fires had been.

It was chilly comfort to think that, if Alfonso had been stolen only a day ago, the gipsy could not have gone far. He had horses and carts, and there was not much chance of overtaking him for the two poor footsore friends, even if they knew which way he went. It was too dark now to see the traces of his wheels on the soft moss, and they could go no farther that night. Nevertheless, Maggie would not give up her quest, and the Cochin-Chinaman, great yellow booby of a fellow as he was, vowed that he would never leave her. He blubbered as he said it, but he meant it, all the same.

When morning broke their hearts were very sad. Where were they to go? Winter was coming on, and they had no money and hardly any food, and unless they begged as they went, there was nothing they could do for a living. But they made up their minds either to die or to rescue their friend, and started at daybreak to follow the track of footprints and wheel-marks which took them to the dusty highroad. The cock picked up all sorts of odds and ends by the way, and a friendly blacksmith who was eating bread and cheese at the door of his smithy gave Maggie a share of it. They slept in an empty barn that night, and the next day found them on the outskirts of a little country town.

They were eager to get to it, hoping to hear news of the gipsy, or to find his tents pitched in the neighbourhood. The cock had cut his foot on a piece of broken glass by the roadside, and was so lame that he could scarcely walk. He sat on Maggie's shoulder, but he was so heavy that he prevented

her from getting on fast. Sometimes she put him down, and he limped a little way, but she always had to take him up again. When they reached the first houses, the people ran out to look at the amusing sight, and when they heard how the strange pair of comrades were talking together, they held up their hands. "Was ever anything like that seen before?" they cried.

Soon there was quite a crowd. The whole street turned out to listen, though, of course, no one could understand a word. Maggie took the opportunity of explaining that they were very poor, and asked for some food. A woman offered them a hunk of bread and a plate of broken meat, which they took gratefully.

"It's worth while paying for such a show!" she exclaimed. And everybody agreed with her, though only a few were willing to put their hands in their pockets.

All at once a great clatter was heard, and a running footman came racing along the road, shouting as he went and pushing people out of the way with his staff.

"Room! room!" he cried. "Make way for the Lord Bishop's carriage!"

A splendid open coach came in sight, drawn by four white horses with purple plumes on their heads and driven by a gold-laced coachman. A fine fat Bishop sat in it, dressed in purple. Gold tassels hung from his hat, and opposite to him sat a servant armed with a silk pocket-handkerchief with which to flick the dust of the road from the episcopal person. Everybody bowed to the earth.

"What is all this crowd for?" demanded the Bishop, stopping his coach.

When he heard that a girl was to be heard talking to a Cochin-China cock in his native tongue, he was immensely surprised, and ordered Maggie and her companion to come before him. The woman who had given them meat and bread pushed her forward.

"Your Reverend Holiness will die o' laughing to hear them," she exclaimed.

"Speak, girl," said the Bishop. "Address the bird, and tell him to reply."

When he had heard the conversation that followed, he could hardly believe his senses. The servant with the silk handkerchief grinned from ear to ear, the coachman on his box turned round to listen, and the footmen who stood on a board behind the carriage gaped.

“You are evidently a highly intelligent little girl,” said the Bishop, “and it is a scandal that you should be tramping the roads. I have a large aviary at my palace and you shall come to look after it. I really never thought to find a person who could speak to birds. Some of mine are very tiresome, and you will be able to make them hear reason. I will see that you are properly clothed and educated.”

But Maggie refused, and explained that she was going to seek Alfonso.

“Tut, tut, tut!” said the Bishop. “If the cock is as valuable as you say, he will be well cared for. You will have a good education at my palace, and be clean and tidy.”

“But I don’t want to be clean and tidy, and I shouldn’t like to live in a palace,” cried Maggie.

All the servants tittered.

“*Nonsense!*” said the Bishop. “Everyone wants to be clean and tidy, and everyone would like to live in a palace.”

“But I can’t!” exclaimed Maggie—“indeed I can’t!”

“There is no such word as ‘can’t’ in the English language,” said the Bishop.

“Come! come!” said Maggie to the Cochin-Chinaman, “we must get away as quick as we can!”

The Bishop could not understand what she said, but he saw she was preparing to run.

“I fear you are one of the many people who do not know what is good for them,” said he. “Get into the carriage immediately. The footmen will help you in, and you may sit opposite to me.”

And before you could count ten they had sprung from their places, opened the door, and lifted her in. With a hoarse agonized screech the Cochin-Chinaman leaped up and flew heavily into the coach. He came through the air like a cannon-ball.

“Really, this is too much!” exclaimed the Bishop. “I cannot be made ridiculous by having this creature sitting in front of me as we go through the streets.”

“He is the only friend I have got left,” sobbed poor Maggie, bursting into tears as the footmen tried to seize the cock’s legs.

The Bishop was far from being an unkind man; indeed, he had a great reputation for charity, both public and private.

“Tut, tut!” he said; “let him come. But he can’t sit there opposite to me. Put him under the seat.”

And so Maggie, thankful to keep him at any price, stuffed him underneath, and pressed her feet against him, to comfort him. The footmen were inexpressibly shocked. Then they all drove off to the palace.

The palace was a truly imposing place, with cupolas and courts, porches and statues; and, being outside the town, it was approached by an avenue a mile long. A wide stream flowed round one side of it, and the great entrance gates were covered with crests and glorious devices. Behind it was an aviary full of bright-coloured birds, who screamed and fought and made such a terrible din that, when the carriage drew up, the Cochin-Chinaman was taken from under the seat trembling. Maggie was shown a hut which she was to inhabit, built in a little remote yard, and an old chicken-coop was brought and filled with straw to make a bed for the cock. The Bishop ordered that food should be given them, and told Maggie she was to begin her duties on the morrow.

She did not like her place at all. The birds in the aviary were nearly all foreign, so she did not know their language; and those she could understand were rude and turbulent, and made the most heartless jokes about the poor Cochin-Chinaman’s yellow trousers. But there was no use in grumbling. The Bishop was determined that she should stay and look after the aviary; he disapproved of vagrants and gipsies, and had settled that she was to be brought up respectably. She could not get away, because she was never allowed to leave the place alone; so she consoled herself by thinking that, as winter was at hand, she would be likely to starve were she still tramping the road; and then she would certainly never see Alfonso again.

And so time went by and she lived at the palace, feeding and tending the foreign birds, and cheered by the company of her faithful comrade, who grew fat on the crumbs from the Bishop’s kitchen and took care not to display his yellow trousers within sight of the aviary.

Soon it grew bitterly cold. The snow fell, and Christmas came and went; and then, at last, the young New Year grew strong, and birds began to sing and trees to bud. The little yard in which the hut stood was surrounded by an ivy-covered wall with a small iron gate in it, and through the latter she could see the ground slope down to the still, wide stream that passed the palace like a crawling silver snake.

The bars of the gate were firm in their places, for she had tried them all and they would not move; they were so closely set that she could not squeeze herself out between them. She would press her face against them, looking out enviously at every passing insect that was free. In the wood over the water squirrels jumped about, or sat up like little begging dogs, with their tails over their heads. The Cochin-Chinaman could fly out of the yard, but what was the use of that when he could not take her with him? She would sit by the gate while he stood on the top of the wall describing to her all the things he could see.

One spring afternoon, as they passed their time thus, a sound of music came floating from some distance. It was very faint, but as it drew nearer Maggie sprang up, crying to the cock to fly out and see what it could mean.

For the tune was the tune of "The Wind in the Broom."

Nearer and nearer it came. She could faintly hear the words. "Gold broom, with your flowers in bloom," sang the voice.

The cock leaped down, and, running and flying, he rushed along the green banks of the stream as hard as he could. The town was behind him at the far side of the palace, so he was molested by no one; and there, sure enough, coming to meet him at the water-side, was Rhoda with her guitar slung on her shoulder. Oh, how he longed to speak! but, as she could not understand his talk, there was no use in saying anything. But he took her by the skirts and began dragging her along.

"You are Maggie's Cochin-Chinaman!" she cried.

He hurried on before her, and she followed as fast as she could run.

How delighted the two friends were at meeting again! Rhoda stood outside the gate, and Maggie held her hand through the bars, and they told each other all that had happened since they parted.

"I will get you away from here, see if I don't!" said Rhoda. "Then we will start off together to find Alfonso, for I can make enough to keep us all by singing. I am quite rich already." She pulled a little bag out of her bosom.

"Feel how heavy it is," she said.

At last Rhoda went away. She said that she would not return till she had thought of a good plan for Maggie's escape, and she commanded the cock to roost every night on the yard wall; for she would come back under cover of night, and wake him by throwing up a stone at him when her plan was ready.

Rhoda was very clever—the making of songs and music was not the only thing she understood. When she found that the iron gate was fastened by a bolt, and that the bolt was held in its place by a padlock, she went off to the town and bought a file, and next night she returned and began to saw away. She did it from the outside, so that no one who might chance to come into the yard could see any mark on the bolt. When morning came it was cut through all but a little piece. Up the stream, a short way above the palace, was a house whose walls stood almost in the water, and near it a little boat was moored to a stake in the bank. This boat she determined should carry them all out of the Bishop's reach.

On the second night, therefore, when it was dark, and she guessed the palace people were in bed, she came stealing along to the gate. There was the cock at his post, fast asleep. When she had filed through the last bit of the bolt, she woke him with a stone, and signed to him to go and fetch Maggie. Then she ran to the boat, cut its rope with her knife, and, jumping into it, rowed quickly down to where her friends were waiting.

How smoothly and how fast the water carried them along, as they ran into the current and the tall mass of the palace dropped behind them! Rhoda had the oars, and the cock sat in the bottom of the boat beside the guitar. Maggie was so much delighted to be free that she did not speak a word. The fields and the alder-trees slipped by, and when the spring day broke, she saw the tufts on the willows and the yellow stars of the celandines shining among the roots. She felt quite sure now that everything would go right.

The whole day they rowed on, and when they thought themselves far enough from the Bishop to be safe, they jumped on shore and let the boat drift out of sight. Then they started off to seek their fortunes once more.

It was a hard life they led as they roamed the country, but they were contented with it. They got enough money to keep themselves from want by Rhoda's singing, and the cock contrived to pick up many scraps by the way. They went to every village they saw, and every town; at every fair or market they were to be seen, Rhoda with her guitar and Maggie searching up and down for news of the rich gipsy and his tents. As the months went by she began to despair, but she never faltered or forgot Alfonso.

One day they were approaching a little hamlet, and, as they were within sight of its roofs, groups of people passed them. Men wore their best coats and women their best gowns; little children ran along with holiday faces, and horses and cattle went by in droves. The horses had their tails plaited up with coloured ribbons, and some had roses stuck in their brow-bands, for it

was the day of a great fair and all sorts of shows and amusements were going on.

The road was full of people. Just in front of Rhoda and Maggie some men were plodding along, laughing and joking, and one of them turned round, calling to another, who lagged behind the party.

“Come on! come on!” he shouted. “You’ll have to step out if you want to see the cock-fight.”

Maggie followed at their heels like a dog. They thought she meant to beg and told her roughly to go away. But she took no notice, and ran after them, listening breathlessly to their talk, for they were speaking of the wonderful game-bird belonging to a gipsy who had beaten every cock in the countryside. To-day he was to fight the greatest champion of all, a bird which had been brought fifty miles to meet him. One of the men pulled out a large silver watch the size of an apple. It came up from his pocket like a bucket out of a well.

“We’re too late!” he exclaimed.

And they all began to run.

Maggie and Rhoda ran too. And the Cochin-Chinaman straddled and flapped after them, raising a trail of dust and volleys of abuse from everyone he passed.

By the time they reached the village a great crowd were dispersing in all directions. It was chiefly made up of men, and, as our friends pushed through the throng, scraps of conversation came to their ears.

“*He’ll* never fight again,” said one.

“That’ll take down the pride of that gipsy fellow, with his money-bags and his rings,” said another.

Maggie ran faster and faster till she came to an open space that had been cleared in the middle of the village green. A man was walking off with a cock in his arms, while a string of people followed, clapping him on the back and shouting. They were all leaving the spot where the long-nosed gipsy stood staring at something that lay at his foot. It looked like a bundle of rags as he rolled it over with his boot. “He’s no more use to me,” said he, turning away with a shrug of his shoulders, “so he can die if he likes.”

Maggie threw herself down and took poor Alfonso in her arms. Blood was oozing from between his beautiful feathers, and his eyes were closed. Nobody noticed her as she carried him away, followed by Rhoda and the

Cochin-Chinaman. Her tears were falling thick on him, blinding her, so that she could hardly see where she was going, and she almost ran into a dark young man who was coming towards them. It was Dan—Dan, with his gold earrings and rabbit-skin cap. Rhoda poured out the story of their search to him, and he took them to a pond, where he poured water down Alfonso's throat and felt his breast to see if his heart was still beating.

“Run and meet my brother,” he said to Rhoda; “our vans are just coming into the village. Tell him from me to go and settle with that long-nosed thief. I'll come and help him when I see whether Alfonso's dead or not.”

So Rhoda ran.

And now we are coming to the end of the story. Alfonso was not dead, and he did not die; he was nursed back to life by Dan and Maggie; but he never fought again, for his back was dreadfully injured, and he was lame for the rest of his days. The three friends returned to their old life in the vans, for Maggie had been much missed, and was received back with joy. Neither was Rhoda left behind, because she soon became Dan's wife and went to live with him in the green van.

The Cochin-Chinaman married again, but this time with better luck; for he chose a good dame of suitable age, who knew the world far too well to wish to quarrel with anyone in it.

And Alfonso, in spite of his crippled body, was not unhappy. He limped round the van wheels or sat in his basket on the step, looking out on the green woods and blue distances of their various places of sojourn. His fighting days were done, but he was well content; for those who have taken their share in life are those who can best bear to see it go by and accept their rest.

THE FIDDLING GOBLIN

One day they were in the miller's garden. He had white rose-bushes on either side of his door and a box-tree by the gate.

"Here is the book!" cried little Peter, who had dashed into the house, and now came dancing out with the volume in his hand. "I've been peeping inside, and there is such a fine bit about a man beating a big drum."

"You rascal!" said the miller. "Who told you you might touch my book? I shall put you into the mill-pond for that!"

And he began to chase the little boy about, shouting and jumping over the flower-beds. It was really splendid.

Janet stood by laughing.

"Be quiet, Peter, or you'll drop the book!" she exclaimed.

"If he promises to read about the drum-man I'll be as quiet as a mouse," shrieked Peter.

"I promise, I promise," said the miller, stopping beside a row of cabbages.

So when Peter gave him the book and had settled down to listen, he began.

There was once upon a time a widowed Baron who had a lovely daughter. She was so beautiful that she seldom went out of the castle gates, because people stared at her so much that it made her quite uncomfortable. Her name was Laurine, and she could dance so wonderfully that she looked more like an autumn leaf sailing in the wind than a human being. Her chestnut hair floated all round her, and her grey eyes shone like stars through a mist.

Now, in spite of all this, the Baron, who was only her stepfather, was most anxious to get rid of her by marriage, for he was a lazy old man, and did not like the trouble of looking after her; he liked to have his own house to himself. He let this be known far and wide, and the very greatest Princes and gentlemen came courting Laurine, which gave him more trouble than ever, for she persisted in refusing every one, and the expenses of their entertainment went, consequently, for nothing.

At last he could stand it no longer, and one morning, after a whole batch of suitors had been turned away, he sent for her to his room. He was sitting up in bed looking frightfully angry, and when she came in he roared and beat his cane on the bed-clothes. He always took it to bed with him, so that he might bang the servants if they made too much noise when they called him in the morning.

“What is the matter, sir?” asked Laurine, making a very pretty curtsy.

“Matter!” shouted the Baron; “the matter is that I’m tired of you and your airs, and I have made up my mind to stand them no longer. Married you shall be. I am going to give out a notice to be posted up everywhere that, in ten days from now, the first twelve gentlemen who send in their names to me are to come here, bringing a musical instrument each; and the one who plays best shall have your hand in marriage. Now, it’s no good crying. I have made up my mind, and the messenger carrying the news shall go out to-day. You have had the choice of all the grandest persons in the country, and now you must just take what you can get. So get out of my sight!”

And he laid about so furiously that Laurine burst into tears. This time she was at her wits’ end, and could not think what to do.

“Oh, my lady!” said her maid when she heard what had happened, “you must get advice from a Goblin I know. He is the cleverest person in the whole countryside, and he will be able to find some way out of it. Only say the word, and I will go at once to fetch him.”

“Go! go!” cried Laurine.

Now, in a wood not far off lived a Goblin who was well known to his neighbours as one of the finest musicians in the world. He was rich too, and it was said that he had a grander house than the King himself hidden in the heart of the wood. But, for all that, he generally chose to live in a little thatched hut near the edge of the trees, playing on his fiddle and coming occasionally into the village, where he was greatly honoured for his wisdom in spite of his strange appearance. He was only about four feet high and quite black; but he had thin legs and arms, a round, fat body and a head like a turnip. In spite of this he dressed in the very height of the fashion, with a pointed hat and feather, doublet and hose and a short cloak. He was called ‘The Fiddling Goblin.’

He entered Laurine’s presence with a low bow, though he was rather out of breath; for when he had received the message from the waiting-woman, he had made the large billy-goat which he rode gallop the whole way. It was

a magnificent animal, with an action like a horse, and the men who took charge of it when he dismounted in the courtyard were lost in admiration of his handsome saddlery. It was easy to see he was a man of note.

“What you must do is this,” said the Goblin, when Laurine had finished her story: “As soon as you hear the names of the twelve suitors, write privately to each one. I will compose the letter for you, and this is what you must say:

‘SIR,

‘Being extremely anxious for your success—, I am writing to give you a piece of important advice. My stepfather has offered my hand to the finest musician; but his *real* purpose is to give it to the one who will play loudest and longest, and most effectually drown the efforts of the rest. Therefore, I beg you, if you love me, to play stoutly against all others, and, whatever anyone may say or do, neither stay nor stop till you have silenced them all.’

“Then,” continued the Goblin, “the noise will be so frightful that the illustrious Baron, who is irritable, will drive the whole party out of the house, and meanwhile you can escape in the turmoil. If you will come to my hut I will take you to a palace I have, deep in the wood, where you can hide till his wrath is over.”

Laurine was charmed with his wisdom, and having given him a lock of her hair as a keepsake, dismissed him with many words of gratitude, promising to do exactly as he had said.

Now, it happened that there lived at some little distance off a young man of good parentage who had fallen madly in love with Laurine. He was brave and handsome, but he was so poor that he had never come forward as a suitor, believing that the Baron would not so much as receive him. When he heard of the proclamation he tore his hair.

“What a chance I’ve missed!” he cried. “If I could play even a shepherd’s pipe I would go. But I cannot so much as do that.”

“You have got ten days to learn in,” said a friend of his, who was practical.

So he bought a pipe and began to take lessons from the man who kept the sheep, and one day when he was practising Laurine’s letter was brought to him. He was simply overjoyed.

“I may be a poor musician!” he exclaimed, “but I have the strongest arm for miles round, and now it will stand me in good stead!”

And with that he rushed off to the nearest town and bought a big drum, the biggest that could be got for money; and, going into a solitary field, he laid about it daily, for practice, with such effect that people for miles round were deafened.

When the great day came, Laurine sat in state beside her stepfather and all the musicians were ranged in a row a little way in front of them. There were fiddles and flutes, trumpets and harps, dulcimers and guitars and the big drum in the middle.

When the Baron had taken his seat, he made a sign to a man who had a large golden harp to begin. But no sooner was the first chord struck than the whole assembly burst into sound with a stupendous crash. The fiddlers sawed their fiddles as though they would cut them to pieces, the trumpeters blew and brayed, the flutes shrieked, the harps and dulcimers twanged, and the young man with the drum fell upon it as though it had been his enemy. The Baron leaped up and roared for silence, but his voice might have been the cooing of a distant dove for all the good it did. The noise grew more and more terrible, and at the first convenient opportunity Laurine put her hands over her ears and rushed from the hall.

Away she ran through the courtyard. It was empty, because everybody had gone to see what the awful disturbance could mean, and the castle gates were open. She flew out like an arrow, taking the shortest way to the wood and rushing along with her hair streaming behind her, and at last she came to the hut where the Goblin lived; she never stopped till she got safely into it.

“Did I not give you sound advice?” said he as she sat down, breathless.

“Oh, excellent,” she replied, panting. “By this time I am sure my stepfather has driven the whole lot out of doors.”

“And now I must hide you away,” said the Fiddling Goblin, stepping out of the door and searching the country up and down with his rolling eye.

As soon as she had recovered her breath they plunged into the wood. Dusk was beginning to fall, for the musical competition had taken place late in the evening. At last they came to a place where there was nothing but horse-chestnut trees in full bloom. The Goblin struck his heel upon the ground, and, to Laurine’s astonishment, the white flowers of the chestnuts on either side became suddenly lit up, looking like so many blazing candles on so many Christmas trees.

The avenue of light stretched away before them, narrowing to the distance, and when they had walked to the end of it, they found themselves in front of a magnificent mansion with a high steep roof covered with golden weathercocks. "This is my house," observed the Goblin, "and here you will be a welcome guest for as long as you like. No one can find the path to it unless I light up the horse-chestnut candles to show the way, so you will be perfectly safe from your stepfather."

When the door was opened Laurine found herself in a beautiful hall. There were golden staircases, woven curtains, groves of myrtle-trees in pots; and servants came from every corner of the place to wait upon her. The Fiddling Goblin told her to use everything as though it were her own, and then left her, promising to return upon the morrow.

We must now return to the Baron's castle, and hear what happened after Laurine's flight.

The noise went on without intermission: the more the Baron raved, the more furiously the musicians played. It seemed as though the howling deep and all the thunder of the firmament were let loose together. The air was alive with vibration and everyone rushed about in terror, as though he were crazy. As the pandemonium grew the young man with the big drum began to be depressed, for the sound of his drum was getting swallowed up in the shrill blare of the trumpets. But he set his teeth and went on harder and harder, and at last he struck it with such violence that it broke in two and the drumstick went right through at one end and came out at the other.

There was no use in going on any more; he was vanquished, and all hope of winning the beautiful Laurine was gone. In despair he threw the remaining drumstick to the farther end of the hall and strode out of the castle to avoid his sad thoughts and the terrific noise that still raged. Once clear of the place, he sat down on a stone, and, burying his head in his hands, thought of all he had lost. He determined to leave the country and seek his fortune far away from the scene of his disappointment; so when he got up, he walked straight forward, without caring where he went, and soon found himself on the edge of a wood. It was growing dark, and he wandered on, meaning to take the first shelter that offered itself for the night.

A little way on was a thatched hut, and when he saw that the door was open and the place empty, he went in. He scarcely troubled to look about, he was so weary, and soon he threw himself down full-length on the hearth and fell asleep.

It was about midnight when he awoke with a start and saw the Fiddling Goblin sitting on a chair by the fire, preparing to tune his violin. He arose at once, and began to apologize to him for his presence.

“Don’t mention it,” said the Goblin, “and pray sit down again. I will play you a tune upon the fiddle.”

“Oh, anything but that!” cried the young man, leaping up in horror. “I have heard so much noise to-day that the very sight of any musical instrument is death to me!”

“Then you are one of the suitors who came to play before the Baron for the hand of the beautiful Laurine!” exclaimed the Goblin.

“I am indeed,” replied he, “and why I am not dead I don’t know.” And then he told him the whole story. They talked almost till daybreak.

Now, as the Goblin listened he began to like the young man, and as he saw how brave and handsome he looked, he had a mind to help him; for he thought the best thing that could happen to Laurine would be to get such a fine fellow for a husband.

“Don’t despair,” said he, at the end of the history. “I think I can do you a good turn, for I must tell you that Laurine is at my big house not far from here at this moment. Does she know you by sight?”

“I hardly think so,” replied the young man. “I have often watched her as she walks abroad, but I don’t think she has ever noticed me. There was such a crowd in the hall while the music went on, and such a turmoil, that, as I was behind the drum, it is likely she never saw me at all. And yet she wrote to me as if she had every wish I should succeed. I can’t understand it.”

The Goblin looked so sly that it was frightful to see him.

“Well,” he continued, “to-morrow I am going to my house, and she will be there. If you have a mind for it, I will take you with me, and you will then have the chance of making yourself agreeable.”

“You are too kind!” cried his companion; “but on what pretext can I intrude on her? She has probably repented of her letter.”

“As she does not know you by sight, I will say you are my nephew,” replied the Goblin; “so mind you call me ‘uncle.’ You can address me as Uncle Sackbut. We are a musical family, and all named after instruments. One of my brothers is called Shawm and the other Hautboy. What is your name?”

“Swayn,” said the young man.

“Very well, Nephew Swayn,” said the Goblin, “to-morrow we will set out.”

When they arrived at the Goblin’s house, Swayn was astonished at its magnificence; but he had no time to think of anything but Laurine, and to hope that, if she had ever seen him, she would not recognize him. He could not imagine why she had not so much as looked his way after writing such a condescending letter. But the Goblin bade him keep up heart, and in they went.

She was sitting among the myrtles when they approached, and the Goblin introduced his friend, being careful not to mention his name.

“This is my nephew,” said he, “my sister’s only son. He has come to pay me a visit, and as I have no room for him in my hut, I propose that we shall both keep you company here.”

Laurine received them in the most charming manner, and so much pleased was the Goblin that he spent all day in practising his fiddle, so that the young people should be left together. In this manner two whole weeks went by. They spent a delightful time, and Swayn grew more hopeful every day. They strolled in the gardens, they hunted in the woods, and it was evident that Laurine looked upon him with great favour.

One morning he and the Goblin were together on a terrace where there was a little green arbour.

“Swayn,” said the Goblin, “it is high time that you asked Laurine to marry you. I think so well of you that I mean to leave you this house when I die, though you are not my nephew at all; and while I live you can stay here with me, whether you have a wife or not.”

“Uncle Sackbut,” said Swayn, “I can hardly believe such good fortune! How little I thought when I threw away my drumstick and left the Baron’s castle what luck was in store for me!”

At this moment there was a movement in the arbour, and Laurine, who was in it and had heard every word they said, came rushing out.

“And so you are not the Goblin’s nephew at all?” she cried. “And you are one of those horrible musicians who came to play? I will go away at once!” she shrieked. “I will never see you again! I will not stay here another hour!”

Then she turned to the Goblin. “Good-bye,” she said. “Never, never will I forgive you for deceiving me!”

And, before they could stop her, she had rushed out of the garden into the wood.

They ran after her, they shouted, they called, they implored—nothing was of any use. She fled so swiftly that they could not even see which path she had taken. At last, after a long time, they gave up the search. They felt very much crestfallen.

“We shall never see her again, I fear,” said the Goblin; “she has gone back to the Baron’s castle, and the best thing we can do is to try and think of something else. We have made a terrible mess of it.”

“As for me,” said Swayn, “it is not so easy to think of something else as you fancy. I shall go off and try to better my fortunes elsewhere. What I am to do I don’t know. It is a sad thing that I am a gentleman, for I have learnt no trade, and now, though I have every will to work, there is nothing I can do.”

“I have a good mind to come with you,” remarked the Goblin. “I can always return here if I get tired of it, and we can pass for uncle and nephew still. I’ll take my fiddle, and we will make our living by it. You can play the drum.”

“They won’t go well together,” said Swayn moodily.

“What of that?” cried the Goblin. “Very few people have any ear for music. You’ll see—they’ll be delighted, and pay us well.”

So next day the two comrades set out together. The Goblin locked up his house, put his fiddle in a bag, and when Swayn had procured a new drum, they left the wood by its farther edge and made for the boundary of the kingdom, which was not far off.

At the first village they came to they determined to try their luck, so, having found the village green, the Fiddling Goblin mounted the steps of the market-cross, and struck up with his bow, while Swayn, at a little distance, kept time with the drum. Soon figures began to appear at every door, and women left their houses and men their work; children came capering up, and everybody’s feet could be seen tapping the ground. When the Goblin at the market-cross saw that, he stood on tiptoe, and looking round with a shout, burst into the fastest country dance he could think of. In one moment the whole crowd was stamping, chasséing, and pirouetting to the music, seizing one another round the waist, and swaying like corn in the wind. On and on

they played, till the Goblin had lost his hat and Swayn's arm ached, and the people were whirling round in fours and sixes together instead of in couples. It was as if the whole world had gone mad. When at last the Goblin stopped and signed to his friend to go round and ask for money, it poured in so handsomely that they were able to go to the nearest inn and take the best lodgings to be got.

When they looked out next morning, there was a crowd under their windows.

"Come out! come out!" cried the people. "Come out and play!" Their feet were going already at the very recollection of the music.

So the friends set up again at the market-cross and played as they had done before; and from far and wide, people, hearing of their fame, came pouring into the village to dance. No work was done, and none of the children were sent to school, for their parents were too busy dancing to attend to the matter. Besides which, the schoolmaster had taken to his bed, having sprained his ankle in hopping and skipping.

"We must depart," said the Goblin, "or everyone will go crazy."

So they rose in the night and made off, while the world was snoring after its exertions. They went travelling on towards a great city, and at each village they made enough money to lodge well; but they were always obliged to leave secretly in the night, because the people would never consent to their departure.

When they got to the capital their fame had run before them, and even the very King and Queen were at the palace windows to see them arrive. By twelve o'clock next day the Lord Mayor and his family had made themselves so ridiculous by the way in which they had kicked their legs about that the King was displeased, and ordered the music and dancing to be stopped. He could not hear the music himself, because his business room was in the centre of the palace, and the walls were thick.

But when the decree went out, there rose such a howl of rage that the Court feared a rebellion. People were rushing about in bands, crying: "Down with the King! Down with the palace! Down with everybody! Hurray for the Fiddling Goblin! Three cheers for the Big Drum!"

The end of it was that the soldiers were called out, and Swayn and the Goblin were thrown into prison. The Lord Mayor, whose antics had done so much harm, took charge of the drum and the fiddle and locked them up in the town-hall, and peace reigned once more.

And now we must hear something of what happened to Laurine when she ran away from the Goblin's house in such a hurry.

She found it very difficult to get free of the wood, but she did so at last, and, by good fortune, came out on the side nearest to her stepfather's castle. But when she arrived there the first thing she saw was the Baron himself looking out of a high window. At the sight of her he began to shout with fury and to beat the window-sill with his cane, just as he had beaten the bed-clothes.

"Off!" he roared, "hussy that you are! I have done with you. I have found out all about you. Not content with being the plague of my life, you encouraged all these knaves to break my head with their detestable noise, and I have been at death's door ever since. Off you go, or I will let loose the dogs! You will soon see what a mistake you have made in refusing all these husbands, for you will have to get your own living as best you can."

And he drew in his head, banging the window till the iron bars rattled.

Laurine turned to go, trembling, for she could hear the dogs which were kept to chase away beggars howling inside the gates. She dared not even beg a piece of bread from the servants, and she knew she could never find her way back to the Goblin's house.

She turned sadly away and wandered on till sundown, when a charitable peasant-woman in a village shared her supper with her, and allowed her to rest in a barn when night came on. But Laurine could not sleep for thinking how she was to save herself from starving and what she could do to earn enough to keep herself alive. If she were to offer to work as a servant, people would laugh at her white hands and delicate ways.

The next day, before she departed, she thanked the woman, and said: "Now I will do something to amuse you and your children, for it is all the payment I can make."

And so saying, she began to dance.

Never had anybody seen anything like her dancing; the village people thought she must be a fairy and were almost afraid to go near her. She gathered up her hair in both hands, whirling it round and round her like a scarf; her feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. It was wonderful. Everyone came to look on.

It so chanced that there passed by a fine chariot, in which sat a red-faced, crooked old lady, very grandly dressed; and when the dame beheld the crowd, she let down her window and shouted to her coachman to stop, that

she might see the dancing. At the end of the performance she threw Laurine a purse.

“Here, girl!” she cried, “that is for you if you will come with me. I am going to give a great feast to-morrow night, and want some new entertainment for my guests. Get in quickly, if you have a mind to come, for I can’t waste any more time here. The whole of the nobility are coming to the party, and I have a great deal to arrange.”

Laurine picked up the purse, thankful for such luck, and they drove away to the nearest city.

As soon as they got there, Laurine, who was determined to do her best, took some gold pieces from the purse and went out to see the merchants’ wares. She bought the most beautiful dress that could be got for money, a girdle of jasmine, a long veil covered with spangles and a pair of golden shoes. Then she came back and practised all the steps she could think of, so as to be perfect in them by evening.

The feast was gorgeous. Several Kings came to it, and even one aged Emperor, who was so much startled by the thunder of applause that he was carried out for dead. The dancing was the talk of the city from end to end, and the only dreadful part of it was that the lady who had given the entertainment grew jealous because no one talked of her and her hospitality, while every tongue was wagging about the lovely dancer.

But Laurine cared very little; she knew that her fortune was made, and she determined to leave the place and travel about, dancing at the various towns through which she passed. When she had taken leave of the lady she set out.

Wherever she went, crowds came to see her dance and criers went before her to tell people what a treat was in store for them. Her stepfather, hearing news of her success, sent a messenger after her, commanding her to return, for he wished to share in her grandeur; but she only laughed, and pursued her way.

At last she drew near the capital city in which Swain and the Goblin were imprisoned, and the whole place was in a shiver of excitement at her approach. When she got there a deputation waited on her, bringing all the town musicians with it, that she might chose the best among them to play for her dancing.

One after another, she refused them all. There was not one she considered good enough to be of any use; and she grew quite impatient,

saying she would depart next day without dancing at all unless something very much better could be found.

“Madam,” said the Lord Mayor, “it is quite true we have nobody fit to accompany your ladyship, except a young man and a Goblin, who are, unfortunately, in prison; but if we could get the King to release them so that they could play for you, they could be put back into prison afterwards quite easily.”

So the heads of the city appealed to the King, and as the King was extremely anxious to see Laurine, he made no difficulty about the matter.

“Certainly, certainly,” said he; “you can release the Goblin and his nephew at once. We can always execute them if they are troublesome afterwards.”

And so Swayn and his pretended uncle were taken out of prison and set to play in the courtyard of the house where Laurine lodged, that she might judge of their talents.

“That will do beautifully,” said she. “I will dance at nine o’clock this evening.”

But she did not think of looking out of the window.

Nine o’clock came, and the crowd was assembled; and when she saw who the musicians were, she was almost too much annoyed and astonished to begin. But there sat the King with the Queen in her best robes, and all the lords of the kingdom, and she was not sure that they would not throw her into prison too were she to disappoint them. So she gave a sign to the Goblin to strike up, and, whirling her spangled veil, began to glide about like the shadows on a windy moonlit night.



“WHIRLING HER SPANGLED VEIL, SHE BEGAN TO GLIDE ABOUT.”

By the time she had finished, the whole court was spellbound and she herself almost in tears from excitement, the Goblin had played so rapturously. Gold was showered upon her, flowers were thrown to her in

basketfuls, and the King whipped off his crown, dug out the biggest ruby with his pocket-knife, and presented it to her himself.

“Now then!” cried the head of the police to the Goblin, “back to prison with you! And tell that fierce-looking nephew of yours to go quietly, or it will be the worse for him!”

“If you will come with me as my musician,” said Laurine, “I will beg the King on my knees to let you go. I have never danced to such playing in my life. Will you come?”

“Not without Swayn,” said the Goblin.

“But I hate the drum,” said Laurine.

“Then he need not play it,” replied he.

“And I don’t want *him*,” continued Laurine.

“It is both or neither,” said the Goblin.

“Oh, very well, then,” said she, turning away. “He can come as my servant.”

So she went to the King the very next day, and the King, seeing an excellent chance of getting rid of the prisoners without the expenses of an execution, consented.

So the Lord Mayor gave the Goblin back his fiddle, and the three set out on their travels together.

“Uncle Sackbut tells me that you object to the drum,” said Swayn to Laurine, “so I’ll leave it behind, and I shall have all the more time to attend upon you.”

Certainly he made a most valuable servant. He cleaned her little gold shoes, he robbed all the jasmine-bushes to make her girdles, and when anyone annoyed her, he looked so big and fierce that people were only too glad to get out of the way.

They travelled about for a whole year, and Laurine was beginning to be tired of such a restless life. When they came to a grim-looking town built on a rushing river, she made up her mind to dance there for the last time; for the Goblin had begged her to return with him to his house in the wood, and she had promised to do so. Swayn was to come too, for there was no doubt that it was impossible to get on without him.

“Patience,” said the Goblin to him, “and all will come right.”

“Patience is a long word,” replied Swayn.

As they approached the town gates a crowd of sour-looking men came out to meet them with fierce eyes and frowning faces.

“You need not come here, thinking to bewitch us with light ways and mountebank tricks,” they said to Laurine. “We have heard about you, and we know that you are a witch!”

“A witch! a witch!” they shouted.

“Why,” cried someone in the crowd, “she has even got a Goblin for her musician!”

Then they all began to cry “Witch! witch!” at the top of their voices, till she could hardly hear herself speak. And in a moment they had surrounded her and were dragging her away.

Oh! how the poor Goblin stamped and raved! but, unfortunately, he was too small to hurt anyone much. Swayn began knocking down everybody he could reach, but there were so many that he was soon overpowered.

“It is the witch we want! It is the witch we want!” cried the people.

The crowd turned back to the town. Some seized Laurine by the wrists, and some by her long hair, and the rest held her companions while they hurried her through the city gates, leaving them outside. Then the doors were locked, and they lost sight of her.

As Laurine was dragged along the streets, a very good idea came into her head. She was quite sure that, by hook or by crook, Swayn would try to rescue her, so she managed to pluck the flowers from her jasmine girdle, and to drop them behind her as she went, that he might see which way she had gone; and when there were no more left, she plucked off the leaves, and dropped them too. Just when the very last leaf was gone, they came to a little stone cell built by the parapet of the city wall, where it was low and overlooked the river. Into this dreadful place they thrust her, turning the key in the great lock, and calling to her that they would come in the morning to drown her in the water below. One man was left to stand outside and guard the door, and he tied the large key to his belt.

It was quite dark in the cell, for only a little light could come in at a barred window, whose sill she could just reach by standing on tiptoe. Poor Laurine wept bitterly when she thought that she was going to be drowned next morning, and she cried all the more when she remembered how unkind she had been to Swayn, and how much he loved her. She wished she had not

been so cruel. How often she had thrown her gold slippers at him and told him he had not made them shine enough, when he had spent hours rubbing and polishing them! How many times she had seen him sad and heavy with the weight of her scornful words! She was afraid that, even if he got into the town, the jasmine flowers would be so much trampled that he would not guess what they were. She took off her little gold shoes and put them up on the window-sill, just inside the bars. "If he passes he will see them," she said. The man outside was so near the wall that the depth of the sill hid them from his sight.

Swayn was only waiting till it was dark to get into the town. The river ran all round it, but he could swim well, and he had noticed a place where the wall was low and a beam stuck out which he thought he could reach with a leap. When the moon was up he left the Goblin in a thicket and plunged into the river, and, once across, he ran along under the walls till he came to the big beam. After one or two attempts he managed to spring up and clasp it with his hands, and then he swung himself up without much difficulty, and was soon standing on it, looking down into the moonlit streets of the city.

Nobody was about. The ground was much higher on the inside, so he let himself down easily, but, as he had no notion where they had taken Laurine, he did not know which way to go. He met few people in the deserted streets, and as the whole of the crowd which had captured her was sitting planning how it should drown her on the morrow, no one had any idea who he was.

He was almost in despair, when he noticed a jasmine flower lying at his feet; then he saw that there was another farther on, and yet another after that, and he knew that she had dropped them that he might trace her. He followed the track through several streets, and as he went he kept singing, that she might hear his voice if she were anywhere near.

"Laurine, Laurine, the jasmine white
Shines like a star in the darkest night,"

he sang. He dared not call, for fear of disturbing the sleeping town.

At last he came to where flowers and leaves stopped, near an open space by the town wall. Close to it was a little stone cell with a barred window and a door, in front of which lay a sleeping man, with a key tied to his belt. It was easy to see that no one could get in without awakening him.

Swayn looked up to the window above the sleeper's head, and saw the two little shoes placed together on the sill. He crept nearer, and sang again:

“Laurine, Laurine, the jasmine white
Shines like a star in the darkest night”;

and in a moment he heard a voice inside the cell singing softly:

“Swayn, Swayn, nearer tread:
Love lives on when the stars are dead.”

He came a little closer and sang:

“Laurine, Laurine, throw your veil:
Dead men’s lips can tell no tale.”

Then the spangled veil was thrown through the window-bars, and he caught it as it fell.

Stealthily he went up to the sleeper and cut the heavy key from his belt with his knife; then, as the man stirred, he thrust the veil into his mouth to stop his cries, and, seizing him in his strong arms, flung him over the low parapet into the river swirling below. In another moment he had unlocked the door of the cell and was embracing Laurine, while she asked his forgiveness for all her unkindness and promised to marry him if they managed to get out of the city alive.

There was an old piece of tattered sacking lying in a corner of the prison, and she took off her rich dress and wrapped the horrible rag about her. They tucked away her long hair and tied a bandage over her face, so that she looked like some wretched beggar, and, when they had locked the door and pitched the key into the river, she set off down the silent streets, Swayn following a little way behind. They hid in a dark alley near the town gates, and waited till the hour should come to unlock them at dawn. The sentry on duty was not the same man who had closed them after Laurine on the preceding day, and he let the poor beggar go through with a jeer. As for Swayn, following at a little distance, he took no notice of him beyond bidding him a friendly good-morning. So the lovers were soon in the open country, pressing forward to the thicket where the Fiddling Goblin had promised to wait for his nephew’s return.

You may be sure that they spared no haste in getting away. By the time the sun was high they had reached a village, where they procured horses. All the money that Laurine had made by her dancing was kept by the Goblin tied up in a bag with his fiddle; so they lacked no means of getting forward, and they turned their heads towards the country from which they had started.

When they reached the wood they could have shouted for joy. As they came to the middle of it the Goblin stamped his heel, and all the candles of

the horse-chestnut trees burst into a blaze of light, for they had been away a whole year, and it was the season of blossom again. Swayn and Laurine promised to live with their uncle Sackbut, and never to leave him any more.

They were soon married, with great pomp and solemnity, the only drawback being that the Goblin could not make up his mind whether to be best man, or give away the bride, or play the wedding music on his fiddle. But the matter was happily settled by his doing all three.

THE WITCH'S CLOAK

Peter and Janet and the miller stood on the rising ground by the farm; the sound of the wheel came to them, and the whir of grinding. Before them lay the tidal marshes that stretched to the seaport town. It was the same town through whose streets the Water-Nix followed the pedlar when she left dry land for the last time to swim out and join the water-kelpies. It looked like a blue shadow-town now, cut sharp against sky and sea, with its tall steeple reflected in the wet sand.

"I have often had it in my mind to tell you a strange story my grandmother heard about a man who lived in that place," said the miller, pointing across the salt marsh.

"Is it true?" asked Peter.

"That's more than I know," replied his friend, "for I never asked my granny, and maybe if I had, she couldn't have told me. If you like the story you can think it true, and if you don't we'll say it isn't."

"Have you ever been in that town?" the miller asked Janet.

"Never," said she.

"Well, just where you see the steeple rising and the glint of the sun on the weathercock is the High Street. It's a wide road, with windows looking down on it from either side; and at the end, as you go to the docks, is an old house with carved gable-ends, and in a niche of its wall is the statue of a man."

"And is that the man the story is about?" inquired little Peter.

"The same," said the miller. "But, to tell you about him, I must begin somewhere very far away from the place where the old statue stands."

"How far?" asked inquisitive Peter.

"I don't know," answered the miller, "because nobody I've ever seen has been there.

"Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a Princess who had five handsome elder sisters."

"But I thought you were going to tell about the man!" cried Peter.

“If you listen hard enough, you’ll hear the grass grow,” said the miller, “and if you listen long enough, you’ll hear about the man.”

Once upon a time, as I said before, there was a Princess who had five elder sisters, the most beautiful ladies ever seen; and their father thought a deal of them, but not much of the youngest, who was small and not nearly so pretty. But she was very nice, all the same, and the thing she loved best was to go hunting after flowers. Nobody cared what she did or where she went, and she spent all her days wandering in woods and valleys looking for her plants. There was little she did not know about them, and if she had not been a Princess, with no need to work, she might have made her fortune by writing books about them and their histories. One day as she roamed about she came to a place she had never seen before—a little valley full of great trees, with a winding stream rushing through it like a silver thread. Beside the water grew a clump of the most lovely yellow irises.

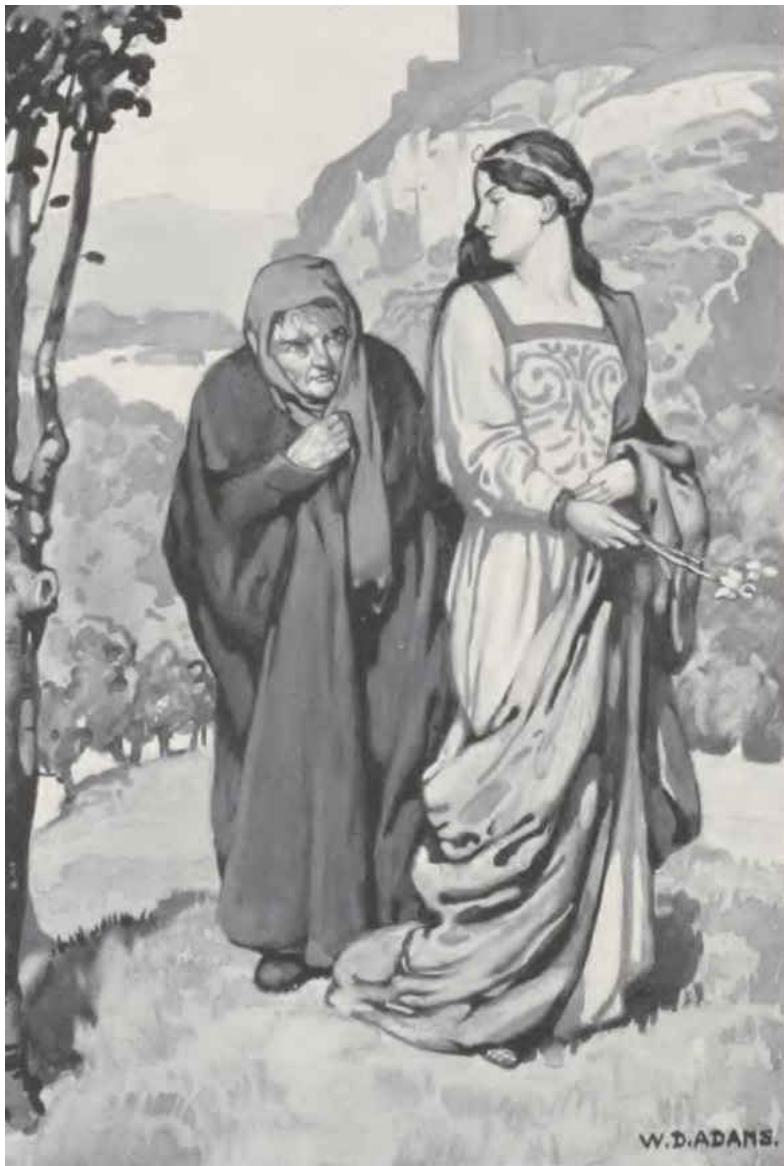
She liked the spot so much that she returned to it every day; and she would sit for hours at a time beside the iris-bed, with her elbows on her knees, dreaming about wonderful foreign plants she had never seen and the strange descriptions of them she had read in books.

Farther up the valley, beyond the trees, could be seen the roofs of a castle which stood on towering rocks. She did not know who it belonged to, so one day, as she sat by the water, she said aloud: “I wonder who lives there?”

“The witch, the witch!” sang the iris-flowers behind her. The sound went through them like a sigh.

She started and turned round, but there was no one to be seen; and again as she looked the flowers repeated: “The witch, the witch!”

Then she asked them many more questions, but nothing would they say. Perhaps it was all they knew, or perhaps what she took for words was only the rustling of the long stiff leaves one against the other. But that’s as may be. In any case, it roused her curiosity so much that she rose and went off towards the castle. She had no sooner got among the trees than by came the witch herself.



“‘WHO ARE YOU?’ INQUIRED THE OLD WOMAN.”

“Who are you?” inquired the old woman.

The Princess explained, and politely asked to be forgiven for trespassing.

“Pray don’t apologize,” said the witch, “and do me the favour to give me your arm as far as my castle. I have, as you see, no staff, and I am not so young as I was.”

The Princess agreed willingly, and they walked on together. The old woman was wrapped in a trailing black cloak, and her hair hung over her eyes, like the hair of all other witches. She seemed rather a pleasant body, though her nose and chin were certainly a little too near together. When they had climbed as far as the castle gate, she invited her companion to come in and rest, and the Princess, who feared nobody, followed her. They sat down together at a window overlooking the valley; from it she could see the winding water and the clump of irises.

“It is the most fortunate thing in the world that I met you,” began the old woman, “for I am much in need of advice from somebody. My difficulty is this: I have grown very tired of being a witch, and I wish to leave my profession and become like other people. I am learning, as you have noticed, to do without my crooked staff. Last week I sold my broomstick and bought a very pretty little brown horse instead, and I have given my black cat to a friend. My appearance is still not quite what I could wish, and I really do not know what kind of clothes to get, nor how to arrange my hair. Other witches can tell me nothing, for they know as little as I do, but your advice would be the greatest help to me.”

“I shall be very pleased to do anything I can,” said the Princess.

“If you will consent to stay with me for a few days till my wardrobe is complete, I shall be more obliged than I can say,” continued the old woman. “Use my house as your own, and everything in it.”

And so it was all arranged in five minutes.

The Princess was uncommonly useful. She brushed the witch’s hair and pinned it up tidily, and made her a fine lace head-dress, which gave her a dignified air. She sent to the nearest town for silks and brocades and buckled shoes, and, instead of the crooked staff that her friend missed so much, she bought her a handsome stick with an amber head.

The witch was delighted, for she looked both refined and venerable as she stood before her glass.

“Here!” she exclaimed, taking up her old black cloak, which lay on the floor, “this must be thrown away.”

She was just going to cast it upon the fire when the Princess stopped her.

“Oh no, no!” she cried, snatching it from her, “don’t destroy it. Pray, pray give it to me!”

“What for?” exclaimed the witch. “A Princess in a witch’s cloak? A pretty idea, indeed!”

But the Princess clung to it.

“Surely you will not refuse me,” she said, “since you do not want it any more! How often have I heard you say that you could fly wherever you liked in it? Think what it would be for me if I were able to go off in it to foreign countries, and see all the wonderful plants I have heard so much about! Only give it to me and I will be your debtor for life.”

“Well, after all, why not?” said the witch. “One good turn certainly deserves another. Keep it, my dear. If you put it on, and hold out your arms like wings on either side, it will take you up into the sky, and you can sail along like a ship. When you wish to descend, just fold your arms and you will come down to earth quite gently.”

The Princess took her treasure and locked it up in her own chamber, for fear the witch should change her mind. The next day she bade her farewell, and, throwing on the cloak, spread out her arms. Up she went, easily and gently, and when she had decided where she should go, she turned her face southwards and was soon far, far away, a little speck among the clouds. The witch looked after her till she could see her no more.

She was now in the seventh heaven of joy. She went to every country she had ever heard about. She saw the sea-pinks and water-asters of lonely islands known only to screaming gulls; she stood in forests where creepers were thrown like veils over the branches and the air was heavy with the scent of fringed and spotted orchids, purple and mauve and cream-yellow. She wandered beside lakes, walled in by solemn trees that hid the sun and strewn with red and white lilies; she saw the groves of cherry-blossom that hang on the steep gorges of blue hills far away, and the giant palms and scarlet flowers of the South. At last, after many months of wandering, she flew northward and up the coast of the North Sea till she was right over the town before us.

It was midnight as she stood, wrapped in her black cloak, on the topmost point of the steeple. The folds fluttered and crackled, as you may hear a flag flutter and crackle if you stand by a flagstaff on a tower; but no one noticed it or saw her, for everyone but the watchman was in bed, and *he* was asleep too, though he was paid to be awake. In the bright moonlight she sailed down to the empty pavement of the High Street, among the dark shadows of the gable-ends. It was winter now and the frost was iron-hard over the whole country. She went quickly through the streets, for she did not care for towns,

determining that when the sun rose next day she would be well on her way back to the witch's castle in the valley. But she was rather tired and wanted a few hours of sleep first. She left the town and flew up this very road and past the mill—so I have heard—till she came to an old deserted cottage that once stood not far from here by the wayside. (There were still a few stones of it left when I was a child, and I used to pass it on my way to school.) The nettle-stalks were all frozen round it as she pushed through the broken door, meaning to lie down and sleep in shelter till morning. She had nothing to fear from the cold, for among the cloak's other useful qualities was the power of keeping the person inside it perfectly warm. She was exceedingly surprised to see by the moonlight that someone else was in the miserable hovel.

A little starving boy was lying on a pile of straw in the corner. His poor face was thin and blue with cold, and he had crept into the hut because it was the only refuge he could find. He had walked all day, begging from door to door, for he had neither home nor friends nor food, and was worn out with fatigue and hunger. He lay, scarcely knowing where he was, for his wits were beginning to go, and when the Princess came in he was very near death. Strange dreams were in his brain. The moon struck brilliantly on a little window in the wall and the bitter cold had covered it with wonderful frost-flowers. It was the last thing he had seen before he closed his eyes, and he seemed to himself to be looking deep into a white forest that had grown up from the panes. Oh, how freezing it was! The forest was all made of frozen ferns and seaweed and feathers, like the white images on the glass. It stretched far, far away in alleys of fantastic sparkling fronds and glittering branches. How thick the strange, beautiful things grew! He had been once told that, if he was a good boy, when he died a white angel would come and take him to a place where he would never be sad or hungry any more. He was not sure that he did not see someone coming to him between the stems of the frozen forest. Perhaps it was the white angel.

He tried to sit up, but he was too weak. Poor little man, he had just enough life left in him to see that what he had taken for an angel was a woman in a black cloak.

The Princess went to him and bent over him. Then she took him up under the warm folds, bound him to her breast with her girdle, and hurried out of the hut. She spread out her arms, and, sailing with him into the wintry sky, flew over land and sea till she arrived at the witch's castle.

The witch was overjoyed to see her come back, for she had been away half a year. They took the little boy and put him in a warm bed, in which he

lay for many long days. But he was fed with the best of food, and such care was taken of him that when he got well he was able to run about and play in the valley and be happy from morning till night. They were so good to him that he soon forgot he had ever had any troubles at all.

The witch and the Princess got on so well together that they determined not to part, and they had plenty to do, looking after their charge and teaching him all the things he should know—how to read and write and say his prayers, and how to answer nicely when he was spoken to. When the Princess went, as she did every year, to find new flowers in foreign lands, he went with her, and helped her to carry back roots and seeds, which they planted in the valley; for the cloak was so large that, even when he grew bigger, there was room in it for them both. She taught him all her own knowledge, and as time went by and he grew up to be a man, he became even more learned than herself. He was very clever and so hardy and strong that nobody would have believed him to be the little wretched child who had lain starving in the hovel.

At last the time came when he was ready to go out into the world to seek his fortune. The parting gift that the Princess gave him was the black cloak. He was to have it on condition that he would come back once every year to go to some foreign land with her, and to visit the witch. He was given a small sum of money to start life with; and, as he was anxious to see the country of his birth and the hut in which he had been found, he wrapped himself in the cloak and came down, as the Princess had done, at midnight into the town across the marsh.

He was a fine, sensible fellow. Though he had lived in a castle, and perhaps because he had been brought up by a real Princess, he had no silly notions and was ready for any work he could find. He hired a modest lodging, and, going to the director of a large public garden that had been made in the town, he asked to be employed as a gardener. There was only one place vacant, and that was the very lowest, but he took it eagerly. His work was to wheel barrows, and sweep leaves, and cut grass, but he did it as carefully and put as much heart into it as if he was raising priceless flowers; for the Princess had brought him up strictly, and made him understand that honest work can only be made mean by the meanness of the person who does it.

Every year, when he had a few weeks' holiday, he returned to the witch's castle. No one saw him go, and no one saw him come back, and nobody knew how he managed to get the marvellous plants that he brought back with him. Very soon he was no longer an under-gardener, but the head of all,

and by the time he was turning grey he had become the greatest botanist and teacher in the country. Learned men came from all parts of the kingdom to talk with him in his house with the carved gable-ends in the High Street of yonder town.

Time went by, and his fame spread all over the world. He grew old and his hair turned white, but still he went about wrapped in the black cloak, from which he never parted. His white beard flowed over his breast as he sat and wrote the books which helped to make him famous, or walked over the country, comparing plants and teaching his pupils out of his stores of wisdom. But at last he grew too infirm to walk long distances, and strangers coming to the town would look with awe upon his venerable figure as he passed through the streets. Everyone loved him, rich and poor alike.

And so it came to be that a great banquet was given in his honour, and the learned from all countries met together.

It was the middle of summer, and the hall in which it took place was decorated with flowers. A laurel-wreath hung over the chair in which he was to sit, costly fruits were brought from far-away lands, and the hall was filled with the glory of blossoming plants, many of which he had carried home with him as tiny seeds from his journeys. Wise men were there and beautiful ladies, students and great personages. All had come to see him and to hear him speak. The town was thronged—you would think there was no room in it for so much as one additional person.

When the feast was over he rose and began his speech, and silence fell upon everyone. Though he was frail and old, his voice was clear as he told them of the countries he had wandered in—the distant islands, the tropics, the golden East. No one imagined he had been so far afield, and his listeners wondered how he had contrived to make such voyages, for they knew that he was not rich and lived very simply in the old house at the end of the street. But everybody was enthralled; his life of work, his modesty, his great age and wisdom adorned him, in the eyes of his pupils and the assembled guests, like the jewels of a crown.

When the long speech was over he sat down, leaning back in his chair under the laurel-wreath, for the effort he had made was great. The guests remained respectfully in their places; they saw that he was weary and would need rest before he could listen to their congratulations. For a moment he closed his eyes, and when he opened them, a wonderful change seemed to have come over the scene before him.

The green boughs that filled the hall and the vases of flowers on the long tables were changing before his failing sight. Instead of the tall sheaves of roses a white forest was rising up, deep and pure, a forest that he had seen before. On either side the frost-flowers hung sparkling, their snow-crystals thick in the maze of white feathers and seaweed and ferns. The sprays and branches crowded on him in their dazzling myriads, dense and high, and far down the white vista into which he looked a figure was coming—a white figure. It was the angel.

He rose and grasped an outstretched hand.

“He is gone,” said the guests. “The exertion has been too much for him.” And his pupils and friends came round him, the tears standing in their eyes.

At that moment a gust of wind ran through the open doors of the hall, and the black cloak, which its owner had laid on a window-sill before he sat down at the table, was blown from it and flew out into the air. No one saw it go, but it rose on the sudden wind and sailed upwards, above the town, above the steeple, and disappeared like a dark cloud into the distant spaces of sky.

“Some day,” said the miller to little Peter, “I’ll take you to the town in my cart and show you the statue of that man in the wall of the old house.”

“And you’ll let me hold the end of the reins and the whip, and drive too, won’t you?” shouted the little boy.

“Well, perhaps I will,” laughed the miller, “only Janet must come too, to keep you in order.”

CONCLUSION

It was not long after this that the miller kept his promise. The horse was harnessed and away they drove to the town. He and Janet sat together, with Peter between them; the little boy held the end of the reins in one hand and the whip in the other, shouting and flourishing the lash about and thinking that coachmen were even better people than millers. Janet was happy too. She sat smiling and holding the tail of his coat, for fear he should overbalance himself and fall out into the road.

They left the cart at an inn, and went to see the house with its statue in the niche of the wall and carved gable-ends turned towards the street. It was now inhabited by poor families, whose washing flapped from the upper story like a row of banners over the head of the stone image. They stood on the pavement of the High Street and looked up to the giddy point of the steeple, where the weathercock twirled, more than a hundred feet in the air; they wondered at the quaint houses, with their outside staircases and their little wooden triangles of drying haddocks nailed against the wall. Then they strolled to the docks and stood at the place from which the lovely Nix had dived into the salt water. The tide lapped and gurgled against the quays, and the wind sang in the rigging of the ships alongside, and the fair-haired sailors talked in a foreign tongue, shouting to the fishwives who passed in their blue petticoats and amber necklaces along the cobbled roadway. The lighthouse stood on the promontory and the North Sea rolled and heaved outside the bar. It was a delightful holiday.

When they were tired of that they went out towards the seashore. The gulls were wheeling over the bents and sea-grass, and the sands lay smooth and fine to the edge of the waves. Little Peter rushed off to play, leaping about and throwing stones and gathering shells, while his companions sat upon the sand-dunes watching him.

“Janet,” said the miller, “I hear that your grandmother is going to leave the cottage by the pond and go away to some other place. Is that true, do you think?”

“I’m afraid so,” replied she.

“And you will go too?”

“Oh yes,” said Janet; “we have no other home.”

“But little Peter will miss his stories.”

Janet sighed. “Indeed he will,” she answered, sadly. “There is not much else we have in the way of pleasure.”

“But I can’t let you go,” the miller went on, “and what’s more, I won’t. Janet, if you’ll marry me and come and live with me at the mill-house, I’ll see that you are happy for the rest of your life. Do you think you could like me enough for that?”

“But I can’t leave Peter,” she exclaimed; “I could never be happy to think of him all alone, and perhaps being cruelly used.”

“But suppose he came too?—there’s plenty of room for him. Will you say yes, Janet, or shall we ask him to settle it for us?” said the miller. “Will you promise to marry me if he says yes?”

“I will,” said she.

And so they drove home together when the sun was getting low.

“Peter,” said the miller, “don’t you think it would be a good plan if I married Janet, and you were to come and live with me and learn to be a miller too? You should have cake for tea every other day, and a pair of fine blue trousers, and a whipping-top of your own, and a kite, and I’d tell you a new story every Sunday afternoon.”

Peter’s eyes grew round.

“And should I be all white with flour like your man?”

“From head to foot,” said the miller.

“Hooray! hooray! hooray!” shrieked little Peter, jumping about in the cart.

“Take care, take care,” cried Janet, “or you will make the horse run away.”

“That settles it,” observed the miller. “We’ll be married next week.”

And so they were.

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.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

[The end of *Stories Told by the Miller* by Violet Jacob]