

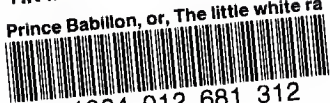
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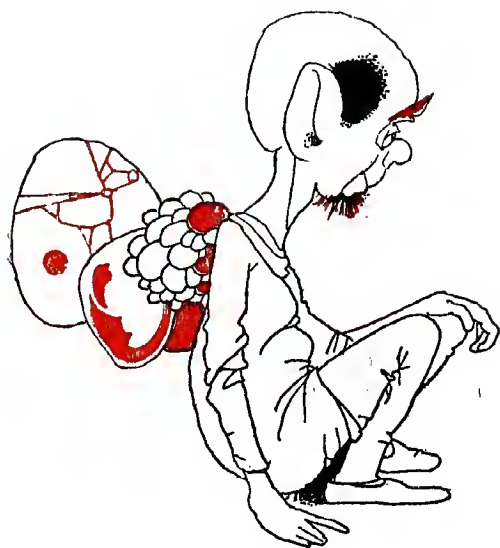
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PRINCE
BABILLON
OR THE LITTLE WHITE RABBIT







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






AS SOON AS GNEY NEARLY OVER
TOOK IT, THE RABBIT HOPPED ON
A LITTLE FURTHER.



PRINCE 
BABILLON

OR
THE LITTLE WHITE RABBIT
BY NELLA   
DRAWINGS BY  
CHARLES ROBINSON 



NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY



Olin

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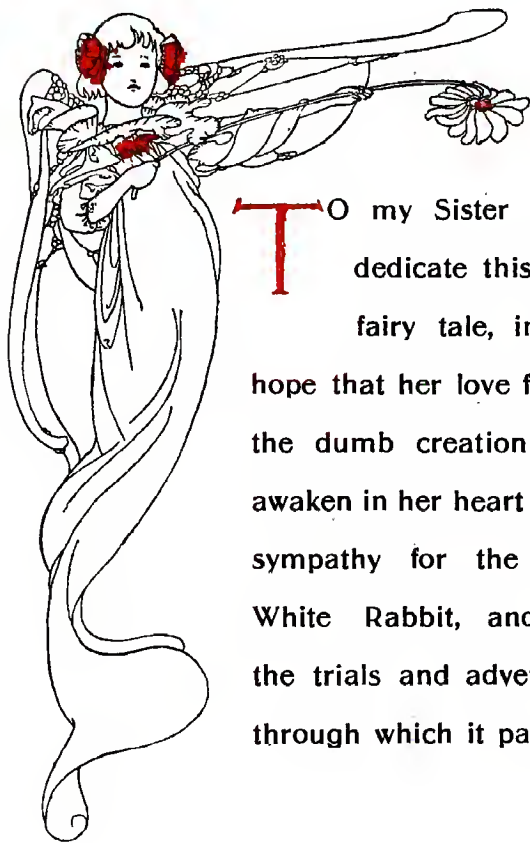
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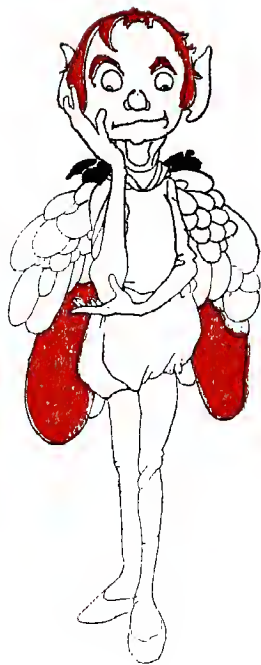
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Gift of
Malcolm K. Whyte

DEDICATION



TO my Sister do I
dedicate this little
fairy tale, in the
hope that her love for all
the dumb creation may
awaken in her heart some
sympathy for the little
White Rabbit, and all
the trials and adversities
through which it passed.





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PRINCE BABILLON or

The Little White Rabbit

“



fancy I am going to have a headache,” began the Queen, looking with anxious eyes at the King, as he warmed the front part of his legs, neatly enveloped in silk stockings, before the blazing logs that were crackling in a heap on the hearth.

“Why can’t you be quite sure?” asked the King, as he slowly shifted one leg over the other, pretending to be deeply interested in an ancient manuscript that lay unrolled upon his knees.

The King had learned from past experience that whenever the Queen hinted the approach of a headache there was some weight on her mind that she intended to hand over to his care, and just at that moment he was not at all inclined to take it upon his shoulders.

“I think you might offer me a little more sympathy,” sighed the Queen, falling wearily back on the cushions of an old-fashioned high-backed chair, as if to resign herself to her fate and mourn her sufferings alone.

“O bother!” muttered the King, as his hand darted down to the middle of his shin, where a bit of flaming wood from one of the logs had alighted. The Queen had closed her eyes the better to face the coming headache, and was quite unaware of the cause of the King’s exclamation. Concluding, however, that it applied to her and her troubles, she was inclined to resent it.

“Well, sir,” she remarked, “if you do not care to sympathize, you need not show me so plainly that you are utterly heartless.”

“Utterly heartless!” repeated the King, still smarting from his burn. “Look at my leg, and then say who is the heartless one!”

“O, you have burned a hole in your stocking, I declare! Have I not told you over and over

again," said the Queen, "that if you persisted in crouching continually over the fire, the day would come when your silk stockings would be burned and the taxes would have to be raised."

"Stockings!" exclaimed the King wrathfully. "It is not my stockings that I am talking about. I am not thinking of my clothes. It is my shin. Look at my shin! It is burned! I must go at once and have the Court Physician summoned!"

"Pray do not do that!" implored the Queen, not a little alarmed lest the King should leave her, before she had poured her grievance into his ear. "Let me look again! I do not really think the burn is so very terrible. A day or two in bed and perhaps the wound will heal!"

The King knit his brows. The notion of several days in bed was not agreeable. A little pain might be more easily borne. After all, the burn was scarcely more than a scorch. Taking his feet off the fender and rolling up his ancient manuscript, he leaned back in his chair, folded his hands, and inquired of the Queen the reason of her coming headache.

"To tell the truth," replied the Queen, somewhat mollified by the King's question, my daughter and yours is inclined to give us both some trouble.

She has grown quite infatuated about Prince Babilon, who has not a penny in the wide world. His only merit, if it can be so termed, is that he plays fairly well on the lute. You know I have had the best masters for the Princess, but she dislikes practising, and is quite resolved, come what may, to marry this young Prince. She says, that if she does, the Prince will do all the practising and playing, while she can amuse herself in any way she pleases. Though I have summoned her several times to my boudoir, and spoken as seriously as a loving mother can speak to her only child, she still clings to the absurd idea, and appears perfectly determined to carry out her unreasonable intention. Whether we give our consent or not will not turn her from her purpose. She means to marry Babilon, and will do so. Is not such obstinacy on a daughter's part enough to bring on a headache?"

"Well!" replied the King vaguely, for his thoughts were dwelling more on his burnt limb than on his wife's indignation at her daughter's conduct, "what next?"

"What next?" snapped the Queen scornfully, "what next? Why, the bridal—when our only daughter, heiress to your realm and crown, will lead Prince Babilon to the altar and marry him then and there!"

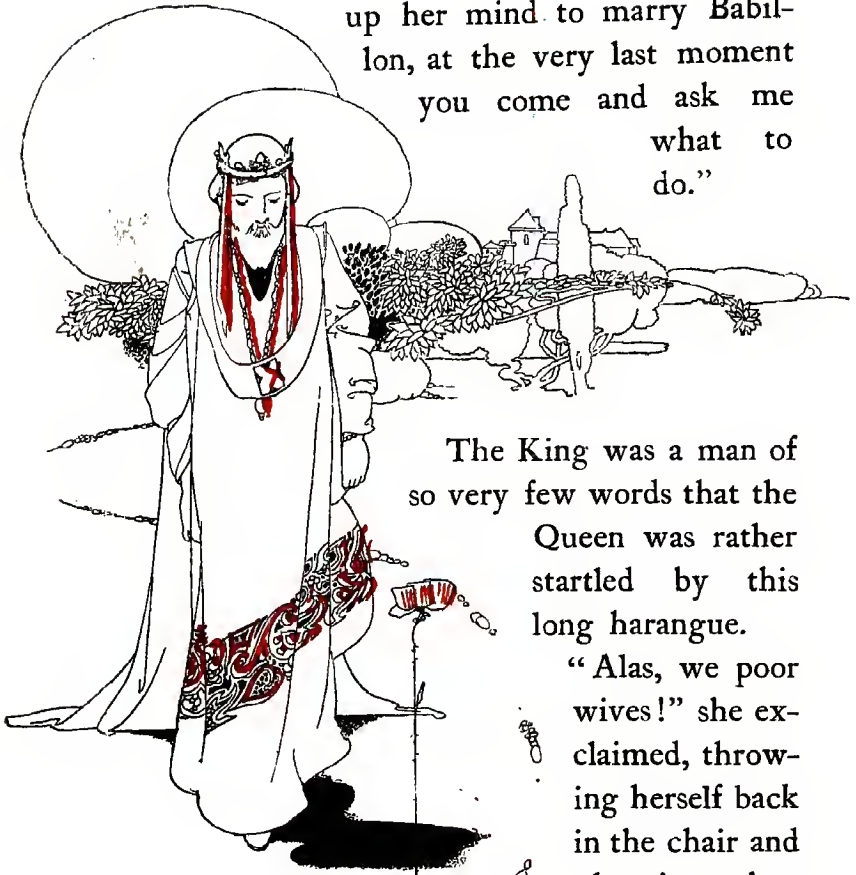
“Really, I don’t know what else she could do under the circumstances,” remarked the King timidly. “I do hope they will be happy!” he added, with a sigh, as he placed his hand tenderly on the burnt spot.

“This is beyond all endurance,” cried the Queen severely. “You have never a thought for any one but yourself. If you do not think of me, at least think of your subjects and your crown !”

This impassioned appeal had the effect of rousing his Majesty to such a pitch that he began to take a real interest in one who might sooner or later become his son-in-law.

“Do you mean my nephew, Prince Babillon ?” inquired the King in very measured tones. “Until this moment I never thought of his aspiring to Melanie’s hand. You surprise me,” he continued, “by not having looked more carefully after our daughter. You should have plainly pointed out to her the bridegroom you thought most eligible. That was the conduct pursued by your mother. She not only pointed me out to you, but you to me, otherwise how was it that we were married, as Love, they say, is blind? Why have you not acted like your mother? You knew her better than I did. Now that our daughter has made

up her mind to marry Babilon, at the very last moment you come and ask me what to do."



The King was a man of so very few words that the Queen was rather startled by this long harangue.

"Alas, we poor wives!" she exclaimed, throwing herself back in the chair and clasping her hands. "All

the blame is thrown on us, as if we could be everywhere and do everything. It was you who would ask the Prince to

"HE WENT FOR HIS USUAL WALK ROUND THE CASTLE GROUNDS."

this Court, though I never liked him. This is the result.”

“After all, Babillon is a good fellow,” said the King soothingly. “He really would not be a bad match for our daughter, only his pockets are so empty. He is neither tall, handsome, nor clever, so that if the Princess married him, nobody would grudge her the choice she had made. He certainly does play on the lute——”

“A lover and his lute !” exclaimed the Queen. “A pretty bridegroom for our daughter !”

The King, noticing that her Majesty was provoked by his answer, remained silent for a few moments. Then, after remarking thoughtfully that the matter was one of supreme importance to the State, requiring much consideration, he rose from his chair, put away his manuscript, and went for his usual walk round the Castle grounds. As he descended the stairs, the sound of a lute greeted his ears. “Poor Babillon,” thought he to himself, “the days of your courtship are numbered.”



“Play on, play on—that sweet melody,” exclaimed the Princess Melanie, in pleading tones to Prince Babillon, as she raised her head with its

sunny curls, bent but a moment before over her tapestry frame. "That very same piece you have just played. I love to hear music. It seems to waft my soul away, which I find not to be the case when my own fingers are wandering over the strings."

"With the greatest pleasure," replied the Prince, who had been playing a little lullaby he knew by heart.

"It has a drowsy sound," said the Princess, suppressing a little yawn, as she endeavoured to push back her hair, which would fall over her face and interfere sadly with her needle. At last she leaned back on a silken pillow, and in another moment fell fast asleep.

Prince Babillon rubbed his hands so as to loosen his fingers and make them twang the strings more nimbly, and then began his lullaby once more. He liked playing it, for it was both easy and effective. As he knew it by heart, he could not help now and then throwing a glance towards the corner where the Princess sat. He was delighted to see her eyes closed, thinking how much she must be enjoying his music. He therefore continued playing the same piece over and over again, until he began to wonder whether she was really listening or had accidentally fallen asleep. At last

he stopped. The sudden silence had not the slightest effect upon her. Her blue eyes were hidden beneath their tightly-closed lids, while her rosy lips were just parted enough to show the pearliest of teeth.

“How lovely she is,” thought the Prince, “especially when asleep.” He twisted his stool round and gazed at the slumbering girl. “Ah me,” he sighed, “the more I look, the more I may. She will not, cannot love a beggarly Prince like me, for though my appearance is not much against me, my revenue is !”

He rose quickly from his seat, and stepping across the floor on tiptoe stood before a mirror arranging his black locks and twisting his budding moustache into shape.

The Prince Babillon was only a Prince, and nothing more. The youngest son of a large family, he had been left wholly unprovided with the usual fortune of one of royal race, and was now entirely supported by his uncle the King, and father of the Princess Melanie. He was now over head and ears in love with his cousin, though without a chance, as he thought, of winning her.

While the Prince was examining his features in the glass, the Princess opened her eyes and, smiling, said, “How beautiful !”

The Prince did not quite understand whether she was referring to the music or not, as he had left off playing for two minutes at least. Explanations are usually tedious, so he did not ask her to explain, but only remarked he was glad she liked it.

The Princess seemed so much refreshed by her brief slumber that the Prince thought within himself that he might venture to utter the thousand and one thoughts that had nestled in his brain for months past. Many a time had they fluttered to his lips, wavered there, and then flown back.

“Princess—cousin,” he murmured, as he twitched nervously at the lowest button on his waistcoat, “have you ever heard of anybody loving anybody in this wide, wide world?”

“They say there is room for all,” answered the Princess, yawning.

This yawn distressed the Prince. He fancied he was only tiring her. Remembering, however, that her lovely eyes had been closed so lately, he thought the yawn excusable.

“Princess,” he continued with emotion, “love is life’s duet.”

“There must be two, then?” said the Princess inquiringly.

“Suppose, for fun, they were you and I,” returned the Prince with studied carelessness.

“But both must be able to play,” interrupted the Princess hastily, “and you know how badly I play.”

An irrepressible shiver ran through Babillon’s frame.

“You misunderstand me, cousin, let me explain myself in a little parable: A certain vine grew on a garden wall, and as it grew taller and taller it spied a little wallflower half hidden in a cranny far above its head. ‘Little wallflower,’ sighed the vine, waving its leaves to it, ‘how lovely you are with your bright blossoms, while I am all green leaves. If I climb up to you, will you, O will you?’—the rest of the sentence was carried away by the winds, but the vine climbed on, and as autumn drew nigh its leaves became burnished like gold. It reached the spot at last where the wallflower was hanging over to welcome it. It then clasped its tendrils around that little wallflower and they parted no more.”

“What a pretty little tale, where did you read it?” asked the Princess, rubbing her eyes and plunging her needle into her tapestry again.

“Read it? In the pages of my heart,” said the Prince.

“Have you any more little stories inscribed in the same place?” inquired the Princess. “But tell

mé, why was it the flower would have nothing to do with the vine until its leaves turned into gold ?”

“She did not think it was quite old enough, Princess.”

“Not that she thought gold such a pretty shade ?” said the Princess, taking up a piece of coloured wool for her work.

“Ah !” replied the Prince, as his hand turned listlessly in his empty pocket, “that may have been the reason.”

“O, do tell me a few more little tales of the same sort,” urged the Princess, looking affectionately at her cousin, “they really do amuse me.”

“Well, cousin, just to please you, I will tell you one more little story. Once upon a time there was a young Prince who came to his uncle’s Palace and lived there, and, lo ! the King had one beautiful daughter, but her heart was full of pride. The Prince loved that King’s daughter more than any other person’s daughter, but she was so haughty she néver would bend her eyes upon him. Give me your hand, cousin, and let me see whether you are proud by the lines on it.”

“What will you do with it if I do entrust it to your care ?” asked the Princess, as she stretched it towards him.

He was about to raise it to his lips as the shortest answer when the Queen-Mother entered the room from the garden.

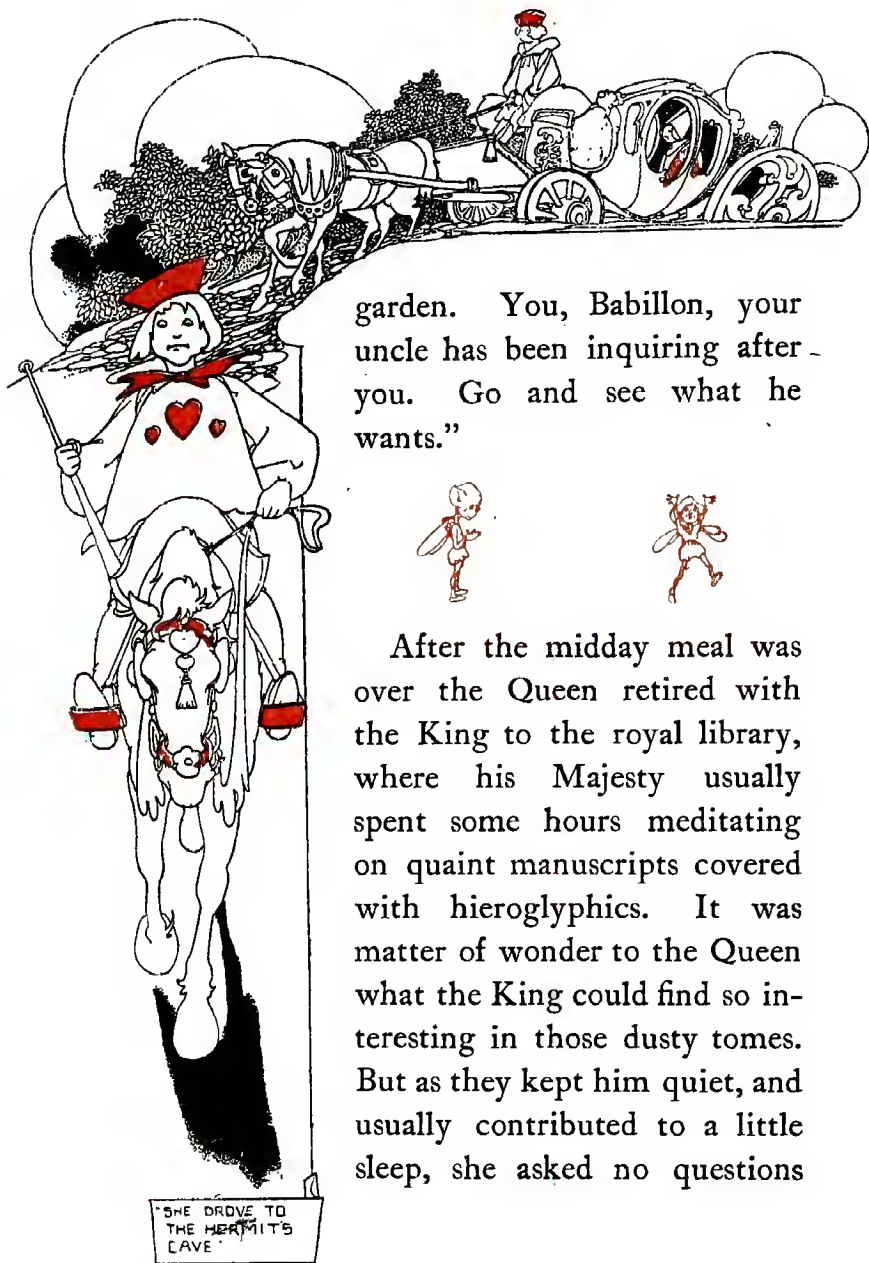
“What is the Prince doing with your hand?” asked the Queen, as she tapped the Prince rather sharply on the shoulder with her sceptre.

“He is going to tell me whether I am a wallflower, or likely to be one,” laughed the Princess.

“A wallflower,” repeated the Queen, raising her eyebrows. “I hope not, wallflowers are not usually held in much esteem. What made you think of a wallflower?”

“O, nothing in particular. Only a little tale I heard about one, mamma dear,” answered the Princess as she turned her head towards the Prince, who had let her hand drop and was walking across the room towards the door. “He was only asking me if I had ever heard of love, and telling me love was life’s duet, and then he told me a story about a vine and a wallflower, and was just going to tell me whether I was proud as a King’s daughter.”

“My child, I never knew Babillon was such a story-teller. Don’t listen to him so much,” said the Queen. “I think, dear, you have worked long enough at your frame. Run off to the



garden. You, Babillon, your uncle has been inquiring after you. Go and see what he wants."



After the midday meal was over the Queen retired with the King to the royal library, where his Majesty usually spent some hours meditating on quaint manuscripts covered with hieroglyphics. It was matter of wonder to the Queen what the King could find so interesting in those dusty tomes. But as they kept him quiet, and usually contributed to a little sleep, she asked no questions

but let him have his own way. This afternoon, however, was not to be allowed to pass in the same easy, tranquil manner. The Queen intended to inform the King that she had seen Prince Babillon holding the Princess's hand, and to relate to him all her daughter had told her. The King listened patiently, but was inclined to pay very little attention to Prince Babillon's stories or actions. The Queen, finding her royal spouse reluctant to take any steps to get rid of the Prince, became low-spirited.

On the advice of an old servant, the trusty Elizabeth, she determined to consult an aged hermit who dwelt in a cave all by himself, and who was consulted by many of the ladies in the neighbourhood when they were in trouble. Rising early the next morning the Queen, accompanied by the trusty Elizabeth, drove to the Hermit's cave. At that moment the saintly old man was engaged in sweeping out his cell, and was somewhat flustered by so early a visit. Perceiving, however, it was the Queen, he bowed low, and led the way into an inner chamber in the rock but dimly lighted by an oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling. Here it was that the Hermit performed his daily devotions and received any visitors that came to consult him. The cell was so dark that it was

some time before the Queen perceived two seats hewn out of the rock. Placing herself on one, she signed to the Hermit to take the other, while the maid remained standing.

This act of graciousness on the Queen's part filled the Hermit with the most profound gratitude. His deep-set eyes shone quite benevolently under his shaggy eyebrows.

“What is your will, great Queen, that I, the humblest of your servants, may endeavour to perform it?”

The Queen needed no further encouragement, but poured out all her sorrows into his attentive ear. Finally she asked the Hermit's advice.

The Hermit shook his unkempt locks, and then musing, murmured, “How strange a thing is love! Two young people meet, and they fall into it. Peradventure in another world it may be different.” These words were spoken as if to himself. Turning to the Queen, he continued, “If it is as you say, madam, and who am I that I should gainsay it——” Here the Hermit stopped; and rocked himself to and fro as if some mighty thought were struggling in vain for utterance. At last he said, “The only suggestion I can offer, in all humility, is that if the Princess and Prince have fallen in love from being together, mayhap if they

were not so they would not do so. If you would take my advice, go home and straightway dismiss this pauper Prince from your Court, and invite some other that shall find more favour in your eyes, and peradventure your daughter may change her mind.”

With these solemn words the Hermit closed his lips and waved his hand in the direction of the door. The Queen grasped the holy man's meaning, and, rising from her seat, quickly left the cave.

The carriage that had brought her and her trusty servant was waiting. The Queen, after allowing the Hermit to kiss her hand, seated herself in the carriage, closely followed by Elizabeth, and commanded the coachman to drive back to the Palace.

The Hermit on returning to his cell was surprised to find something glittering on the seat the Queen had just left. It was the fee for his advice, and though hermits despise the things of this world, yet out of gratitude for the Queen's condescension he did not forthwith return it.



Advice, whether followed or not, always gives some satisfaction. It affords a sense of relief, as

there is no longer any need to think for oneself. The Queen's headache got better, so she devoted all her spare time for some days in looking over a list of acquaintances and mentally calculating which Prince she should invite as being most likely to attract the attention of her daughter.

Prince Babillon meanwhile continued to play the lullaby over many times a day to the Princess, but no sooner did the Queen's ear catch the hated strain than she immediately came to listen to the music. Babillon did not know many pieces, so could not vary the tune often. At last, to his intense grief and mortification, his eyes were opened, and he perceived that the Queen's behaviour was not quite so friendly as usual. There was more of the stepmother about her. Her answers were short and snappish. Just when he thought he was going to enjoy a delightful conversation with the Princess, as he had hitherto so frequently done, the Queen would hint that it would be better for his health if he would go and amuse himself in the garden, or try to catch fish in the lake.

This change in the Queen's manner damped the blitheness of Babillon's spirits. He became quite dismal and downhearted. As he had never heard of her visit to the Hermit, he tried in vain to guess the reason of her coldness. The Hermit,



RISING EARLY THE NEXT
MORNING THE QUEEN ACCOM-
PANIED BY HER TRUSTY ELIZ-
ABETH DROVE TO THE CAVE.



however, was well known as being willing to give advice to all that asked it. Babillon therefore determined to consult him. Concealing his intention even from the Princess, he started from the Palace one fine morning under the pretext of a fishing excursion, and left word that he might be away some time, so as not to cause his aunt any unnecessary anxiety owing to his absence from breakfast. As he passed beneath the Princess's chamber he could not help casting an upward glance at her window, but it was close curtained and the blinds drawn down. With a sigh of disappointment he turned his head away and hastened his steps to the forest where the Hermit dwelt. To prevent recognition, he had disguised himself in some shabby old clothes, so that even had the Princess been looking out, she might have only hurt his feelings by taking no notice of him.

On drawing nigh the Hermit's cell, he spied the aged man eating something and then drinking something. Not wishing to interrupt him in the enjoyment of his meal, the Prince thought it wiser not to enter into his presence before the Hermit had quite finished, for then his attention would be less likely to be diverted and his utterance would be more distinct. An old stump of a tree offering a comfortable seat, the Prince sat

down on it, and watched the Hermit's movements unobserved.

"It must be a feast day," said the Prince to himself as he noticed that the colour of the liquid imbibed rather freely by the Hermit was red, while a most savoury smell of cooking greeted his nostrils. A feeling of intense hunger began to affect him. "I wonder," thought he, "if I was to speak now, whether that good old man would be courteous enough to invite me to share his breakfast. I feel sure I should not be proud enough to refuse."

Appetite won the victory, and Babillon, raising his cap, uttered a very humble good-morning to the Hermit. The latter started on hearing a voice at so early an hour.

"Good-morrow, my son," he replied, recovering himself quickly, but it was evident from his manner that he was in no humour to be bothered with questions.

"I am hungry, good father."

"I am sorry to hear it, my son. Is it hunger of the spirit or body?"

"Both, holy father."

The Hermit muttered something in Latin which the Prince did not understand, and then added, "If thou has aught wrong with thy spirit,

I may heal it, as for thy corporal infirmity, begone to a physician."

Prince Babillon, seeing that there was no hope of gratifying his appetite, and finding his hunger only aggravated in the presence of food, began to pour forth the sorrows of his soul to his spiritual doctor and beg assistance.

"My son," replied the Hermit, as he lifted a pan full of eggs that were frying on the fire, "thou hast looked too high. All the good things of this world are not for the lowly. Let thy gaze be fixed on things at thine own level."

The Hermit began to guess his visitor was the Prince Babillon, from the strange similarity between what the Queen had told him and the Prince's story.

"Prince Babillon," he began.

"You know my name, then?"

"What is hid from the blind may be seen sometimes by those who have eyes."

"O, holy father, you know much."

"I will help you, Prince. Stay; let me enter alone into my sanctuary to consult my books, and shortly will I tell you what to do that you may win the Princess. Watch, I pray you, these eggs that they burn not and the fat fall not into the fire, and quickly will I return."

The Hermit handed the pan to the Prince and retired into his cave.

“This is a temptation more than human flesh can bear,” thought the Prince when he saw the back of the Hermit vanish into the gloom of the cavern. “Four eggs for one man!” So the Prince concluded that if he ate two before the Hermit came back, two, at any rate, would be left. Having made out this calculation to his own satisfaction, he subtracted two and hastily devoured them, not without burning his fingers and his tongue. His next calculation was how to explain the reason of their disappearance when the Hermit returned. To give himself some fresh ideas, and to cool his burnt tongue, he took a draught from the brown pitcher, so that when the Hermit did reappear he felt more comfortable in body, though less so in spirit. As the Hermit neither counted the eggs nor looked into the pitcher, the Prince thought there was no need to say anything. He therefore took the scroll on which the Hermit had inscribed his advice. Thanking the good old man for his kindness, the Prince did not stop to read it, but left hurriedly, rejoicing in his heart that no remark had been made about the loss of the eggs and the wine.

As the morning air was bracing and time passing, the Prince began running, and continued to do so

until he was well out of the forest. On his return to the Palace he hastened to his private apartments, hid the scroll carefully away until he might read it secretly, then went and played his lullaby, as if nothing particular had occurred. Now it should be said that the Hermit had noticed the disappearance of his eggs and wine though he had held his peace. Being a holy man, it is possible that he forgave the injury ; but a very peculiar smile played round his wrinkled lips that might have suggested to a beholder that this old man had a black side.



Meanwhile the Queen-Mother had not wasted time. She had been busily counting on her fingers all the princely families in the neighbourhood, selecting only the richest as most suitable for her purpose. At last she hit upon that of Prince Nollibab, whose enormous wealth and magnificence of dress were unrivalled. She therefore went to beg the King to send an ambassador with a royal invitation.

“Do you know, sire, what I want you to do?” asked the Queen, with the softest intonation of her voice possible.

“How should I?” growled the King, who hated riddles, and who, from the tone of her Majesty’s voice, had a presentiment that something disagreeable was to follow.

“Now, before I tell you, promise me you will do it, won’t you?” urged the Queen.

“How absurd of you, my love,” replied the King, “you might make me promise to give away all my kingdom and my daughter. I must know beforehand what I am going to promise.”

The King looked very wise, for he remembered having read in books stories of kings’ promises and what became of them.

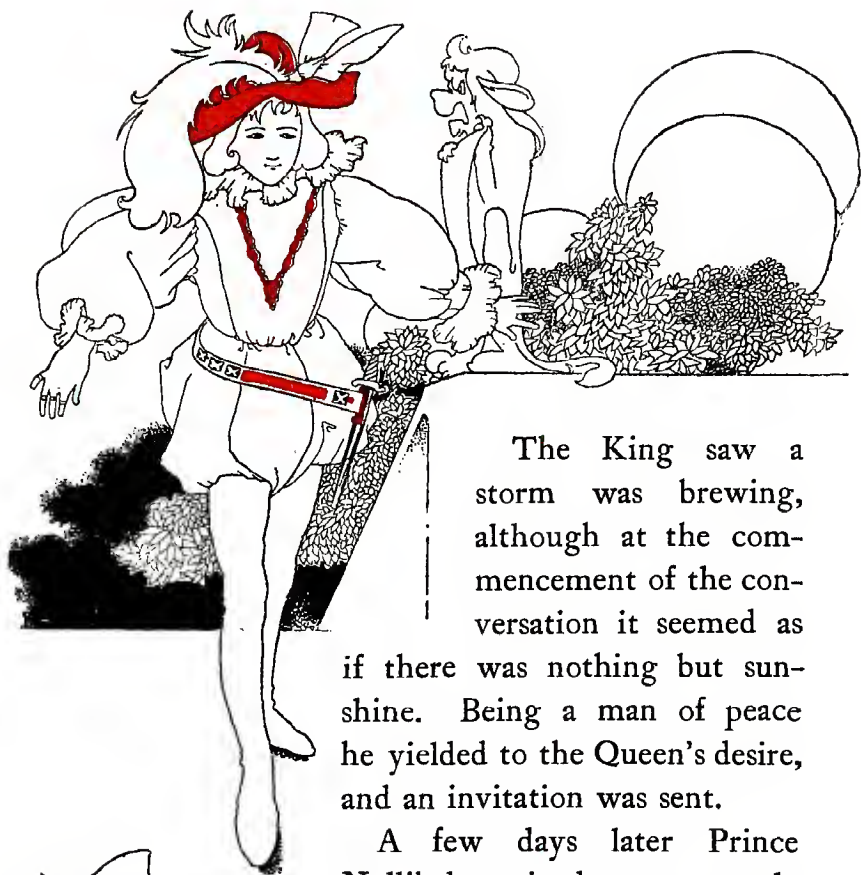
“If you won’t, you won’t, I suppose,” returned the Queen. “Well, I want you to invite Prince Nolibab to your Court.”

“Who are the Nolibabs?” asked the King in a lazy manner. “Are they perfectly respectable?”

“Of course!” answered the Queen. “They keep a large number of servants and everybody visits them.”

“You know I am rather particular as to the persons with whom the Princess associates,” said the King, wishing, if possible, to find some excuse against inviting a guest to his Court.

“Do you think I am not?” returned the Queen, drawing herself up stiffly.



The King saw a storm was brewing, although at the commencement of the conversation it seemed as

if there was nothing but sunshine. Being a man of peace he yielded to the Queen's desire, and an invitation was sent.

A few days later Prince Nollibab arrived, very smartly dressed in a suit of pink satin and a hat of the same colour and material, with a large white ostrich feather which dangled down and so hid half of his face. His costume was so attractive that there was no time to look at the Prince himself. He was

PRINCE
NOLLIBAB

attended as usual in such cases by a large retinue of courtiers, many carriages, and a troop of gaily-caparisoned bodyguards.

This display was rather depressing to the King, as he thought of the expense the country would incur for the support of such a cavalcade. The Queen, however, was supremely delighted.

“What a handsome Prince, at least what handsome clothes he wears!” exclaimed the Queen, as she threw up her hands in an ecstasy of admiration.

“Prince Babillon is worth a dozen of such clothes-poles,” said the King.

“Hush, my dear, do!” whispered the Queen. “The Prince is quite close to us, and is not deaf.”

The object of admiration then advanced with great composure to the King, amid the blare of trumpets and beating of drums, and thanked him for the honour he had conferred on him, his family and relations in inviting him to the Palace. He further stated that his father and mother sent their compliments and thanks, which sounded to the King’s ears very like the words used in a receipt to a tradesman’s bill. Rather wearied by the length of the Prince’s harangue, the King replied in a few words of welcome. The Queen added that she was much pleased to see him, and expressed the hope that he would spend some time with them.

He was then introduced to the Princess. Poor Babillon was not introduced. Fearing to face a rival, he had remained sadly ruminating in his own chamber. His only hope now rested on the scroll which the Hermit had given him. As yet it lay unread in one of his drawers, for he did not intend to make any use of it until his troubles commenced.

A magnificent banquet was served in honour of the royal guest, and after the banquet a ball was given, and Princess Melanie's chief partner that evening was Prince Nollibab.

"What a stupid partner you are to-night," remarked one of the maids-of-honour to Prince Babillon. "You always used to be lively enough, but to-night you are as silent as grief."

"O am I?" replied Babillon, rousing himself from his reverie and trying to smile. "The weather is very pleasant for dancing."

"Do say something sensible!" retorted the maid-of-honour impatiently. "Tell me who that gaily-dressed young man is, now valsing with the Princess."

"He is named Prince Nollibab," replied Babillon sulkily.

"At any rate, his clothes are fairer than his face, and his dancing is very different to our usual way.

But then we are so old fashioned in this musty Court."

"At least he is not shy," remarked Babillon, "you can hear his voice everywhere."

"Yet the Princess seems quite captivated already," continued the maid-of-honour. "Faint voice, Prince, never won fair lady."

Prince Nollibab, with perfect confidence in his own merits and striking appearance, was not wasting his time, but was doing his utmost to make a favourable impression on his partner. She in her turn was amused by one so different in thought and dress to her usual companions; still, in her heart she clung to the simple-minded Babillon.

The latter, however, unaware of her fidelity towards him, was boiling with indignation and jealousy. On that occasion and afterwards the Queen managed affairs so skilfully that, as Babillon too plainly perceived, all sorts of entertainments were provided for his rival, while he never had a chance of speaking or even playing to the Princess. So, under a feeling of injured and hopeless love, he declined going to these pleasure-parties, and preferred fishing in the lake by himself instead.

Prince Nollibab charmed everybody by appearing day after day in a handsome new suit of clothes of

many colours, each more costly than the last and all made by the best tailors. His evident admiration of the Princess endeared him to the Queen, who took the greatest pains to provide every pleasure for her guest. The King cared but little for the Prince, so generally excused himself from attending the fêtes on the score of advanced age. The Princess was amused by his constant change of costume. There was little else about him to attract her attention.

One day when sauntering in the garden the Prince said, "Do you believe in love, Princess?"

"What a strange question," replied the Princess, with her eyes cast down on the gravel-path, while she kicked a pebble into a flower-bed. "Many of us believe in things of which we are not quite sure."

"Love has been in fashion so many years," continued the Prince, "perhaps you may consider it quite vulgar."

"I do not think I am old enough to express an opinion," returned the Princess quickly. "I know so little about the fashion of this world. But go, Prince, and pluck that rose hanging from the wall in the sun."

The Prince hastened to obey her command, and on presenting the rose to her, remarked that

ladies' cheeks were often compared to roses, but for his part he thought the colour too common for such a comparison.

A smile flitted across the Princess's lips as she took the rose from his hand, and thanking him she proposed to return to the Palace. The Prince was surprised at the Princess's desire to leave him so soon, as he had much he was longing to say to her. Yet, as he had damaged his white kid gloves and pricked his delicate fingers, he was not sorry to escape from the garden lest the Princess might ask him to pluck some more flowers.

As the Princess gazed at the gentle beauty of the rose, with all the delicate softness of its opening petals, her thoughts wandered to her cousin. Scarcely two words had passed between them for days, and she began to feel a longing to see him that she had never felt before.

“O that Nature had clothed Babillon as she has done this speechless rose,” thought the Princess, “then mamma might have regarded him with less aversion, and if he drooped I could pop him into water and make him all alive again.”

With such ideas running in her head the Princess made her companion quicken his steps. Leaving him abruptly at the door of the Palace, she ran up-stairs to her tapestry frame and called Babillon

to play his lullaby once more. This time sleep did not weigh down her eyelids.



The Queen found that in spite of all her hints and remonstrances her daughter preferred Babillon, and was at her wit's end to know what to do, as she disliked being rude to anybody. After long reflection a notion entered her head, that if the King could only be coaxed to provide the Prince with a small salary, and to send him to a distant part of the country, the Princess might in time forget him, and become reconciled to Prince Nollibab.

One morning, therefore, when the King showed signs of being in a good humour, taking him fondly by the arm, the Queen led him into the garden to point out how magnificently his pet roses were blooming. She then threw out a hint as to Prince Babillon, saying that he was now no longer a child.

“It is high time,” she said, “that so promising a young man should start on his journey through life. He ought to be sent on some diplomatic errand to a distant part of the kingdom, or to some

neighbouring country like many other young Princes."

As anything like change in his family arrangements or in the government was productive of the greatest uneasiness to the King—change being to him only another word for revolution—he was much annoyed at the Queen's suggestion.

"Why do you want to send Babillon from here?" he asked, as the smile which just before had lighted up his face when admiring his roses gradually died away. "I am sure he is quite happy where he is. If it was not for that abominable fellow, Prince Nollibab, your precious guest, he would be ten times happier. Since that coxcomb set foot in the Palace there has been no peace! Balls, tournaments, and garden-parties! The royal exchequer is becoming exhausted! Soon there will be a revolution, and you and I, my love, will end our days on the scaffold."

"Don't talk such nonsense," replied the Queen. "We have only shown Nollibab the hospitality due to a Prince. I do wish Melanie would marry him instead of fluttering after that poverty-stricken Babillon."

"At least," said the King, "he is an honest lad, and as for this Prince you so much admire, I consider him no better than a tailor's dummy."

“Babillon, at any rate, will never add a penny to the exchequer,” replied the Queen, “so you had better do what I ask. Send Babillon somewhere. Let him have sufficient to support himself in his station of life, but let him go hence.”

The King, naturally indolent and accustomed to give way to his wife, though really very much vexed, admitted that it would be better for Babillon if he had some suitable employment. Accordingly a few days afterwards Babillon received notice that he was to go to a distant part of the country on a diplomatic mission for his uncle.

The sorrow this caused Babillon may be readily imagined. The thought of leaving the Princess behind with Prince Nollibab was unendurable. In the first spare moment he hurried off to his room and unrolled the scroll the Hermit had given him. His fingers trembled so he could scarcely unfold the parchment, and his eyes were so dimmed with tears he could scarcely read it. At last after several ineffectual attempts he succeeded so far as to make out the following words—

“Shut thy music-book,
Take a shepherd’s crook,
Tend your sheep all day,
While you are away.
If her love be true,
She will follow you.

If she say thee nay,
To your lambkins play.
For lovers true, 'tis only fair
Every sorrow they should share."

"This is truly ridiculous," exclaimed the Prince aloud, as he rubbed his hair with his hand till it attained a state of the wildest confusion. "What means all this nonsense about a shepherd's crook, and shut my music-book. I never will be a shepherd, and as for buying a crook, I have not got the money to do so. O that old villain of a hermit! Would that I had eaten all his eggs and drunk all his wine! This comes of my never having given the good man anything for his advice."



The days quickly flew, and the time arrived for the Prince to leave the Palace and journey to a distant province. He had given up all hope of getting any assistance from the Hermit's words. They seemed so senseless that the less attention he paid to them and the more to his uncle the better he thought it would be for his future prospects.

"Play me that lullaby once more, Babillon," said the Princess, with the slightest tremor in

her voice the night before his departure. "When you are gone, Babillon, what shall I do? Nollibab does not know one note from the other. His fingers are too much encrusted with diamonds to move. Indeed, dear Babillon, I am sorry you are going. When it really comes to saying good-bye, it does not matter who it is, I always feel inclined to weep. It was just the same when my dear canary died."

The Prince played the lullaby, and as the Hermit had advised he shut the music-book. Being the last night he gained courage and explained as well as he could his unutterable love for her. She seemed partly to understand him a little better than usual. She fixed her eyes on him with an expression of pity. He took her hand, pressed it to his lips, and rushed from the room.

The Princess did not sleep quite so soundly as usual that night. Dreams of Babillon's departure awoke her. As for Babillon he had no sleep at all. His packing took him some little time. Not having travelled before he did not know exactly what he should require. His servant had to act on his own responsibility, and so packed everything and anything he could lay his hands on, under the impression that it is always better to have too much luggage than too little.

The moment that Babillon was alone his thoughts reverted to the Hermit's scroll. Come what may, he determined as soon as he was out of sight of the Palace and the Queen's eye to take another turning to the one he was directed to take, and to buy if he could a shepherd's crook and a few sheep, and follow out the words inscribed on the scroll. The closing of the music-book was not a bad beginning, and if everything was as easy as that had been, the Princess would be his in a very short time, so that when the hour for bidding farewell arrived the Prince felt strangely buoyant, and though the Princess's eyes filled with tears, he smiled so radiantly upon her that her heart was comforted.

The Queen had some difficulty in repressing the joy she felt, but managed to preserve a demeanour calculated to express the feeling proper for the occasion, as became a person of her rank. The King was truly sorry, as he was really attached to him. As for Prince Nollibab, his feathers hanging down from his hat so impeded his sight that he scarcely saw Babillon. However, he had the good taste to hold out the tips of his fingers to him and wish him every success. As to what Prince Babillon was going to do, or why he was leaving, he had not the slightest idea.

“Now that Babillon has really left us Melanie will surely devote all her attention, if not her heart, to Prince Nollibab,” thought the Queen.

“Now that Babillon is gone I shall be able to



enjoy the Princess's company without interruption," thought Prince Nollibab.

“Now that Prince Babillon is no longer with me, how can I ever be happy again?” thought the Princess.

“I shall have no one as companion but that young jackanapes,” thought the King.

So Babillon was not so much forgotten as he expected to be.

Prince Nolibab now decked his person daily in finer and more expensive apparel even than before. His hat was hung with so many feathers that people wondered he was not suffocated when he put it on. His cloak of the finest satin dazzled the eyes of all the Court ladies. His stockings of the finest silk that worm could spin were the constant admiration of those who understood such matters. The diamond buckles on his shoes were said to be worth half a kingdom. Indeed, to anybody really fond of dress he must have been quite irresistible.

“Valetie,” observed he one morning to his servant as he was helping to enrobe him, “can you explain to me why it is that the Princess always smiles when she sees me? My sisters never thought me at all amusing.”

“Of course, your Highness,” replied Valetie, as he tied a pretty lace collar round the Prince’s neck. “It is a smile of loving admiration. One so magnificently apparelled as you are would find some difficulty in escaping such recognition of your charms.”

“But, though she smiles, Valetie, she usually hides her face and goes away to work at her tapestry just when I want to talk to her.”

“Your Highness, that only shows her love and maidenly reserve, she goes away to think of you all by herself.”

“That must be so, Valetie, for all the Princesses I have been introduced to, have shown much the same symptoms. Have you found the emerald bracelet I mean to give the Princess previous to our betrothal?”

The valet handed the Prince an enormous bracelet, encased in a box, which the Prince took, but had to carry in his hand, having no pocket large enough to contain it. After wandering about the Palace for some time, he espied the Princess walking alone amidst her flowers. With a strong effort he raised his hat as he approached her. The bracelet was then produced, which the Prince said he hoped if she really ever had felt any love for him she would deign to accept. As the Princess could not say she had ever had any such feeling, she only admired the jewels, without taking the bracelet from him.

“O Princess!” exclaimed the Prince, tired of carrying the box, and wondering what he could do with it if she did not take it from him; “O Princess, whether you have any love for me or not, please accept this bracelet and box in testimony of my great admiration of you. You alone are worthy

of wearing so priceless an ornament ; your wrist alone can adorn these precious gems."

The Princess, hearing that love was not necessary in order to accept the gift, allowed the Prince to encircle her wrist with it, and was not a little gratified by its beauty.

"How extremely kind of you, Prince, to give me so handsome a present," she said, with a smile ; "if you will excuse me I will run and show it to mamma, she will be even more pleased than I am."

Without saying another word she tripped lightly up the marble steps leading to the Palace and disappeared.

"I was a little hasty," said the Prince to himself, "in fastening on the bracelet quite so soon," and sulkily turning on his heel he withdrew to his own apartments in order to change his clothes once more.

The Princess very soon found the Queen and showed her the bracelet.

"How dearly he must love you, Melanie, to have given you so valuable a present," exclaimed her mother, as she looked affectionately from the bracelet to her daughter. "Real emeralds, I declare, and what large ones !"

"Must the presents we give to those we love always be valuable ?"



OH PRINCESS WHETHER YOU
LOVE ME OR NOT PLEASE AC-
CEPT THIS BRACELET AND
BOX'



“It is better they should be. It shows the person who receives them has some value in the eyes of the giver.”

“Babillon never valued me much, then, for he never gave me anything valuable, and yet there was something in the poorest flower of the field he plucked and gave me that made it more precious than all these jewels. I do not believe true love knows or cares anything about value.”

“Tut, tut, my child,” said the Queen impatiently. “Poppies look very beautiful in a field of corn, but they make no bread. Everything has its place and value. Could you live in a palace of love?”

“O yes, dear mother. A palace, even of jewels, without love would be no palace to me.”

The Queen, seeing that further argument would be thrown away, made her daughter promise to keep the bracelet, as it might offend the tender sensibility of the Prince if she returned it. But the Princess felt that the bracelet was only a chain that might bind her to the Prince, and to his great astonishment as well as to the dismay of the Queen next time she met him it was not round her wrist.

“Is the Princess’s arm so fair that an emerald bracelet is not ornament enough for it?”

The Princess made no reply at first, but finally

said, "There is a legend that if a serpent casts its eye on an emerald it becomes blind."

"But, Princess, that is well for you."

"Some are harmless, Prince. Why injure them?"

The Princess stooped to pluck some weeds from her favourite flowers.

"We always pet the most beautiful," she said; "it is very hard these poor struggling weeds are not allowed to enjoy their short lives."

"Why should they, Princess? What right have these dingy plants to poke their heads up amongst the other gaily-clad flowers?"

"They have a hard struggle to live, and they put on the best they have, Prince, and cannot help themselves if they do appear a little dowdy."

"They are very impertinent, Princess, that is my idea, and the sooner they are hustled out of sight the better for everybody."

"Poor Babillon," thought the Princess, "I begin to know why you have been sent away."

Though the Princess knew that the Prince despised flowers she picked one of the most beautiful roses, thinking that as it came from her hands he might prize it. The Prince took the rose, and exclaimed—

"How can words of mine paint my emotions

at receiving this first gift, which I accept as a symbol of your love for me."

The Princess had not the slightest idea the rose meant quite so much, and repented having given it. She was still more surprised at seeing him lift it with the utmost fervour to his lips, and then put it in one of his pockets, where the poor flower must inevitably be crushed and die.

"Where have you put my rose? give it me back again," cried the Princess, eager to save her rose from such rough treatment.

"By no means, Princess, I will keep it for your dear sake. I will treasure its petals, faded though they be, in a golden box, but I must put it in my pocket just now, because the colour does not go well with my pink cloak."

"I think mamma is calling me," said the Princess, and at once left him.

"I wonder if I annoyed her about the rose?" thought the Prince, and went to his room to look in the glass.

"Valetie," he called, "come to me." Now Valetie, though only a servant and uneducated, was possessed of common-sense. He had seen something of the world, and had drawn his own conclusions.

"Valetie, only think, the Princess gave me a rose

of a different shade to the pink satin I was wearing. What extraordinary taste for a Princess !”

“Very, indeed, your Highness, and what did your Highness do with it ?”

“I put it in my pocket, Valetie, and here it is,” he said, drawing it out in a very crumpled and broken state. “What am I to do with it ?”

“Keep it, your Highness, and wear it to-night at the ball.”

“How can I wear a common garden rose, Valetie ?”

“Well, your Highness, as you say, it is a common or garden rose, and somewhat below your usual style and good taste ; yet to please the Princess you must wear it somewhere about you, lest she fancy you have slighted her.”

“I really fancy she admires me,” said the Prince, “though she has not told me so yet.”

“As for her admiration of your Highness, I venture to suggest that no Princess in the world could look at you without being struck almost dumb at the sight.”

“Ah, now I understand, good Valetie, the reason why the Princess has so little to say to me ; she used to talk to that untidy Babillon by the hour, but with me she is often very reserved. By the way, what shall I wear to-night ?”

The rest of the day was spent in turning over various gorgeous suits of clothes. At last a black satin coat was chosen as most likely to show off the Princess's pink rose, or rather one he had since obtained in its place, as her gift was so completely crushed as to be absolutely unwearable.

The Princess meanwhile had told her mother about her presentation of a rose to the Prince. The Queen smiled most graciously.

"But only think," added the Princess, pouting her rosy lips, "he put it in his pocket because it did not suit the colour of his cloak."

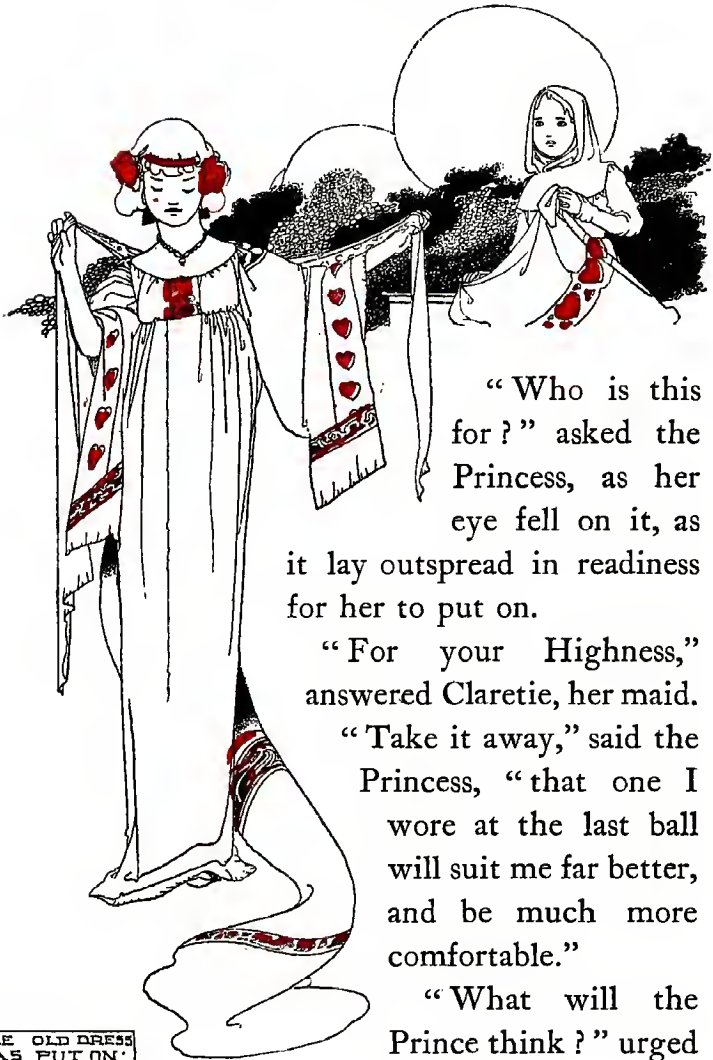
"Well, my love, you know he has such exquisite taste and manners."

After the banquet a grand state ball was to be given, and numerous guests were invited to honour Prince Nolibab.

The Queen had her hopes about the result, so she was pleased, though somewhat anxious.

The King, on the contrary, was rather doleful. He was too old to enjoy balls, and begged the Queen to find some good excuse for his early retirement.

The Princess, after an involuntary sigh for Babillon (with whom she had danced so often before), began to dress herself. Her mother had taken care to provide her with a new gown of pure white satin trimmed with gold lace.



“Who is this for?” asked the Princess, as her eye fell on it, as it lay outspread in readiness for her to put on.

“For your Highness,” answered Claretie, her maid.

“Take it away,” said the Princess, “that one I wore at the last ball will suit me far better, and be much more comfortable.”

“What will the Prince think?” urged the maid.

THE OLD DRESS
WAS PUT ON.

“Think? He will think of himself, as he always does!” retorted the Princess.

The old dress was put on, and the Queen greatly annoyed. The King, however, smiled, patted her cheek, and called her his "wayward little girl."

The Prince spent a very long time considering which position would be the most becoming for the rose. He could not make up his mind whether he ought to pin it in his hat close to his magnificent plume, or on his breast. At last he placed it just a little on the left side on the spot where his heart was beating, but so loosely did he fasten it that after the first dance the rose fell out, and was completely destroyed by the feet of the dancers. The Prince had, moreover, resolved to propose that night to the Princess, for he flattered himself that he would soon be able to improve her taste, and after their marriage make her look at things as he saw them. The Princess, however, was so unaccountably silent, and her dress so old fashioned, that the Prince hesitated some time before he could summon up courage to carry out his intention. Still he accounted for her silence by what his servant had told him. At last, when about to dance with her, he complained that he felt quite exhausted, and begged that she would lead him to a chair in a quiet corner, so as to recover himself. She did so, and was about to call an attendant, when the Prince suddenly became quite animated.

“You seem better, Prince,” said the Princess, “shall we return to the ball-room?”

“Not yet, Princess, not yet,” he exclaimed as he rolled his eyes upward, and placed his white gloved hand gently on his heart for fear of rumpling his lace frills. “You, and you alone, are the cause of my exhaustion. It was for your sake that I implored you to lead me to a chair. And now you have placed me in it you want to hurry back. Stay for one moment! Listen to the few words in which I shall endeavour to express the passion I feel. I shall be brief, and ask for nothing but a brief reply.”

The Princess stood still somewhat nervously. He, however, was thinking of his satin breeches, and if he threw himself on his knees, of the dust on the floor. At last, taking her hand in his, and pressing it very softly, “Princess,” he sighed, “for a long time I have noticed your admiration for me. Your silence has been eloquent. That I have entranced one so lovely as you cannot but fill my heart with pride. As you have admired me so much I now offer to you the object of your admiration, and cast myself and my fortune at your feet.”

By the time the Prince had got to the end of this lengthy speech the Princess had quietly withdrawn her hand. Thanking him for the great honour he

had conferred upon her in presenting her with one of the noblest of his sex, she added that his condescension was so great that she could not find words to express her feelings just at the moment, but hoped on some future occasion she would be able to return him a suitable answer. As he rose from his chair, she took his arm and drew him back to the ball-room, where another partner was awaiting her.

The Prince could not help feeling gratified by the impression he had evidently made on the Princess, though he found it rather difficult to understand her reply. He almost wished her admiration for him had been a little more explicit. However, he did not allow his mind to dwell long on the point, and after being introduced to another partner soon forgot the matter.

The Queen, who had carefully watched the youthful pair all the evening, noticed an unusual glow on her daughter's cheek as she returned from the quiet interview she had had with the Prince.

“It is all over,” said the Queen to herself, and felt very anxious to know what had happened, but neither the Prince nor her daughter said anything. Nor was her curiosity gratified till the next morning, when the Princess narrated the whole scene to her mother.

The Queen was a little disconcerted by her daughter's behaviour. She complained of her coldness, and want of sympathy, and expressed a hope that in future the Princess would be more kind to the Prince, who evidently meant well.

“Meaning well and doing well are two different things, dear mamma,” returned the Princess impatiently, “and to tell the truth my aversion to the Prince is so strong that however I should like to fulfil every wish of your heart it is impossible that I could ever bestow my hand on such a popinjay !”

The Queen, seeing that her daughter was too excited to listen to reason at that moment, dropped the subject and talked on indifferent matters.

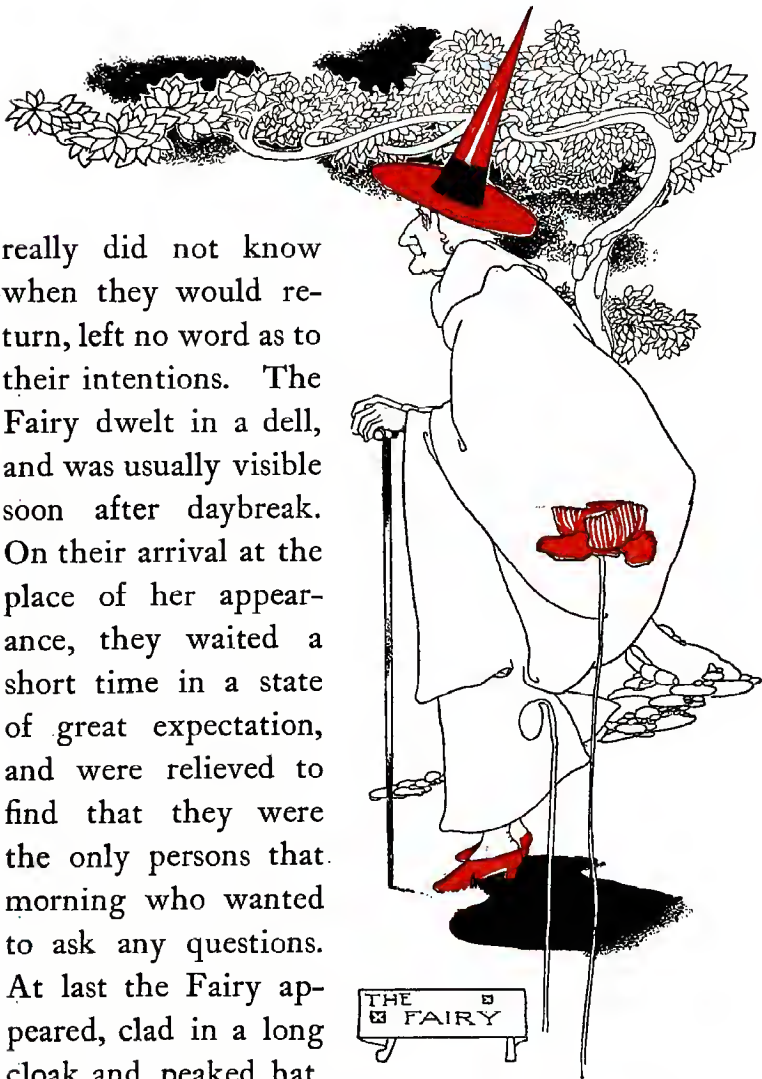
The Princess now perceived that the Queen was really bent on her marriage with the Prince, and made up her mind to consult a far-famed Fairy who dwelt in the neighbourhood. Wishing to conceal her visit she consulted her maid Claretie, who agreed to lend her some of her clothes and to accompany her.



Early next morning, after carefully disguising themselves, they set out on their journey, and as they

really did not know when they would return, left no word as to their intentions. The Fairy dwelt in a dell, and was usually visible soon after daybreak. On their arrival at the place of her appearance, they waited a short time in a state of great expectation, and were relieved to find that they were the only persons that morning who wanted to ask any questions. At last the Fairy appeared, clad in a long cloak and peaked hat,

with red shoes and pink heels, while she carried in her hand an ebony stick that she used as a wand.



“Good Fairy,” exclaimed the Princess, “I come for counsel.”

“What troubles you, Princess?” asked the Fairy, who was not in the least deceived by the disguise she was wearing. “If there is anything I can do for you, speak, and I will perform it.”

“Since you know me,” replied the Princess, “in spite of my disguise, there is no need of further concealment. I am the Princess Melanie, unfortunately.”

“Why unfortunately? since you are heiress to one of the largest kingdoms in the world.”

“What is that to a heart that is longing for love? I am doomed to marry one who is hateful to me.”

“His name, Princess?”

“The Prince Nollibab, madame.”

“A rich suitor and one that dresses well.”

“I have nothing to urge against his dress; but when that is all there is to love——”

“Some girls love nothing else,” replied the Fairy, “but you seem to look for something more. Know you some other Prince whom you find more charming? If so, confess the truth, and I will do my best to help you.”

“There is but one,” sighed the Princess, casting her eyes down, “I love, or at least I fancy I do, and he is banished from the Court.”

“What is his name?”

“Prince Babillon.”

“Where is he now that I may know what course to pursue?”

“Alas, I cannot tell you where he is. When he left the Palace he travelled towards the West, for I watched him until he was out of sight. Since that time I have never heard of him. He was very sorry to go. It was not exactly his fault, and I was very sorry he went, but I forgot to ask him whither he was going.”

“That is enough, Princess, I will soon find him, and you and he, if he is really all you think he is, shall soon have the pleasure of meeting.” With these words the Fairy drew from her pocket a magic crystal. “Gaze in this, Princess,” said she, handing her the crystal, “and tell me what you see in it, and I will look on the magic mirror, and then I shall know whether what you see is true or imaginary.”

The Princess took the crystal eagerly, and after gazing in it for some time told the Fairy she could see nothing, but that from gazing her eyes began to water.

“Dry your eyes, then, Princess, and try once more.”

The Princess obeyed, and after drying her aching eyes gazed again.

“I do see something at last,” she exclaimed, “but what it is I cannot exactly make out. Can it be, after all, only a speck of dust, or can an eyelash have fallen into my eye?”

“Gaze on,” said the Fairy rather sternly. “To leave off now will be fatal. You will see the Prince in a few moments.”

The Princess was so cheered by the last words that she kept her eyes wide open, and at length said—

“I see a man in shepherd’s clothing, with a crook in his hand. He has just caught a sheep by the leg, and is dragging it to the fold. But he cannot possibly have anything to do with Babillon, who never caught a sheep in his life.”

“We do not know all that lovers can do,” remarked the Fairy; “but look, Princess, more carefully at his face. Are the features those of the Prince?”

“There is a slight likeness,” answered the Princess, “but that horrid shepherd’s hat nearly conceals his features and his hair—his curly hair!”

At this moment the Princess gave a little scream of joy. “O, look a sheep has run away and the shepherd has taken off his hat and thrown it at the sheep. It is Babillon! I know him by his curly hair. But O! some dark man has come between

and I can see nothing now of Babillon, but only a little white rabbit running for its life into the wood.”

“Now,” said the Fairy, “you understand what comes from staring very hard at anything. I will discover where he went, and if you still can love him, I will set you on the road to find him.”

The Princess thanked the Fairy for her kind assistance, and at the same time clasped one of her own bracelets round her arm. The Fairy condescended to accept it, and both separated equally satisfied with each another. The Princess and her maid retraced their steps to the Palace, and managed to enter so quietly that their absence was never suspected.

A few days after, when the Princess was working as usual at her tapestry, more to avoid Prince Nollibab than from any motive of industry, her maid entered the room holding the most delicate little note imaginable. After presenting it to her mistress, she was rather curious to know what the contents were. A young peasant had met her while she was walking with her mistress's pet dog in the wood, and after giving her the note for her mistress, had disappeared as quickly as he had come.

“Who gave you this?” asked the Princess, as a blush kindled rosy flames in her cheeks.

“A young peasant, your Highness, in the wood. He was a rude fellow. He never said anything but ‘Give this to your mistress at once.’ I had a mind to throw it back in his face, but before I could say a word the wretched man had flown.”

“It is from the Fairy, Claretie. She says she knows whereabouts Prince Babillon is, but not exactly what he is doing. He is many leagues from here, but she has promised if you will come with me in disguise to carry us both through the air in her winged chariot and we shall be there immediately. O how delightful! We are to start with her to-morrow morning at the same time as that when we met her before. But what will mamma think if I do not come back soon? I must ask the Fairy to see to that.”



Next morning the Princess and her maid departed on their journey, leaving word that the Princess was going to gather wild flowers, and if she was not home by dinner-time the Queen was not to feel anxious.

They hurried along as fast as they could. Their



THE MOMENT *they were*
THEY WERE SEATED
THE WINGS EXPANDED AND
THE CHARIOT ROSE QUICKLY.



feet got a little damp from the dew, but excitement prevented them from noticing the state of their boots.

When they arrived at the dell the Fairy was awaiting them, and after saying a few kind and reassuring words, invited them to mount the winged chariot with her, and bid farewell to the earth for a short time. The moment they were seated the wings expanded and the chariot rose quickly. The earth soon disappeared as they entered a cloud, and nothing was visible through the cold white mist. Very frequently, however, when the clouds opened, they could catch glimpses of villages and towns extended far below them. Claretie would keep looking down and pointing out what she thought were spots she knew, and was not a little happy in being able to observe what other people were about, especially as the elevation gave her an opportunity she had long desired of peeping over other people's walls.

At last the chariot began descending, until it rested on the grass of a meadow very similar to that which the Princess had seen in the crystal. She and Claretie immediately stepped out. Before leaving the Princess the Fairy bade her, should she want her aid, to call out loudly, and she would quickly come to her assistance. The Princess

thanked her for her kindness, remarking that she could never be grateful enough for the benefits she had already received at her hands. The Fairy then remounted her chariot, and was soon out of sight.

It was now time for the Princess to see whether Babillon was really tending sheep, as he appeared to be in the crystal. She explained to Claretie what he was now doing ; but Claretie, after the amusing part of the journey was over, did not seem to be deeply interested, and only wondered that a Prince could soil his hands with such creatures as sheep. However, this remark did not affect the Princess, as all she wanted was to meet Babillon once again.

“Come along, Claretie,” she said, “I fancy there is a shepherd’s cottage yonder—a sweet little house all covered with jasmine.”

“But your Highness,” exclaimed Claretie in the utmost dismay, “would never deign to live in a cottage after having spent your youth in a higher circle of society! How terribly monotonous, with nothing to look at but green fields and woolly sheep!”

“Where there is love, a cottage is quite as agreeable as a palace, though perhaps not quite so roomy,” answered the Princess.

“But your Highness is a little selfish. You will have your Prince, and what am I to do when both

of you are so interested in each other that you will forget all about me ? ”

“ Perhaps, Claretie, there may be more shepherds than one, with little cottages hereabouts, and it may be, then, that you too will become interested in somebody. ” Claretie brightened up considerably at the thought, and began to fancy she might do worse in a palace. So, chattering gaily, they turned their steps toward the jasmine-covered cottage and peeped over the hedge. Instead of Babillon, the Princess only saw a sulky old woman, who asked roughly what business it was of theirs to pry into other people’s gardens.

“ Does any one of the name of Babillon live here ? ” asked the Princess timidly.

“ Never heard of such an outlandish name, ” growled the old dame snappishly.

“ Then who does live here ? ”

“ The Shepherd. ”

“ What is his name ? ”

“ I really cannot tell you, my girl, as he is called by all of us ‘ The Shepherd, ’ because he tends the sheep, and there is no need to call him anything else. He calls me ‘ Cook. ’ We don’t want names here. ”

“ Then everybody does something, or they could not have a name at all, ” said the Princess, a little surprised at this strange custom.

“Just so. The person that does nothing here shall be nameless. That’s our law, and a very good and proper one it is.”

“O, come away,” whispered Claretie, “this old woman is talking nonsense, and does not want to tell us her master’s name.”

“Do you think,” suggested the Princess, putting her hand into her pocket, “if I gave her a little present she would give me the information I require?”

“Perhaps she might and perhaps she might not. Grumpy people are difficult to handle. They’re not like us servants at the Palace, we know our duty.”

“At least I can try,” said the Princess, and finding a little silver coin in the corner of her pocket she sought to place it in the old woman’s hand, but the latter seemed so busy that she had no further time to attend to the Princess and her questions. So at last the Princess gave up the attempt, and started with Claretie to a distant field where some sheep seemed to be grazing, attended by a shepherd. On nearer inspection this man turned out to be a goatherd, who was trying to drive his flock to the hills. The goats were rather disposed to wander, and as the Princess and her maid came suddenly on them they scampered off

in every direction. The consequence was that the goatherd lost his temper.



“What on earth did you do that for?” he called out in an angry voice. “Who are you that come interfering with me and my work? Out of my sight, you good-for-nothing hussies. Have you no work to do?”

Both the Princess and her maid were terribly shocked at this rebuke, and their consciences stung them when they perceived how much trouble they had given this poor working man.

“We are deeply grieved,” murmured the Princess, “but indeed we did not mean to do any harm. We are strangers in this place, and do not as yet know our way.”

“I should think not, trespassing everywhere,” snarled the goatherd; “but as you have scattered my goats you cannot do less than help me collect them, especially as you seem to have nothing to do.”

The goatherd was really the Hermit whom the Queen and Babillon had consulted. He was no hermit at all, but a magician who could assume any shape he pleased, and change anybody else into any animal he chose. He had been very much annoyed by the Fairy bringing the Princess so near the Prince, and had determined, because the Prince had eaten his eggs and drunk his wine, to make himself as disagreeable as possible. So he ordered the Princess and her maid to run after the goats until they had overtaken them, and then to drive them back, saying that meanwhile he would wait. He glared at them with such an evil eye that, terrified lest he should kill them, they promised to do what they could to fetch his goats back again. Both

began running, only too pleased to have an excuse to get away. The more they ran the further fled the goats, and though it seemed to them they had run a long distance, yet when they stopped they found the magician close at their heels bidding them run much faster, and threatening that unless they caught the goats he would bind them hand and foot and leave them to starve. This threat was so horrible that, though very much fatigued by their exertions, they did not hesitate a moment, but again rushed after the animals. At last Claretie, who had not the spirit of her mistress, declared her strength was spent, and that she could not and would not go a step further to save her life. She stopped, and the Princess nobly gave up the chase as she could not bear the thought of letting the poor girl fall into the clutches of this heartless goatherd, especially as she had been the cause of her danger. When the goatherd appeared, they both frankly declared that the goats had proved too active for them, and that they had done their best. If the goatherd would not accept their excuse they could not help it—he would have to fetch his own goats if he wanted them. This answer threw the magician into such a violent passion that words failed to express his feelings. With an angry wave of his hand he explained

that if they did not catch the goats the result would be terrible for both. Mistress and maid felt very much inclined to cry at this savage behaviour, and the Princess was beginning to look for her handkerchief to wipe her eyes, when the goatherd roughly told her to take her hand out of her pocket, as no bribe would move him to alter his determination.

“O your Highness, why did you ever bring me to this horrid place!” sobbed the maid; “and as for you, Mr. Goatherd, do you not know that my mistress is a Princess, and not accustomed to go running after goats. If she would take my advice, she would let you and your goats go where they liked, and not trouble herself any more about them.”

The goatherd smiled grimly, and replied that people in that country had to do as they were told. Princesses, he added, were possessed of hands and feet like other folk, and it must be uncomfortable for them not to use them.

“O, don’t talk any more to him,” said the Princess, becoming very much alarmed. “We must try to obey, or I feel sure he will do something dreadful. There is no one anywhere about that I can see to help us. O Babillon! if you only knew in what a terrible fix I am, and all for love of you!”

So once again mistress and maid hurried after the goats, frightening them and making them rush helter-skelter into the wood. If they stopped a moment the Magician was close at hand, bidding them run faster, and scoffing at their hopeless efforts.

In their pursuit after the goats they did not notice how far they had gone into the wood, and never thought how difficult it might be to retrace their steps. The deeper they went the gloomier the wood became. The branches formed a dense barrier behind them. Retreat now was impossible. The very trees began to look horrible. Their gnarled roots were coiled round each other like huge serpents. Ghastly faces peered from the branches. Their arms waved about like human arms, and huge hands with knotty fingers seemed to be outstretched to grasp them.

“Good Fairy,” cried the Princess in an agony of terror, “help us! this is more than I can bear!” and looking behind she saw Claretie almost fainting from fright.

In a moment the forest opened into a sunny glade with a pathway leading to a stream sparkling as it rippled over the stones. Faint from their late exertions, Princess and maid flew to the water to quench their thirst. Immediately they felt completely refreshed, and wandered merrily onwards,

quite forgetful of the terrible experience they had just had with the goatherd in the wood. Everything was changed. Birds were singing, bees humming, mossy banks yielded beneath their feet, and the whole air breathed the fragrance of a thousand flowers.

“The good Fairy has not forgotten us,” said the Princess, rejoicing in the change.

“I almost thought she had,” replied Claretie. “I never was so frightened in my life, and as for fairies, I much prefer honest village folk.”

“Then you prefer goatherds?” laughed the Princess.

“O, don’t speak of him, your Highness. Nobody knows where he is. He may be just behind us!”

“It is very strange what has become of him,” continued the Princess looking all round. “Even those tiresome goats have vanished.”

“I am very glad they have, your Highness, for I don’t know when we should have caught them.”

“Stay, look! Claretie. What is that place in front of us? It is quite different to the cottage.”

“So much the better, your Highness. Don’t you remember that disagreeable person who called herself ‘Cook’? For my part, I would just as soon live in a palace as in a cottage. I am more accustomed to it.”

“I feel very hungry, Claretie. It seems a long, long time since I had anything to eat. Ah me ! come what may, I will see if there is any one here who will be charitable enough to give us food ; go and knock at the door, Claretie, and then we shall see who answers. We can hide until we know what kind of people they are.”

“Certainly, your Highness, we cannot be too cautious. After that goatherd I intend to be always on my guard.”

Claretie knocked, but did not wait for an answer. Both hid behind a laurel bush that was close by the door, and awaited with some anxiety the result of the knock.

At last as there was no answer both grew impatient. Their appetite getting the better of their caution, Claretie finally proposed that, as the door was half-open, there would be no harm in entering. If they met any one, they could explain why they had taken that liberty.

“A very sensible suggestion, Claretie,” said the Princess. “They are not likely to take us for robbers, and after all they can only tell us to go away.”

So they pushed the door wide open, and entered, but as soon as they had done so the door swung heavily back and closed behind them. They turned

to open it again, but great was their alarm when they found that their united efforts could not unbolt it.

“Good gracious! your Highness, what are we to do now? If only the chief butler had been here he would soon have unfastened it, but neither you nor I can do so.”

“Never mind,” said the Princess, her courage rising with her difficulties. “Remember the wood. When it closed behind us we found the sunny glade.”

The Princess led the way and entered the first room. It was magnificent in size and grandeur, ablaze with gold, and flashing with mirrors. In the middle stood a table on which was laid every delicacy that could charm the eye and please the taste.

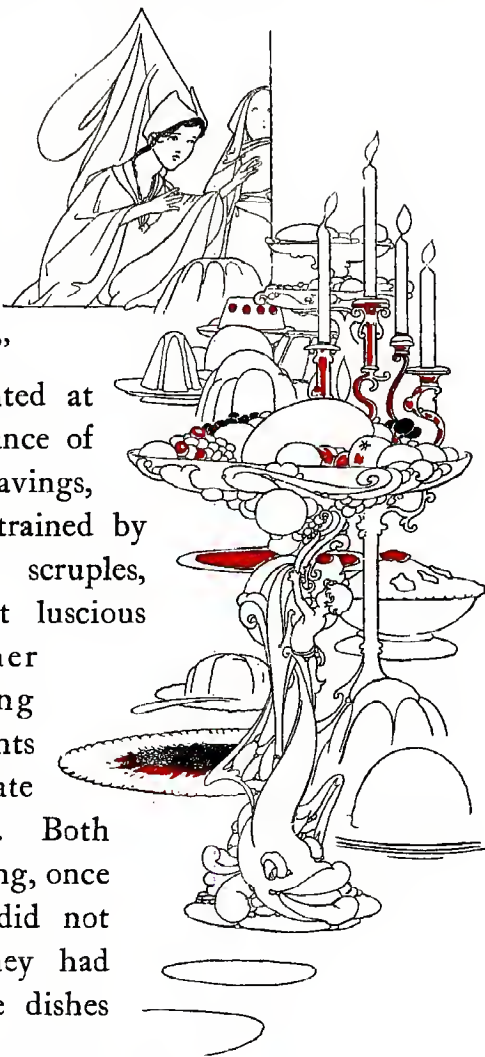
“Do you think, your Highness,” said Claretie, who began to take heart at the sight of such a banquet, “do you think we might just taste a little bit of something? It seems so hard to feel famished and see so much without enjoying a scrap. The door is still ajar, and we could retire into the hall if anybody came.”

The Princess was very hungry, and could scarcely resist so many dainties. She, however, hesitated to take what was not offered her, and peeped into the

hall to see if there were any servants belonging to the master of the palace. Finding no one, she exclaimed, "I must either eat or faint."

Claretie, delighted at last to have a chance of satisfying her cravings, and not being restrained by any unnecessary scruples, selected the most luscious delicacies for her mistress. Having supplied her wants she did not hesitate to satisfy her own. Both being almost starving, once they began they did not leave off until they had tasted most of the dishes on the table.

"What lovely sweetmeats," murmured the Princess, as she placed



IN THE MIDDLE
STOOD A TABLE
ON WHICH WAS LAID EVERY
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one after the other into her mouth. "I do not think I have ever eaten any that I liked so much."

"I am so glad your Highness waited no longer. I too feel better, but hush!"

Before Claretie had finished all she wanted to say, a noise as of some one walking up and down with a heavy tread struck her ear.

"O Claretie," said the Princess, looking rather blank, "I fancy I heard some one, and from the expression you let drop and the way your face has fallen, you must have heard the same noise."

The Princess stepped on tiptoe to the door, under the impression that the sound was coming that way, but on looking up and down she could see nobody.

"Only fancy!" she said rather relieved, "it must be our consciences, Claretie, that are speaking within us, for indeed I do feel a little uncomfortable."

"Your Highness did eat a little more than usual, but that discomfort will pass off."

Feeling strengthened by their good meal, they thought it better to return to the hall. If anybody met them they would explain everything, if nobody, all they had to do was to leave the palace, and go back to the spot where the Fairy had left them.

But on turning round to go, there was no door, or if there was it was quite indistinguishable from the wall. The only way of escape was through another door at the opposite end of the room.

“O, let us run through that door,” cried Claretie, aghast at this fresh mystery, “if we do not, it will shut, and then what shall we do? I wish I had never eaten anything nor entered the palace. Why will people leave their front doors open, and lunch on the table?”

Off they both ran to the open door, and hurried down a dark passage, at the end of which a ray of sunshine encouraged them to proceed. Their spirits revived at finding themselves in a garden full of lovely flowers and fruits. Fountains shot their silvery jets upwards to the sky. Birds of the gayest plumage fluttered to and fro between the trees, while others sang as they sat amid the branches. Beautiful statues and many benches of carved marble glimmered white among the foliage.

“This is perfectly enchanting,” exclaimed the Princess, feeling that now at last there were no doors to close mysteriously behind her. “Thank you, good Fairy, for not having forsaken us.”

They plucked and ate some of the ripest fruit. Then feeling drowsy after their late exertions, they chose one of the most retired of the arbours,

in which lay a couch that appeared to have been placed there on purpose for them to rest their weary limbs. Throwing themselves on it both soon sank into a profound slumber, forgetful for the time of all the cares and troubles of the morning.

As everything seemed so nicely arranged for their comfort, the Princess and Claretie had almost entertained the agreeable idea that they were the only persons for whom everything had been prepared, and that all was due to the good Fairy. This was a very pleasing thought, and had soothed them before they fell asleep. The goatherd had been quite forgotten, but he had not forgotten them. It was his palace into which they had entered. Little did they think that the Magician was close to their elbows all the while they were eating, and was watching every mouthful they swallowed.

After slumbering some time, the Princess woke, and wanting somebody to talk to, roused Claretie, and told her she was eager to continue her search after Prince Babillon. Leaving the arbour they examined the alleys and paths of the garden in order to find a way out. After wandering hopelessly to and fro they were becoming exhausted when the Princess heard a cough behind her, and



ARE YE NOT WORTHY OF
DEATH PLUCKED YE NOT MY
FRUIT UNASKED?



turning round perceived a decrepit old man leaning on his spade and watching them.

“Good-morning, gardener,” said the Princess, graciously nodding to him, though not feeling quite comfortable after the manner in which she and Claretie had been helping themselves to the fruit.

“Good-morning,” growled the old man. “It is a good morning for people who come into gardens and eat whatever they choose.”

“We were locked in,” said the Princess, “and were so very hungry.”

“Anybody might go into anybody’s garden and take the fruit and then say they were hungry. What an excuse !” muttered the gardener ; “but I never knew ladies do such a thing before.”

“We are very sorry for what we have done,” said the Princess, feeling in her pocket for her purse. “I will pay for what we have eaten, gladly.”

“It is not your money that I want, I want my fruit. The fruit I have grown and guarded for a year, and you two women have eaten it. Fruit does not grow in a day. You must come to my master, and he will let you know what it is to rob gardens.”

“O I never thought of doing such a thing,”

cried the Princess, almost weeping with vexation and shame.

“If you did not think of doing it, you did it all the same,” sneered the gardener, “so come along with me. Young women of your sort are not much given to thinking. If your minds are not busy your fingers usually are.”

The Princess, finding further argument useless, followed him, as he led her and Claretie through a number of winding paths back to the palace.

“Now at last,” thought the Princess, “the master of this palace will appear.” For the moment her curiosity got the better of her fears. They entered a large hall, in the centre of which stood a golden throne approached by steps of whitest marble. On the throne sat, or rather crouched, a man. His thick black hair almost concealed his features; but now and then a flash seemed to dart through those elfin locks as his eyes moved in different directions. A long velvet mantle hung from his shoulders, covering his body and limbs.

“Sire!” said the gardener, falling on one knee, as he drew near his master, who remained almost motionless, “these two young women have been found eating of the fruit of your garden. What punishment do you decree for them?”

“Death,” hissed the Magician, scarcely moving his head to see who the culprits were.

“Death!” exclaimed the Princess and Claretie together, “what for? For only taking a little fruit?”

“Death,” said the same voice, but with a sound like the boom of a passing bell.

“We won’t be put to death,” said the Princess, “we do not deserve it. It is not justice.”

“Justice is with the strong,” replied the Magician, with a laugh horrible and grating that re-echoed through the hall.

After some moments, the Magician raised his skinny clawlike hand, and thrusting aside the hair from his face fixed his snakelike eyes on them. They both began to be really afraid and almost swooned.

“Came ye not into my palace? Ate ye not of my banquet? Slept ye not in my bowers? Are ye not worthy of death? If the food was on the table, why tasted ye it? If my garden be full of fruit, was it yours that ye might eat of it? Of what land are ye? Are they all thieves whence ye come? Yet ye are fair to see, and my eyes are weary with reading. Ye refresh them. Therefore if you, Princess, will stay with me and be my wife, and that maid of yours be wife to my gardener yonder, both shall live.”

“How know you I am a Princess?” asked Melanie, proudly tossing her head.

“I know all,” said the Magician. “Will you



ONE HOUR SAID
THE MAGICIAN

accept my hand? As for your maid, she shall marry the gardener!”

“We won’t,” replied the two firmly with one accord.

“Then you die.”

“Will you give us time for preparation?” asked the Princess.

“One hour,” said the Magician, as he pointed to an open door. The Princess, concluding that he

intended them to retire led the way, closely followed by the trembling Claretie. After they had entered, the door closed behind them, and once more they were alone.

The chamber was square, and very small. The windows were barred, and so high up that there was no chance of escape. Like skylarks in a cage they kept turning up their heads to see if there was any loophole, but the more they looked the more hopeless they became.

“What are we to do now?” cried Claretie, who was always the most faint-hearted under difficulties. “O that I had never come with that Fairy. She might have told us what we were to expect. It is worse than going to a new situation. And here we are!”

They then mingled their tears, and wrung their hands. At last the Princess, rousing herself, reminded Claretie that this was not the proper preparation to make. She then bethought herself of the Fairy. So she called out her name aloud with such earnestness that the Fairy, to her great astonishment, rose by her side in a moment.

“O save us!” exclaimed both in a breath, “we are both doomed to die for eating fruit in the Magician’s garden or marry him and his gardener, and we prefer to die.”

“You have fallen into the hands of an evil and

powerful necromancer," began the Fairy, "and it is very lucky I was within earshot. But how is it, my children, that neither of you have noticed that there is a little gate in the wall there? Push it hard, and it will give way before you. You will then find yourselves again in the garden, and will see a little white rabbit gambolling in the pathway. Follow it. It will lead you out of the garden and out of the Magician's power. Beware lest you fall again into his clutches. If once more you should find yourself in difficulties, break this little phial that contains some oil of the Roses of Persia. Do not lose it, for if you do the Magician next time will weave a spell so strong round you that I shall be unable to save you. Farewell, my children." With these words she vanished from their sight as quickly as she had appeared.

The Princess did as she was told, and pushed the gate. It yielded readily, and both the prisoners lost no time in leaving their cell, to find themselves once more in the garden. Free once again they thought no longer of picking the fruit, but looked for the little white rabbit. Great was their delight when they perceived one squatting on its haunches, and dusting its ears with its front paws, occasionally dropping down as if it wanted to give a more vigorous scratch with a hind-leg.

“It must see us!” exclaimed the Princess, “I



hope it won't be frightened and run away.”

“I hope so to,” returned Claretie. “I have heard they run very fast, and it is difficult to catch them up when once they start.”

The rabbit continued to complete its toilette in the most unconcerned manner until they were close beside it. Then turning one of its pink eyes on the Princess with quite a benevolent glance, it hopped slowly away. They followed it, and as

“YOU HAVE FALLEN INTO
THE HANDS OF AN EYE-
...NEEDHANCER.”

soon as they had overtaken it, the rabbit hopped on a little further.

This slow hopping continued for some time, until Claretie, losing all patience, exclaimed—

“Why will the lazy little beast not move its legs a little faster? I am dying of fear lest that horrid gardener should come again. I know I should swoon if I saw him, and then it would be either death or marriage. O it is dreadful!”

“The poor little darling is trotting along quite fast enough,” replied the Princess. “If it went any faster I might have to marry that fearful enchanter.”

The rabbit turned its head round with such a grateful expression that its meaning was quite unmistakable. It nodded its head, and began to run a little quicker down a narrow path that seemed to have no end. Both the Princess and Claretie were beginning to feel the effects of such unusual exertion. Their faces were becoming redder and redder. Their breathing was very quick. When nearly exhausted they saw a small hole in the hedge through which the rabbit dived and disappeared.

“Nasty selfish little wretch,” said Claretie, who generally spoke on the spur of the moment. “How are we to get through holes like that? Making

us run until we can scarcely contain ourselves, and all for——”

“Don’t be so cross, Claretie,” returned the Princess, interrupting her. “There may be some opening to slip through. I am beginning to get quite fond of that little white rabbit. It seems almost human. Perhaps it may be some one this Magician has transformed. By the way, I recollect seeing a little white rabbit in the magic crystal the Fairy gave us. Surely this little white rabbit and Prince Babillon cannot be one and the same.”

“Prince or rabbit,” retorted Claretie a little viciously, “I wish he or it would remember that we are not all rabbits, and are unaccustomed to live in holes.”

On their arrival at the hedge, however, what seemed a hole was really an opening quite wide enough to let them pass. This they did without a second thought. A sound of rapid footsteps, as if the Magician or gardener was not far behind gave them no time to linger. Happy were they both to find themselves on the other side, and noticed with the utmost satisfaction that the hedge closed behind them so that no one could follow.

A howl of malice and disappointment reached their ears, but feeling safe they only laughed aloud in return. Leaving the garden as far as they

could behind them they walked leisurely along accompanied, to the great joy of the Princess, by the little white rabbit.



The Princess had now been absent some time from the palace, a circumstance which began to cause the Queen great uneasiness. She could not help reproaching herself for urging the Princess to accept the hand of Prince Nollibab, and for sending away Prince Babillon. The King too, in an unintentionally thoughtless manner, added to the Queen's unhappiness by continually asking where his daughter was when meal-times came round. Many were the excuses the Queen had to invent. Saying, "She was a very headstrong girl," that she had "gone out with Claretie and would stop out all day without telling her exactly where she was going." The King accepted these answers, as he seldom troubled his brains about domestic affairs. If his daughter had stopped away a week or two he would not have doubted what the Queen said, as he had the utmost confidence in her motherly care.

Prince Nollibab was in a condition of the utmost prostration of mind and body. He had nobody

now for whom he need trouble to put on his nice clothes. He therefore confided to his valet that he thought he had outstayed his welcome ; and as his valet thought so too, Nollibab told him to pack up at once, as he intended leaving that very afternoon. The Prince meanwhile wished the King and Queen farewell, dressed in his second-best suit, which he kept for travelling. After a few words from his hosts of formal regret as to the necessity of such a hurried departure, he mounted his charger and rode away at the head of his brilliant cavalcade.

No one deplored his going except the Queen, who, though she had never been very fond of the Prince, thought, at any rate, he might make a good son-in-law. The long absence of her daughter was worrying her exceedingly, so much so that she at last resolved to consult the same Fairy that the Princess had consulted. The King always retired to his library at the end of the day, so the Queen chose that opportunity of accomplishing her design, in order that she might give her royal husband as little anxiety as possible.

When the evening mists began to rise from the lake in which Babillon had so often fished, the Queen, after throwing a cloak over her shoulders and concealing her features behind a thick veil,

stole out of a postern-gate accompanied by the trusty Elizabeth. This worthy servant was always employed in any business requiring tact or delicacy.

No time was wasted on the journey, as Elizabeth had carefully reconnoitred the path on the previous day. On reaching the house of the Fairy, which lay almost hidden in the dell, she knocked at the door, but without effect.

“I wonder if I might knock again?” said the Queen to her trusty maid. “Some fairies are so very touchy about little things.”

“Better wait a moment, your Highness,” answered Elizabeth, who thought her mistress rather too impatient. “The servants’ hall may be a long way from the front-door.”

“They may not have heard,” said the Queen quickly. “If they keep me much longer, I shall knock again.”

“Servants,” remarked Elizabeth, “do not always get up the moment they hear a noise, for fear they should be mistaken and answer the door for nothing.”

“In that case,” returned the Queen, “I shall certainly knock again, to prevent any misapprehension;” and she did so, much more loudly than before.

This last knocking was successful, for the door

opened slowly of its own accord. Luckily the Queen thought there was some one behind it, or in her impatience she might possibly have pushed it open a little more quickly.

“This is extraordinary,” said the Queen, rather nervously, when she saw that the door had opened itself. “I wish doors would be answered in the usual and proper manner. Of course, the Fairy does not recognize my dignity, so I must be patient. I never thought I was so well disguised.”

“Come in!” called a voice rather unceremoniously. But where that voice came from neither Queen nor servant could discover.

The Queen obeyed the summons, walked into the hall, and tried several of the doors, but found them all locked.

“Good Fairy,” cried the Queen, falling on her knees, “hear the prayer of a very anxious mother, who has lost her only child, a girl! Pity her breaking heart, and spare no time in answering her petition! Tell me where she is! Is she alive or is she dead? I fear the worst!”

The trusty Elizabeth listened with respect to the earnest entreaty of her mistress, while she kept a careful watch on all the doors, to see whether any one appeared. They all remained closed.

“You must have offended the Fairy by that

double knock," whispered Elizabeth, "you had better, before asking her again to do anything for you, apologize for the noise, and say how sorry you are if you have in any way disturbed her or her domestics."

The Queen listened eagerly to this suggestion, and, having always found Elizabeth's advice reliable, followed it.

"Great Fairy, let it not offend you," exclaimed the Queen in humble accents, "that I, who am but human, should have knocked twice at your door. I am but a mother, and have a mother's feelings. Be merciful and tell me of my daughter." Even gossip will come to a Fairy's ears. This benevolent Fairy had heard that the Queen on a previous important occasion had consulted the Magician in the form of the Hermit, and not her. This preference had vexed her, as she considered the good ought to be consulted before the wicked. The Fairy was therefore inclined to humble the proud spirit of the Queen by turning a deaf ear, at least for some time.

In vain the Queen implored her, but at last the inherent goodness of the Fairy's heart prevailed, and she appeared before her Majesty and asked her the motive of her visit. Needless to say the Queen was not at all surprised at the Fairy at once

recognizing her, she would have been much more so if she had not.

“Great Fairy,” said the Queen as meekly as she could, for her impatience was with difficulty kept under control, “my daughter has gone away, and I have come with my trusty Elizabeth to ask you to tell me whither she has gone. Is she alive or dead? Is she alone? She took her maid Claretie with her, but since she left the palace no one seems to know anything about them.”

“It is exactly as her Majesty says,” chimed in the trusty Elizabeth. “The time the Princess left the palace was about the time I was dressing her Majesty’s hair, and she was just asking me some questions about Prince Nollibab, when I heard footsteps. Whose footsteps they were I cannot truthfully say, but, as I was saying, I was just telling her Majesty about——”

“Hush, my good Elizabeth,” said the Queen, laying her hand on Elizabeth’s arm. “The Fairy looks as if she was going to say something. She is smiling, and I hope her words will be comfortable.” Though the trusty Elizabeth disliked being checked in the flow of her information, she obeyed the Queen, and both were all ears as to what the Fairy would say next.

“Your daughter is quite safe,” said the Fairy,

“but she has wandered far from here. She is under my protection, so no harm can happen to her. The greatest danger to which she is exposed is from that Hermit, the great, subtle Magician you consulted on a former occasion when you were afraid she was becoming too deeply enamoured of that Prince Babillon. As her heart is entirely devoted to that worthy young Prince, I yielded to her solicitation to seek him. She is now on her search. Why did you drive that poor innocent young Prince from your doors?”

“I never drove any Prince from my doors,” returned the Queen rather tartly, intending the Fairy to understand that she was not expected to meddle in what did not concern her. “He left of his own accord when ordered to do so. I never want to see his face again—how dare you,” exclaimed the Queen, her temper getting the better of her previous caution—“how dare you, I ask, powerful Fairy though you be, help a daughter to rebel against her mother’s wishes? Her mother surely knows what is for her good if any one does.”

“Yes, indeed, your Majesty,” began the trusty Elizabeth, who was never in want of words, “when other people set other people’s children against other people, it is time that other people should know the reason.”

“Be quiet, will you?” exclaimed the Queen, turning hotly upon the trusty Elizabeth, who had not half finished her sentence. “I will be revenged, great Fairy! Your enemy that mighty Magician whom you hate shall be my friend! He shall help me to resist your petty spite! I laugh at your vaunted power!”

The trusty Elizabeth, perceiving that more words from her were unnecessary, felt too that a prolonged stay would be but a waste of time. So, carefully adjusting the cloak that had slipped from her Majesty’s shoulders during her excitement, she waited to see what her mistress would do. The Queen rose to her full height, and scarcely deigning to look at the Fairy who had spoken so frankly to her, turned back and with hasty strides hurried to the door.

Had the Fairy wished it, she could have held both of them spellbound, but tired of such ill-tempered, talkative guests, she let them go, knowing that no Magician could prevail against her power.

Her Majesty’s temper was so ruffled by what she termed the insolent behaviour of the Fairy, that she hastened with her trusty servant to the place where she had met the Hermit. On her way through the wood she fancied a hand touched her, and she stopped to ask Elizabeth whether she had done so.

“No,” replied Elizabeth, “it must be your Majesty’s fancy. You have been so flurried to-day, that I cannot say I am in the least surprised at your Majesty fancying anything. It must have been a branch of a tree, for what else could it have been? I remember poor father once telling me——”

“O Elizabeth,” interrupted the Queen, “my brain is too full just now to listen to any stories. I feel certain some one touched me. My flesh is all creeping.”

“O don’t say so, your Majesty,” replied Elizabeth, her teeth beginning to chatter. “It was just what happened when little Annie died; it was in the middle of winter, and the snow was as white as a shroud, and I thought then——”

“I cannot move a step,” exclaimed the Queen, as every drop of blood seemed to leave her cheeks, “I feel so terribly faint. There is a sensation as if some one was grasping me.”

“Let us turn back. Let us turn back,” urged Elizabeth. “I begin to feel the same thing. I shall never be able to crawl home, but never will I desert your Majesty.” Elizabeth here gave way to a flood of tears, but continued expressing herself in broken sentences. The Queen was too alarmed to heed or stop her.

“We will turn back,” said the Queen at last, with a great effort. “I will visit the Magician to-morrow. I am afraid that interview with the Fairy has upset my nerves. I cannot go further to-day.”

Thereupon the Queen retraced her steps, closely followed by her worthy attendant. Neither spoke a word until they found themselves safe inside the palace gates, which were under the protection of the Royal Bodyguard.

“Now, at any rate, that malicious Fairy cannot harm me!” exclaimed the Queen triumphantly. But a sudden spasm in the knee-joint, just as she was putting her foot on the first step, prevented her saying any more.

“Gracious goodness, your Majesty, what made you turn so deadly pale when mounting the staircase? I thought you were going to swoon,” remarked Elizabeth to her mistress that night when combing and brushing her hair.

“O nothing,” said the Queen, “a sudden pain, but it has passed off. I am quite overstrung. Any trifle would upset me.”

Knowing that her daughter was under the protection of this powerful Fairy, the Queen’s anxiety about her safety was removed. But she fully intended, if she could, to thwart the Fairy by

preventing the marriage of the Princess to Babillon. Her brain was full of plans to accomplish this design when she retired to bed. The King complained next morning of her restlessness, declaring he had not had a wink of sleep all night, and that he would try and make up for it in the library, where he begged the Queen would leave him alone for the rest of the day.

This being just what the Queen wanted, she did not argue, but allowed him to do exactly as he pleased.

“I wish Babillon was back again,” remarked the King, as he closed the library door.

“What next?” thought the Queen, as she retired to her boudoir.



For some time the Princess and Claretie had been following the little white rabbit through a grove of pine-trees until they reached a wide lawn with a fountain playing in the midst of it. Here the rabbit stopped, to let them catch it up.

“What a sweet little creature!” cried the Princess, stooping down to caress it.

“For my part I never could abide pets,” retorted



TAKING IT UP BY THE
EARS IN THE
TENDEREST MANNER.

Claretie, “they are always more trouble than they are worth. What with feeding them, walking

with them, and putting them to bed, they are a deal more trouble than a baby. And all this for an animal that only wags its tail or cocks its ear when you speak to it."

"O Claretie, how can you utter such unkind words! Had it not been for this little dear, we might have both been dead, or, if we had changed our minds at the last moment, married! Poor Babillon, if he only knew what trouble I have got into, all for his sake."

"I must allow that, for once in a way, your Highness, this dumb animal has made itself useful, but I am not going to kiss it or coddle it for all that. Kiss a rabbit, no, indeed, not even a white one!"

The Princess paid no heed to Claretie's supercilious remarks, but, as the rabbit did not seem to object, she continued stroking it. Indeed, the rabbit seemed so tame that the Princess seated herself on a rock, and, taking it up by the ears in the tenderest manner imaginable, placed it on her lap, and as she fondled it sang the lullaby Babillon used to play to her. The rabbit seemed overcome by her kindness and endeavoured, by the way in which it rubbed itself against her hand, to show its sense of gratitude. At last the Princess took it up in both her hands and kissed it on the forehead.

To her utter astonishment she thought she heard her name pronounced, but in such a weak, thin voice that she felt she must be mistaken. Looking round, she saw Claretie only, who was sitting close beside her.

“Did you hear anything?” asked the Princess, “because I thought I heard my name called.”

“No, your Highness,” returned Claretie; “I do wish these enchantments and things would leave off. I am sick and tired of them, and only want to get home again.”

“Poor Claretie,” said the Princess, with a glance of compassion, “what you have suffered on my behalf! But hush! there is my name again, and if the voice was not so thin I could declare it was Babillon who was calling me.”

“How could that possibly be, your Highness? Prince Babillon is, as you say, a shepherd and goodness knows where. But if he is in the neighbourhood what a blessing it would be, as he might lead us out of this mysterious place.”

A third time the sound struck the Princess's ear. She was convinced that it was her name, and that the voice was exactly like Babillon's.

“Babillon,” she cried, “Prince Babillon, if you are a spirit of the air, make yourself visible, or if you haunt these woods stand forth, for it is to

seek you that I have undertaken this perilous journey."

"I am here quite close to you," said a voice, "I am Babillon, but alas! the enchanter in whose garden you were has transformed me into the little white rabbit on your knee."

"Are you really Babillon?" asked the Princess, holding the rabbit up so as to have a good look at it.

The rabbit nodded, shaking its ears sadly, while tears began to trickle from its pink eyes.

"I am not hurting you, am I?" exclaimed the Princess. "If you are really Prince Babillon, I will keep you until the good Fairy changes you back into your original shape."

"Surely your Highness has not forgotten the phial of rose oil the Fairy gave you," said Claretie; "would not this be a good time to use it? It might restore the Prince to his natural shape, and perhaps convey us all back to the palace."

"Well advised, Claretie," replied the Princess, beginning to search for the little phial, but though she felt in every pocket, got up, shook her dress, and made Claretie do the same, the phial was not forthcoming.

"O Claretie! I must, no I cannot have dropped it!" said the Princess almost in tears. "Here we

are in a wood, where there is nothing to eat and poor Babillon a white rabbit. What are we to do ?”

After reflection they both began to cry. Even the rabbit seemed to sympathize in their grief, for it sat on the ground with drooping ears and an expression of the utmost concern in its intelligent eyes.

All three then retraced their steps to the hedge to see if by chance the phial had dropped in their flight. Though no stone was left unturned, no nook or corner unsearched, the phial was nowhere to be seen. At last as they drew near to the hedge the rabbit scampered off, and managing to creep through it, disappeared into the Magician's garden.

“O that sweet little Babillon,” said the Princess, smiling amid her tears—“I must call it Babillon—has rushed off to see whether he can find it in the garden. I do hope, Claretie, the Magician will not harm him. He has suffered so much already. I should never have known him, had he not called me by my name.”

“My belief is,” said Claretie, trying to peep through the hedge, “that that horrid Magician and his gardener have made fools of us, and allowed that rabbit to talk, and call himself

Babillon, so that you might take it on your lap, and while you were fondling it, it has robbed you of your phial, and will take it to the Magician."

"How absurd, Claretie; how could that innocent little creature possibly steal anything? Besides, Babillon never did steal anything that I know of. It seemed so pleased to sit on my lap."

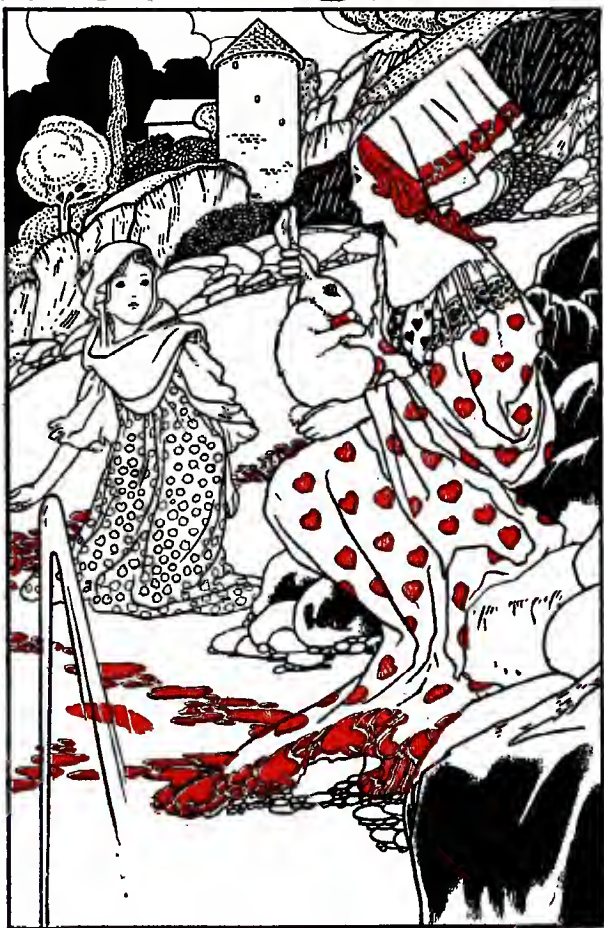
"The little hypocrite, your Highness," retorted Claretie, with a very wise look on her face. "Thieves and robbers are often the sweetest of men. O that rascally rabbit! if it was only here and I had a saucepan, some water and a fire, I warrant we should not be hungry much longer!"

"But suppose it was really Prince Babillon, Claretie, what should we do if we had eaten him? I should have no more happiness in this life."

The Princess shuddered and gazed anxiously at the hedge, hoping to see her little favourite return, but hours passed and no white rabbit.

"Didn't I say this was all a trick to get your phial? I only hope what I say may prove untrue."

"So do I, Claretie, for I am getting very weary watching. If there was some peaceful spot close at hand we might lie down, and for a little time try to forget our troubles. Let us, however, choose some place where the little white rabbit, if it ever returns, will be sure to see us."



THE RABBIT SEEMED SO
TAME THAT THE PRINCESS SEAT
ED HERSELF ON A ROCK AND
PLACED IT IN HER LAP.



“I never can sleep, your Highness, when I am hungry, but here is a heap of leaves which will make a comfortable bed. Let us try. I am sure I should be glad to forget this horrible place even for a short time.”

So the Princess and her maid lay down side by side, and whether the kind Fairy had breathed on their eyelids or not, it is quite certain they closed, and for a while everything, even the white rabbit, was forgotten.



The white rabbit, who really was the unfortunate Prince Babillon, was by no means asleep. After passing through the hedge it sought everywhere for the phial, and determined that as its own happiness and that of the Princess depended on its finding it, to spare neither fur nor foot in its recovery. It scoured all the paths and hunted up and down the bushes but in vain. “The Magician must have found it,” thought the rabbit, “and how shall I get it back?”

This was only too true, as the gardener on his return from chasing the fugitives had found the phial in the pathway. The rabbit was much afraid of this gardener, as whenever the latter

caught sight of it he did his best to strike it with his spade, or else cast a stone at it for eating his cabbages. As there was nothing else to eat, poor Babillon had to eat them or die of starvation.

Noticing the track of the gardener's feet, the rabbit carefully avoided going by that path, and preferred taking a more circuitous route to the palace. Entering by a side-door it made its way to the chamber where the Magician usually sat, poring over books and concocting his potions. As it hobbled along the floor, the Magician could not help jeering at the wretched Prince. "Well, Babillon," he bawled, "it was an expensive meal you ate once without troubling to ask my permission. You thought I did not notice your thieving ways, but take care lest somebody does not make a meal off you some fine day."

The transformed Prince said nothing but thought the more. He hopped round and round as noiselessly as possible, peeping into every nook and corner.

"What are you hopping about for, Prince?" asked the Magician gruffly. "Can't you sit still or leave the room?"

The rabbit on raising its eyes at this moment saw the Magician holding up a phial to the light of a silver lamp while he carefully inspected its contents.

“That must be the very phial I want,” thought the rabbit, but the idea of how it was to get it out of the Magician’s clutches nearly drove the poor animal out of its wits.

The Magician gazed at the phial long and anxiously. It had been brought him by the gardener, and was now engaging his deepest attention.

“It must be some concoction of that detestable Fairy’s witchcraft,” said he aloud; “how lucky it is that it has fallen into my hands.”

He then laid it down on his table and buried his head in his books. At last, as if outworn by his continual study, he sank back in his chair, and before many minutes had elapsed fell fast asleep.

Now or never, thought the Prince, but how? The rabbit could not leap from the floor to the top of the table, it was too high up. The only means of getting there was by first jumping on the Magician’s knee and then climbing on his shoulder to jump from there to the table.

The Magician’s sleep seemed very sound. The rabbit raised itself on its haunches and listened intently; the Magician lay motionless; his breathing was soft and regular. Full of hope the rabbit leaped upon his knee and waited a moment to judge of the effect. The Magician did not stir.

The next leap was to the Magician's shoulder, and as his head was so near the rabbit might touch it. However, it thought of the Princess, and how much it loved her, so much that death would be better than life if separated from her. It leaped again. The result was what it had expected. The Magician awoke and thrust the rabbit roughly aside. But having got so far, the rabbit was not to be diverted from its purpose. So instead of rolling to the ground it jumped to the table and managed very cleverly in its apparent attempt to escape to knock the phial down on a cloth which was lying on the floor, so that it fell noiselessly and did not break.

“Begone, you little beast !” shouted the Magician, as he muttered some incantation which was harmless as far as the Prince was concerned. Seizing the phial as best it could between its teeth, it tried to obey the Magician's orders without delay by disappearing from the room into the garden. There was, however, another enemy to be faced in the shape of the gardener. That watchful servant no sooner caught sight of the rabbit than he perceived some strange thing glittering in its mouth. His suspicious mind began to fancy the rabbit had been stealing something belonging to his master.

“Drop that ! will you ?” shouted he, flinging

his spade at the retreating animal, "or I will make you repent it!"

The rabbit paid no heed, but hurried on the faster through the cabbages, taking cover whenever it could lest the next missile might be more



accurately aimed. On it sped as if life depended on the rate it travelled. The gardener was not so baulked by his first miss as to leave off the chase, but artfully waited for his little enemy at odd corners wherever there chanced to be an outlet.

But the rabbit still retained a little of the brains of a prince. As there was no hope of escape so long as this troublesome gardener kept watch, it retired into the hollow trunk of a tree which had often served as a place of refuge. Stowing the phial away in a hole scraped in the ground, it calmly waited until nightfall, rubbing itself meanwhile in the earth, so that its white coat might not be visible in the moonlight. The gardener waited a long time, but finding that the rabbit had dodged him returned to his master and told him all he had seen. In a moment the truth flashed across the Magician's brain. The phial had gone. The rabbit had taken it!

The rabbit's ears quickly caught the sound of the retreating steps of the gardener. As they died away, it stole from its lurking-place and made for the hedge. On becoming aware of his loss the Magician had rushed from the palace and was close on its track, and had the satisfaction of seeing the white tail of the rabbit disappear through the hedge, beyond which his spells were powerless.

The Princess and her maid, tired of waiting, had wandered a short distance from their former place, which rather disconcerted the rabbit, after all the risks it had run. Raising itself on its haunches it

took a careful survey all round, turning its ears in every direction to catch any sound of their voices ; but as they were fast asleep, they had left off talking for a little while.

“What am I to do now ?” thought the rabbit, scratching its ear with its hind-leg. “This precious phial nearly cost me my life, and, rabbit though I am, life has its charms for me. Where can the Princess be waiting ? I want to show her how much I love her.” The rabbit crouched down by the phial, and began cropping some of the grass to while away the time, as it expected the Princess would be sure some time or other to return. At length, tired and disappointed, it curled itself round the phial and fell asleep.

It was morning before the Princess and her maid at last awoke, much refreshed, for the good Fairy had fanned their eyelids as they slept, so that they had dreamed the most delightful dreams.

“What a delicious sleep I have enjoyed !” exclaimed the Princess, as she flung back her golden ringlets from her face and rubbed her eyes.

“After sleep like that I am sure we shall have good news,” said Claretie, who was tidying herself as best she could.

“I wonder how we look ?” said the Princess.

“Is my hair decently arranged? I have never dressed without a glass before.”

“Indeed, your Highness looks remarkably well.”

“I hope I shall when the Prince returns, Claretie.”

“Do you really think that rabbit is the Prince?” asked Claretie; and in spite of her mistress she could not help laughing. “Only to think of Prince Babillon as a rabbit! When it pats with those little front paws it does remind me so of his playing.”

“Do not be so unkind, Claretie. I am sure he has fallen a victim to that horrid Magician. He was always so gentle in his ways. His white coat reminds me of the purity of his love.”

“I never looked on rabbits in that light before,” answered Claretie. “I shall regard a miller now with more respect.”

“Some day you will fall in love,” said the Princess, “and if you love truly you will think him that you love more beautiful than any one else.”

Talking thus, they returned to the place where they had left the little white rabbit. When the Princess saw it quietly nibbling the grass, her joy knew no bounds.

She sat down by its side, and it immediately

leapt into her lap with the phial in its mouth and dropped it there. To find her rabbit and her phial was almost more than the Princess could bear, and lest the Fairy's gift might be lost again, she broke it at once.

A thick mist rose, and a voice came out of it, asking the Princess what her will was.

"That the Prince be restored to his original shape, and that all three of us be transported to the palace."

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth than she found herself with the Prince by her side and Claretie following them on their way up the principal avenue that led to her father's palace. Their first thought was to thank the good Fairy who had brought them all home so quickly and comfortably.

The Queen, who had been very anxious about her daughter, although the Fairy had told her she was under her protection, no sooner heard voices at the palace gate than she said to the King, "I am sure that must be my daughter."

"Why?" asked the King, scarcely lifting his eyes from the volume that lay open on his knees.

"Why? Don't ask for reasons," replied the Queen.

“No doubt you are right,” said the King. “By the way, it is a long time since last I saw my daughter. You have never told me where she has been all this time.”

“Don’t bother just now,” said the Queen. “I will tell you presently.”

At that moment the door opened, and the Princess rushed into her mother’s arms. When Babillon approached, the Queen looked rather coldly at him. After all the events had been related, and great stress laid on the finding of the phial, the King rose up, held out his hand, and publicly congratulated the Prince, declaring at the same time that no other Prince was so worthy of his daughter’s hand.

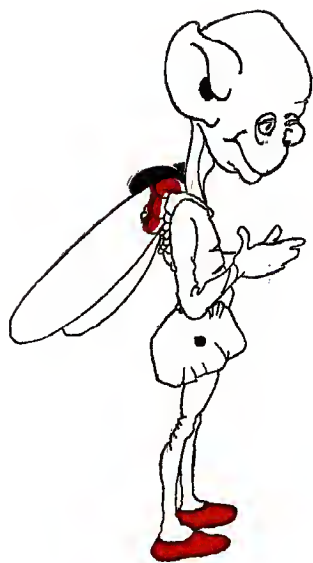
The Queen gave her consent somewhat reluctantly, and the Prince and Princess were shortly afterwards married.

Claretie never forgot the lesson she had learned, but always looked out for a man with a white coat. At last the chief butler, who used to wear a cream-coloured one, struck her as worthy of her choice, his coat being as nearly white as possible. She therefore plainly showed him that he had won her heart, and they were married also.

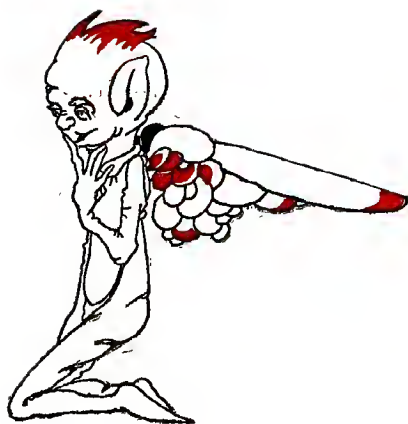
Prince Nollibab was asked to the wedding of

the Princess, but having accidentally put the invitation into one of the pockets of his numerous suits had forgotten all about it. As nobody thought anything more about him, he was not missed.











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