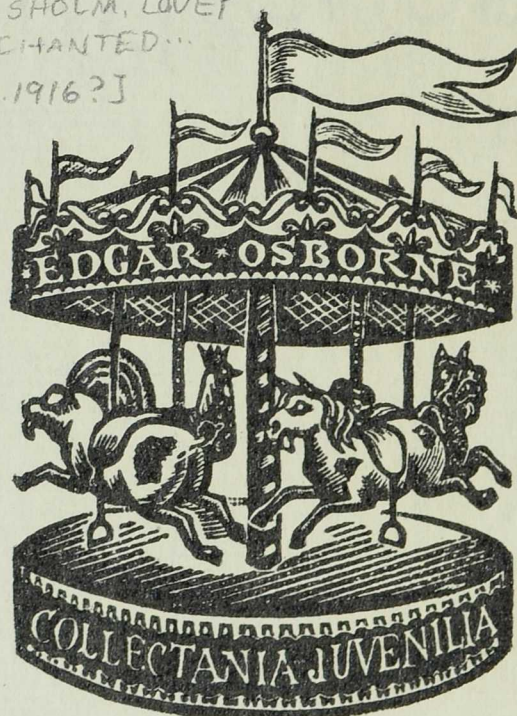




THE ENCHANTED LAND

BY · LOUEY · CHISHOLM
ILLUSTRATED · IN · COL-
OUR · BY · KATHARINE ·
CAMERON

(FT)
CHISHOLM, LOVEY
ENCHANTED...
[ca. 1916?]



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THE ENCHANTED LAND



AS SHE TOUCHED HEAD
THE THREE BROTHERS
WERE AS THE MAID
K.C.

THE ENCHANTED LAND

TALES TOLD AGAIN

BY

LOUEY CHISHOLM

WITH PICTURES BY

KATHARINE CAMERON



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TO
MARIE WINIFRED JACK
AND
ROBERT CAMERON WATT

ABOUT THIS BOOK

‘DON’T pout, Peggy.’

‘Well, Mumbo, Sunflower has been telling fib stories all morning, and I——’

‘Fib stories?’

‘Yes, real fib stories, only she calls them fairy tales. And now I won’t listen no more, she’s telling them to poor Violet what can’t run away. I’m going to the garden to look for snails.’

The encounter was on the staircase. Peggy slid down the banister; the mother went up to the nursery.

There sat Sunflower on a stool, her hands clasping her knees. Facing her, in a doll’s chair, reclined the waxen Violet.

‘. . . and as I got to the end of the rainbow, Violet honey, I found I was at the beginning of Fairyland, and just—oh, mother, it isn’t time to go out?’

‘You may wait till the story is finished.’

‘Oh, how nice! Violet, say, “Thank you, granny.” Yes, my honey, I found I was in Fairyland. I had often been there before, you know, but

I hadn't gone the rainbow way, and it led to a new part, where there was no Cinderella, or Snowdrop, or Red Riding Hood, or Goldilocks. But lots that I just perished to see was there—Gerda, and Ursula, and the Princess in "The Swineherd," and the Princess in "The Frog Prince," and Finola, and lots and lots more. But, Violet sweetheart, they none of them looked quite happy. Gerda was more little than the rest, so I just whispered, "Why do you look like you wanted something?" And Gerda said, "We do want something, and we are waiting here for it, and more others are waiting at the other way into Fairyland, for we don't know the way she will come." And I said to little Gerda, "But who are you waiting for?" And Gerda said, "The Fairy Painter that lives in your land. She has come before, and she will come again, and then perhaps she will paint me." And the other fairies called out, "And me," "and me," "and me." And little Kay said, "The Fairy Painter has made pictures of Snow-White and Rose-Red and Little Two-Eyes, and surely she will come again and make a picture of little Gerda, and put her into a book too. Then they all joined hands and sung this song—

" Little Sunflower, go away,
And come again another day.
Take the Fairy Painter's hand,
And bring her to The Enchanted Land,
To paint us with our fairy-est look,
And put us in a picture-book "

(I made up that poetry in bed, Violet honey.) And when they had done singing, I told them I'd ask mother about it, so come along'; and Sunflower, with Violet in her arms, crossed the room.

'Did you hear, mother?'

'Yes, Sunflower.'

'And will you ask Miss Cameron to paint the pictures, and of course you will tell the stories?'

'Well, let me hear what they must be.'

The little girl ran over her latest favourites.

'“The Four White Swans” and “Deirdre” are too sad, Sunflower.'

'Oh, but they are so beautiful and nice-sounding, and there's lots of the other kind to make up.'

'“The Snow-Queen” is very long.'

'Yes, but you could ask Miss Cameron to make three pictures of Gerda, and that would please little Kay so much, and you'll be sure to tell her, won't you, that the fairies are waiting and waiting for her and——'

The nursery door flew open.

'Oh, Mumbo, Sunflower isn't telling fib stories all this time? Then I'm going to look for more snails.'

LOUEY CHISHOLM.

EDINBURGH.

The Heart of the Princess Joan and *The Pedlar's Pack* are retold with the kind permission of Miss Mary de Morgan and Messrs. Macmillan.

It is also with Miss de Morgan's permission that *The Toy Princess* and *The Magic Candles* are included in this collection.

For leave to retell *The Christmas Rose* and *The Legend of the Daisy* I am indebted to Herr T. G. Cotta'sche, publisher of Herr Rudolph Baumbach's 'Erzählung und Märchen' and 'Neue Märchen.'

The Four White Swans and *The Star-eyed Deirdre* were written after several variants of the tales had been read,—'Old Celtic Romances,' by Dr. Joyce; 'Reliquae Celticae,' by Dr. Cameron; 'The Three Sorrows of Story-telling,' by Dr. Douglas Hyde; 'The Laughter of Peterkin,' by Fiona Macleod, and other translations and re-tellings. It is to Fiona Macleod's exquisite rendering of the tales that I owe most; and if this simpler version should tempt my little readers, when older, to listen to 'The Laughter of Peterkin,' their love of these Celtic Tales will be ensured.

L. C.

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THE SNOW QUEEN

ONCE upon a time there was a little boy called Kay. And there was a little girl. Her name was Gerda.

They were not brother and sister, this little boy and girl, but they lived in tiny attics next door to one another.

When they were not playing together, Gerda spent her time peeping at Kay, through one of the little panes in her window. And Kay peeped back at Gerda.

Outside each attic was a tiny balcony, just big enough to hold two little stools and a window-box. Often Gerda would step out of her attic window into the balcony, carrying with her a three-legged wooden stool. Then she would climb over the low wall that separated her from Kay.

And there in Kay's balcony the two children would sit and play together, or tell fairy-tales, or tend the flowers that bloomed so gaily in the window-box.

At other times it was Kay who would bound over the low wall into Gerda's balcony, and there, too, the little boy and girl were as happy as though they had been in fairyland.

In each little window-box grew a rose-bush, and

the bloom and the scent of the red roses they bore gave Kay and Gerda more delight than you can imagine; and all her life long a red rose remained little Gerda's favourite flower.

But it was not always summer-time, and when cold, frosty winter came, and the Snow Queen sailed down on the large white snowflakes from a grey sky, then no flowers bloomed in the window-boxes. And the balcony was so slippery that the children dared not venture to step out of their attic windows, but had to run down one long flight of stairs and up another to be able to play together.

Sometimes, though, Kay stayed in his own little room and Gerda stayed in hers, gazing and gazing at the lovely pictures of castles, and mountains, and sea, and flowers that the Snow Queen had drawn on the window-panes as she passed.

But now that the little panes of glass were covered with pictures, how could Kay and Gerda peep at each other from the attic windows?

Ah, they had a plan, and a very good plan too. Kay would heat a penny on the stove, and then press it against the window-pane, and so make little round peep-holes. Then he would put his eye to one of these little rounds and—what did he see? A bright black eye peeping from Gerda's attic, for she too had heated a penny and made peep-holes in her window.

It was in winter, too, when the children could not play together on the balcony, that Gerda's grandmother told them stories of the Snow Queen.

One night, as Kay was undressing to go to bed,

he climbed on a chair and peeped out of one of his little round holes, and there, on the edge of the window-box, were a few big snowflakes. And as the little boy watched them, the biggest grew bigger and bigger, until it grew into a white lady of glittering, dazzling ice. Her eyes shone like two bright stars.

‘It must be the Snow Queen,’ thought Kay, and at that moment the white lady nodded to him, and waved her hand, and as he jumped from his chair, he fancied she flew past the window. ‘It must be the Snow Queen.’ Would he ever see her again?

At last the white winter melted away and green spring burst upon the earth. Then once more summer—warm, bright, beautiful summer.

It was at five o’clock, one sunny afternoon, that Kay and Gerda sat together on their little stools in the balcony, looking at a picture-book.

‘Oh!’ cried Kay suddenly, ‘oh, there is something sharp in my eye, and I have such a pain in my heart.’

Gerda put her arms round Kay’s neck and looked into his eye.

‘I can see nothing, Kay dear.’

‘Oh! it is gone now,’ said the boy, and they turned again to the picture-book.

But something had flown into Kay’s eye, and it was not gone; a little bit had reached his heart, and it was still there. Listen, and I will tell you what had happened.

There was about this time a most marvellous mirror in the world. It belonged to the worst

hobgoblin that ever lived, and had been made by his wicked little demons.

Those who looked into this mirror saw reflected there all the mean and ugly people and things in the world, and not one beautiful sight could they see. And the thoughts of those who looked into this mirror became as mean and ugly as the people and things they saw.

This delighted the hobgoblin, who ordered his little demons to carry the mirror all over the world and to do as much mischief with it as they could.

But one day, when they had travelled far, the mirror slipped from the hands of the little imps, and fell to earth, shivered into hundreds of thousands of millions of bits. Then it did more harm than ever, for the tiny pieces, some no bigger than a grain of sand, were blown all over the world, and often flew in people's eyes, and sometimes even found their way into their hearts.

And when a big person or a child had a little bit of this magic mirror in his eye, he saw only what was mean and ugly; and if the tiniest grain of the glass reached his heart, alas! alas! it froze all the kindness and gentleness and love that was there, and the heart became like a lump of ice.

This is what had happened to poor little Kay. One tiny bit of the magic mirror had flown into his eye; another had entered his heart.

'How horrid you look, Gerda. Why are you crying? And oh, see the worm in that rose. Roses are ugly, and so are window-boxes.' And

Kay kicked the window-box, and knocked two roses from the rose-bush.

‘Kay dear, what is the matter?’ asked Gerda.

The little boy did not answer, but broke off another rose, and then, without saying good-bye, stepped in at his own window, leaving Gerda alone.

The next time the little girl brought out the picture-book, Kay tore the leaves, and when the grandmother told them a story, he interrupted her and made ugly faces. And he would tread on Gerda’s toes and pull her hair, and make faces at her too.

‘How cruel little Kay grows,’ said his friends, for he mocked the old people and ill-treated those who were weak. And all through the blue summer and the yellow autumn Kay teased little Gerda, or left her that he might play with the bigger children in the town.

But it was when winter came, and the big white snowflakes once more fell from a grey sky, that Gerda felt loneliest, for Kay now drew on his thick gloves, slung his little sledge across his back, and marched off alone. ‘I am going to ride in the square,’ he shouted in her ear as he passed. But Gerda could not answer; she could only think of the winters that had gone, when she and Kay always sat side by side in that same little sledge. How happy they had been! Oh, why, why had he not taken her with him?

Kay walked briskly to the square, and there he watched the bolder of the boys tie their sledges to

the farmers' carts. With what glee they felt themselves being drawn over the snow-covered ground! When they reached the town gates they would jump out, unfasten their sledges, and return to the square to begin the fun all over again.

Kay was thinking how much he would like to tie his little sledge behind a cart, when a big sledge, painted white, drove by. In it sat some one muffled in a white fur coat and cap. Twice the sledge drove round the square.

As it passed Kay the second time, he quickly fastened on his little sledge behind, and in a moment found himself flying through the streets. What fun! On and on through snowdrifts, bounding over ditches, rushing down hills, faster and faster they flew.

Little Kay grew frightened. Twice he tried to unfasten the string that tied his sledge to the other, but both times the white driver turned round and nodded to him to sit still. At last they had driven through the town gates. The snow fell so heavily that it blinded him. Now he could not see where they were going, and Kay grew more frightened still. He tried to say his prayers, but could only remember the multiplication table.

Bigger and bigger grew the snowflakes, till they seemed like large white birds. Then, suddenly, the sledge stopped. The driver stood up. She was a tall lady, dazzlingly white. Her eyes shone like two stars. She was the Snow Queen.

'It is cold,' said the white lady; 'come into my sledge. Now, creep inside my furs.'

Kay did as he was told, but he felt as if he had fallen into a snowdrift.

‘You are still cold,’ said the Snow Queen, and she kissed his forehead. Her lips were like ice, and Kay shivered and felt the old pain at his heart. But only for a minute, for the Snow Queen kissed him again, and then he forgot the pain, and he forgot Gerda, and he forgot his grandmother and his old home, and had not a thought for anything or any one but the Snow Queen.

He had no fear of her now, no, not although they flew up and up on a dark cloud, away over woods and lakes, over rivers, islands, and seas. No, he was not afraid, although the cold wind whistled around them, and beneath the wild wolves howled. Kay did not care.

Above them the moon shone bright and clear. All night long the boy would gaze at it and the twinkling stars, but by day he slept at the feet of the Snow Queen.

But what of little Gerda?

Poor child, she watched and she waited and she wondered, but Kay did not come, and nobody could tell her where he was. The boys had seen him drive out of the town gates behind a big sledge painted white. But no one had heard of him since.

Little Gerda cried bitterly. Perhaps Kay was drowned in the river. Oh, what a long, cold winter that was! But spring came at last, bright spring with its golden sunshine and its singing birds.

‘Kay is dead,’ said Gerda.

‘Kay dead? It is not true,’ said the sunshine.

‘Kay dead? We do not believe it,’ twittered the swallows.

And neither did little Gerda believe it.

‘I will put on my new red shoes,’ said the child one morning, ‘and go to the river and ask it about Kay.’ So she put on her little red shoes, and kissed her old grandmother who was still asleep, and wandered alone, out beyond the town gates, and down to the river-bank.

‘Have you taken my little playfellow?’ she asked. ‘I will give you these if you will bring him back to me,’ and she flung her little shoes into the river.

They fell close to the bank and the little waves tossed them back on to the dry pebbles at her feet. ‘We do not want you, we will keep Kay,’ they seemed to say.

‘Perhaps I did not throw them far enough,’ thought Gerda, and stepping into a boat that lay among the rushes, she flung the red shoes with all her might into the middle of the river.

But the boat was not fastened and it glided out from among the rushes. Soon it was drifting faster and faster down the river. The little shoes floated behind.

‘Perhaps I am going to little Kay,’ thought Gerda, as she was carried farther and farther down the river. How pretty it was! Trees waved and flowers nodded on its banks. Sheep grazed and cattle browsed, but not one soul, big or little, was to be seen.



P ERHAPS I'AM GOING TO LITTLE KAY THOUGHT GERDA

Y C

After a long time Gerda came to a cherry garden which stretched down to the river-bank. At the end of this garden stood a tiny cottage with a thatched roof, and with red, blue, and yellow glass windows.

On either side of the door stood a wooden soldier. Gerda thought the soldiers were alive, and shouted to them.

The wooden soldiers, of course, did not hear, but an old, old woman, who lived in the tiny house, wondered who it could be that called. She hobbled out, leaning on her hooked stick. On her head she wore a big sun-hat, and on it were painted beautiful flowers.

‘You poor child,’ said the old, old woman, walking straight into the river, and catching hold of the boat with her hooked stick, ‘you poor dear!’ And she pulled the boat ashore and lifted out little Gerda on to the green grass.

Gerda was delighted to be on dry land again, but she was a little bit afraid of the old, old woman, who now asked her who she was and where she came from.

‘I am looking for Kay, little Kay. Have you seen him?’ began Gerda, and she went on to tell the old, old woman the whole story of her playmate and his strange disappearance. When she had finished, she asked again, ‘Have you seen him?’

‘No,’ said the old, old woman, ‘but I expect him. Come in,’ and she took little Gerda by the hand. ‘Come to my house and taste my cherries.’ And when they had gone into the cottage, the old, old

woman locked the door. Then she gave Gerda a plate of the most delicious cherries, and while the little girl ate them, the old, old woman combed her hair with a golden comb.

Now this old, old woman was a witch, and the comb was a magic comb, for as soon as it touched her hair, Gerda forgot all about Kay. And this was just what the witch wished, for she was a lonely old woman, and would have liked Gerda to become her own little girl and stay with her always.

Gerda did enjoy the red cherries, and, while she was still eating them, the old, old woman stole out to the garden and waved her hooked stick over the rose-bushes and they quickly sank beneath the brown earth. For Gerda had told her how fond Kay had once been of their little rose-bushes in the balcony, and the witch was afraid the sight of roses would remind the little girl of her lost playmate. But now that the roses had vanished, Gerda might come into the garden.

How the child danced for joy past the lilies and bluebells, how she suddenly fell on her knees to smell the pinks and mignonette, and then danced off again, in and out among the sunflowers and hollyhocks!

Gerda was perfectly happy now, and played among the flowers until the sun sank behind the cherry-trees. Then the old, old woman again took her by the hand, and led her to the little house. And she undressed her and put her into a little bed of white violets, and there the little girl dreamed sweet dreams.

The next day and the next again and for many more Gerda played among the flowers in the garden.

One morning, as the old woman sat near, Gerda looked at her hat with the wonderful painted flowers. Prettiest of all was a rose.

‘A rose! Why, surely I have seen none in the garden,’ thought Gerda, and she danced off in search.

But she could find none, and in her disappointment hot tears fell. And they fell on the very spot where the roses had grown, and as soon as the warm drops moistened the earth, the rose-bushes sprang up.

‘You are beautiful, beautiful,’ she said; but in a moment the tears fell again, for she thought of the rose-bushes in the balcony, and she remembered Kay.

‘Oh Kay, dear, dear Kay, is he dead?’ she asked the roses.

‘No, he is not dead,’ they answered, ‘for we have been beneath the brown earth, and he is not there.’

‘Then where, oh, where is he?’ and she went from flower to flower whispering, ‘Have you seen little Kay?’

But the flowers stood in the sunshine, dreaming their own dreams, and these they told the little maiden gladly, but of Kay they could not tell her, for they knew nothing.

Then the little girl ran down the garden path until she came to the garden gate. She pressed the rusty latch. The gate flew open, and Gerda ran out on her little bare feet into the green fields.

And she ran, and she ran, until she could run no longer. Then she sat down on a big stone to rest.

‘Why, it must be autumn,’ she said sorrowfully, as she looked around. And little Gerda felt sorry that she had stayed so long in the magic garden, where it was always summer.

‘Why have I not been seeking little Kay?’ she asked herself, and she jumped up and trudged along, on and on, out into the great wide world.

At last the cold white winter came again, and still little Gerda was wandering alone through the wide world, for she had not found little Kay.

‘Caw, caw,’ said a big raven that hopped on the stone in front of her. ‘Caw, caw.’

‘Have you seen little Kay?’ asked Gerda, and she told the bird her sad story.

‘It may have been Kay,’ said the raven, ‘I cannot tell. But if it was, he will have forgotten you now that he lives with the Princess.’

‘Does he live with a Princess?’ asked Gerda.

‘Yes, he does. If you care to listen, I will tell you how it came about. In this kingdom lives a Princess so clever that she has read all the newspapers in the world, and forgotten them again. Last winter she made up her mind to marry. Her husband, she said, must speak well. He must know the proper thing to say, and say it prettily. Otherwise she would not marry. I assure you what I say is perfectly true, for I have a tame sweetheart who lives at Court, and she told me the whole story.

One day it was published in the newspapers that any handsome young man might go to the palace to speak to the Princess. The one who spoke most prettily and answered most wisely should be chosen as her husband. What a stir there was! Young men flocked to the palace in crowds, chattering as they came. But when they saw the great staircase, and the soldiers in their silver uniform, and the grand ladies in velvet and lace, they could only talk in whispers. And when they were led before the beautiful Princess, who was seated on a pearl as big as a spinning-wheel, they were silent. She spoke to them, but they could think of nothing to say, so they repeated her last words over and over again. The Princess did not like that, and she——'

'But Kay, little Kay, did he come?' interrupted Gerda.

'You are in too great a hurry,' said the raven, 'I am just coming to that. On the third day came a boy with sparkling eyes and golden hair, but his clothes were shabby. He——'

'Oh, that would be Kay. Dear, dear Kay, I have found him at last.'

'He had a knapsack on his back, and——'

'No, it must have been a sledge,' again interrupted Gerda.

'I said he had a knapsack on his back, and he wore boots that creaked, but——'

'Oh, then it must be Kay, for he had new boots. I heard them creak through our attic wall when——'

'Little girl, do not interrupt, but listen to me.'

He wore boots that creaked, but even that did not frighten him. He creaked up the great staircase, he passed the soldiers in silver uniform, he bowed to the ladies in velvet and lace, and still he was quite at his ease. And when he was led before the beautiful Princess who was seated on a pearl as big as a spinning-wheel, he answered so prettily and spoke so wisely that she chose him as her husband.'

'Indeed, indeed it was Kay,' said little Gerda. 'He was so clever. He could do arithmetic up to long division. Oh, take me to him.'

'I will see what can be done,' said the raven. 'I will talk about it to my tame sweetheart. She will certainly be able to advise us. Wait here by the stile,' and the raven wagged his head and flew off.

It was growing dark before he returned. 'Here is a roll my tame sweetheart sent you. "The little maiden must be hungry," she said. As for your going to the palace with those bare feet—the thing is impossible. The soldiers in silver uniform would not let you go up the great stair. But do not cry. My sweetheart knows a little back staircase. She will take you to the Prince and Princess. Follow me.'

On tiptoe little Gerda followed the raven, as he hopped across the snow-covered field and up the long avenue that led to the palace garden. And in the garden they waited silently until the last light had gone out. Then they turned along the bare walk that led to the back door. It stood wide open.

Oh, how little Gerda's heart beat, as on the tips

of her little bare toes she followed the raven up the dimly-lighted back staircase!

On the landing at the top burned a small lamp. Beside it stood the tame sweetheart.

Gerda curtsied as her grandmother had taught her.

‘He,’ said the tame sweetheart, nodding to the raven of the field, ‘he has told me your story. It has made me sad. But if you carry the lamp, I will lead the way, and then we shall see——’

‘We shall see little Kay,’ murmured Gerda.

‘Hush! we shall see what we shall see,’ said the tame sweetheart.

Through room after room Gerda followed her strange guide, her heart thumping and thumping so loudly that she was afraid some one in the palace would hear it and wake.

At last they came to a room in which stood two little beds, one white and one red. The tame sweetheart nodded to the little girl.

Poor Gerda! she was trembling all over, as she peeped at the little head that rested on the pillow of the white bed.

Oh! that was the Princess.

Gerda turned to the little red bed. The Prince was lying on his face, but the hair, surely it was Kay’s hair. She drew down the little red coverlet until she saw a brown neck. Yes! it was Kay’s neck, she felt sure.

‘Kay, Kay, it is I, little Gerda, wake, wake.’

And the Prince awoke. He turned his head. He opened his eyes—and—alas! alas! it was not little Kay.

Then Gerda cried and cried as if her heart would break. She cried until she awoke the Princess, who started up bewildered.

‘Who are you, little girl, and where do you come from, and what do you want?’

‘Oh, I want Kay, little Kay, do you know where he is?’ And Gerda told the Princess all her story, and of what the ravens had done to help her.

‘Poor little child,’ said the Princess, ‘how sad you must feel!’

‘And how tired,’ said the Prince, and he jumped out of his little red bed, and made Gerda lie down.

The little girl was grateful indeed. She folded her hands and was soon fast asleep.

And Gerda dreamed of Kay. She saw him sitting in his little sledge, and it was dragged by angels. But it was only a dream, and, when she awoke, her little playmate was as far away as ever.

The ravens were now very happy, for the Princess said that, although they must never again lead any one to the palace by the back staircase, this time they should be rewarded. They should for the rest of their lives live together in the palace garden, and be known as the Court Ravens, and be fed from the royal kitchen.

When little Gerda awoke from her dreams, she saw the sunbeams stealing across her bed. It was time to get up.

The Court ladies dressed the little girl in silk and velvet, and the Prince and Princess asked her to stay with them at the palace. But Gerda begged for a little carriage, and a horse, and a pair of boots,

that she might again go out into the great wide world to seek little Kay.

So they gave her a pair of boots and a muff, and when she was dressed, there before the door stood a carriage of pure gold. The Prince himself helped Gerda to step in, and the Princess waved to her as she drove off.

But although Gerda was now a grand little girl, she was very lonely. The coachman and footman in the scarlet and gold livery did not speak a word. She was glad when the field raven flew to the carriage and perched by her side. He explained that his wife, for he was now married, would have come also, but she had eaten too much breakfast and was not well. But at the end of three miles the raven said good-bye, and flapping his shiny black wings, flew into an elm. There he watched the golden carriage till it could no longer be seen.

Poor Gerda was lonely as ever! There were gingernuts and sugar-biscuits and fruit in the carriage, but these could not comfort the little girl.

When would she find Kay?

In a dark forest lived a band of wild robbers. Among them was an old robber-woman, with shaggy eyebrows and no teeth. She had one little daughter.

'Look, look! what is that?' cried the little robber-girl one afternoon, as something like a moving torch gleamed through the forest. It was Gerda's golden carriage. The robbers rushed to-

wards it, killed the coachman and the footman, and dragged out the little girl.

‘How plump she is! You will taste nice, my dear,’ the old woman said to Gerda, as she drew out her long, sharp knife. It glittered horribly. ‘Now, just stand still, so, and—oh! stop, I say, stop,’ screamed the old woman, for at that moment her daughter sprang upon her back and bit her ear. And there she hung like some savage little animal. ‘Oh, my ear, my ear, you bad, wicked child!’ But the woman did not now try to kill Gerda.

Then the robber-child said, ‘Little girl, I want you myself, and I want to ride beside you.’ So together they stepped into the golden carriage and drove deep into the wood. ‘No one will hurt you now, unless I get angry with you,’ said the robber-girl, putting her arm round Gerda. ‘Are you a Princess?’

‘No,’ said Gerda, and she told the robber-girl all her story. ‘Have you seen little Kay?’ she ended.

‘Never,’ said the robber-girl, ‘never.’ Then she looked at Gerda and added, ‘No one shall kill you even if I am angry with you. I shall do it myself.’ And she dried Gerda’s eyes. ‘Now this is nice,’ and she lay back, her red hands in Gerda’s warm, soft muff.

At last the carriage stopped at a robber’s castle. It was a ruin. The robber-girl led Gerda into a large, old hall and gave her a basin of hot soup. ‘You shall sleep there to-night,’ she said, ‘with me and my pets.’

Gerda looked where the robber-girl pointed, and

saw that in one corner of the room straw was scattered on the stone floor.

‘Yes, you shall see my pets. Come, lie down now.’

And little Gerda and the robber-girl lay down together on their straw bed. Above, perched on poles, were doves.

‘Mine, all mine,’ said the little robber-girl. Jumping up, she seized the dove nearest her by the feet and shook it till its wings flapped. Then she slung it against Gerda’s face. ‘Kiss it,’ she said. ‘Yes, all mine; and look,’ she went on, ‘he is mine, too,’ and she caught by the horn a reindeer that was tied to the wall. He had a bright brass collar round his neck. ‘We have to keep him tied or he would run away. I tickle him every night with my sharp knife, and then he is afraid,’ and the girl drew from a hole in the wall a long knife, and gently ran it across the reindeer’s neck. The poor animal kicked, but the little robber-girl laughed, and then again lay down on her bed of straw.

‘But,’ said Gerda, with terror in her eyes, ‘you are not going to sleep with that long, sharp knife in your hand?’

‘Yes, I always do,’ replied the robber-girl, ‘one never knows what may happen. But tell me again all about Kay, and about your journey through the wide world.’

And Gerda told all her story over again. Then the little robber-girl put one arm round Gerda’s neck, and with her long knife in the other, she fell sound asleep.

But Gerda could not sleep. How could she, with that sharp knife close beside her? She would try not to think of it. She would listen to the doves. 'Coo, coo,' they said. Then they came nearer.

'We have seen little Kay,' they whispered. 'He floated by above our nest in the Snow Queen's sledge. She blew upon us as she passed, and her icy breath killed many of us.'

'But where was little Kay going? Where does the Snow Queen live?' asked Gerda.

'The reindeer can tell you everything,' said the doves.

'Yes,' said the reindeer, 'I can tell you. Little Kay was going to the Snow Queen's palace, a splendid palace of glittering ice, away in Lapland.'

'Oh, Kay, little Kay,' sighed Gerda.

'Lie still, or I shall stick my knife into you,' said the little robber-girl.

And little Gerda lay still, but she did not sleep. In the morning she told the robber-girl what the doves and the reindeer had said.

The little robber-girl looked very solemn and thoughtful. Then she nodded her head importantly. At last she spoke, not to Gerda, but to the reindeer.

'I should like to keep you here always, tied by your brass collar to that wall. Then I should still tickle you with my knife, and have the fun of seeing you kick and struggle. But never mind. Do you know where Lapland is?'

Lapland! of course the reindeer knew. Had he not been born there? Had he not played in its

snow-covered fields? As the reindeer thought of his happy childhood, his eyes danced.

‘Would you like to go back to your old home?’ asked the robber-girl.

The reindeer leapt into the air for joy.

‘Very well, I will soon untie your chain. Mother is still asleep. Come along, Gerda. Now, I am going to put this little girl on your back, and you are to carry her safely to the Snow Queen’s palace. She must find her little playfellow.’ And the robber-girl lifted Gerda up and tied her on the reindeer’s back, having first put a little cushion beneath her. ‘I must keep your muff, Gerda, but you can have mother’s big, black mittens. Come, put your hands in. Oh, they do look ugly.’

‘I am going to Kay, little Kay,’ and Gerda cried for joy.

‘There is nothing to whimper about,’ said the robber-girl. ‘Look! here are two loaves and a ham.’ Then she opened wide the door, loosened the reindeer’s chain, and said, ‘Now run.’

And the reindeer darted through the open door, Gerda waving her black-mittened hands, and the little robber-girl calling after the reindeer, ‘Take care of my little girl.’

On and on they sped, over briers and bushes, through fields and forests and swamps. The wolves howled and the ravens screamed. But Gerda was happy. She was going to Kay.

The loaves and the ham were finished, and Gerda and the reindeer were in Lapland.

They stopped in front of a little hut. Its roof sloped down almost to the ground, and the door was so low that to get into the hut one had to creep on hands and knees. How the reindeer squeezed through I cannot tell, but there he was in the little hut, telling an old Lapp woman who was frying fish over a lamp, first his own story and then the sad story of Gerda and little Kay.

‘Oh, you poor creatures,’ said the Lapp woman, ‘the Snow Queen is not in Lapland at present. She is hundreds of miles away at her palace in Finland. But I will give you a note to a Finn woman, and she will direct you better than I can.’ And the Lapp woman wrote a letter on a dried fish, as she had no paper.

Then, when Gerda had warmed herself by the lamp, the Lapp woman tied her on to the reindeer again, and they squeezed through the little door and were once more out in the wide world.

On and on they sped through the long night, while the blue northern lights flickered in the sky overhead, and the crisp snow crackled beneath their feet.

At last they reached Finland and knocked on the Finn woman’s chimney, for she had no door at all. Then they squeezed down the chimney and found themselves in a very hot little room.

The old woman at once loosened Gerda’s things, and took off her mittens and boots. Then she put ice on the reindeer’s head. Now that her visitors were more comfortable she could look at the letter they brought. She read it three times and then put

it in the fish-pot, for this old woman never wasted anything.

There was silence for five minutes, and then the reindeer again told his story first, and afterwards the sad story of Gerda and little Kay.

Once more there was silence for five minutes, and then the Finn woman whispered to the reindeer. This is what she whispered. 'Yes, little Kay is with the Snow Queen, and thinks himself the happiest boy in the world. But that is because a little bit of the magic mirror is still in his eye, and another tiny grain remains in his heart. Until they come out, he can never be the old Kay. As long as they are there, the Snow Queen will have him in her power.'

'But cannot you give Gerda power to overcome the Snow Queen?' whispered the reindeer.

'I cannot give her greater power than she has already. Her own loving heart has won the help of bird and beast and robber-girl, and it is that loving heart that will conquer the Snow Queen. But this you can do. Carry little Gerda to the palace garden. It is only two miles from here. You will see a bush covered with red berries. Leave Gerda there and hurry back to me.'

Off sped the reindeer.

'Oh, my boots and my mittens!' cried Gerda.

But the reindeer would not stop. On he rushed through the snow until he came to the bush with the red berries. There he put Gerda down and kissed her, while tears trickled down his face.

Then off he bounded, leaving the little girl standing barefoot on the crisp snow.

Gerda stepped forward. Huge snowflakes were coming to meet her. They did not fall from the sky. No, they were marching along the ground. And what strange shapes they took! Some looked like white hedgehogs, some like Polar bears. They were the Snow Queen's soldiers.

Gerda grew frightened. But she did not run away. She folded her hands and closed her eyes. 'Our Father which art in Heaven,' she began, but she could get no further. The cold was so great that she could not go on. She opened her eyes, and there, surrounding her, was a legion of bright little angels. They had been formed from her breath, as she prayed, 'Our Father which art in Heaven.' And the bright little angels shivered into a hundred pieces the snowflake army, and Gerda walked on fearlessly towards the palace of the Snow Queen.

Little Kay sits alone in the great ice hall. He does not know that he is blue with cold, for the Snow Queen has kissed away the icy shiverings and left his heart with no more feeling than a lump of ice.

And this morning she has flown off to visit the countries of the south, where the grapes and the lemons grow.

'It is all so blue there,' she had said, 'I must go and cast my veil of white across their hills and meadows.' And away she flew.

So Kay sits in the great ice hall alone. Chips of

ice are his only playthings, and now he leaves them on the ice floor and goes to the window to gaze at the snowdrifts in the palace garden. Great gusts of wind swirl the snow past the windows. Kay can see nothing. He turns again to his ice toys.

Outside, little Gerda struggles through the biting wind, then, saying her morning prayer, she enters the vast hall. At a glance she sees the lonely boy. In a twinkling she knows it is Kay. Her little bare feet carry her like wings across the ice floor. Her arms are round his neck.

‘Kay, dear, dear Kay!’

But Kay does not move. He is still and cold as the palace walls.

Little Gerda bursts into tears, hot, scalding tears. Her arms are yet round Kay’s neck, and her tears fall upon his heart of ice. They thaw it. They reach the grain of glass, and it melts away.

And now Kay’s tears fall hot and fast, and as they pour, the tiny bit of glass passes out of his eye, and he sees, he knows, his long-lost playmate.

‘Little Gerda, little Gerda!’ he cries, ‘where have you been, where have you been, where are we now?’ and he shivers as he looks round the vast cold hall.

But Gerda kisses his white cheeks, and they grow rosy; she kisses his eyes, and they shine like stars; she kisses his hands and feet, and he is strong and glad.

Hand in hand they wander out of the ice palace. The winds hush, the sun bursts forth. They talk of their grandmother, of their rose-trees.

The reindeer has come back, and with him there waits another reindeer. They stand by the bush with the red berries.

The children bound on to their backs, and are carried first to the hut of the Finn woman, and then on to Lapland. The Lapp woman has new clothes ready for them, and brings out her sledge. Once more Kay and Gerda are sitting side by side. The Lapp woman drives, and the two reindeer follow. On and on they speed through the white-robed land. But now they leave it behind. The earth wears her mantle of green.

‘Good-bye’ they say to the kind Lapp woman, ‘good-bye’ to the gentle reindeer.

Together the children enter a forest. How strange and how sweet the song of the birds!

A young girl on horseback comes galloping towards them. She wears a scarlet cap, and has pistols in her belt. It is the robber-girl.

‘So you have found little Kay.’

Gerda smiles a radiant smile, and asks for the Prince and Princess.

‘They are travelling far away.’

‘And the raven?’

‘Oh, the raven is dead. But tell me what you have been doing, and where you found little Kay.’

The three children sit down under a fir-tree, and Gerda tells of her journey through Lapland and Finland, and how at last she had found little Kay in the palace of the Snow Queen.

‘Snip, snap, snorra,’ shouts the robber-girl, which is her way of saying ‘Hurrah!’ Then, promising

that if ever she is near their town, she will pay them a visit, off she gallops into the wide world.

On wander the two children, on and on. At last they see the tall towers of the old town where they had lived together. Soon they come to the narrow street they remember so well. They climb the long, long stair, and burst into the little attic.

The rose-bush is in bloom, and the sun pours in upon the old grandmother, who reads her Bible by the open window.

Kay and Gerda take their two little stools and sit down one on either side of her, and listen to the words from the Good Book. As they listen, a great peace steals into their souls.

And outside it is summer,—warm, bright, beautiful summer.

THE TOY PRINCESS

ONCE upon a time, in a country on the other side of the world, the people thought that the politest way to behave was to speak to each other as little as possible. To say what they really meant, or to show what they really felt, was supposed to be very rude indeed. To laugh aloud, or to cry even quietly, was enough to make one avoided by the people of that country.

Now the King had married a Princess from a neighbouring land, where every one talked to his heart's content, and laughed when he was happy and cried when he was sad. In fact, whatever the people of her land felt, they showed. And she was like her people.

So you can imagine that when this Princess came as a bride to her new home, expecting to be received with cheers of welcome, she was puzzled to be met without a word or a smile. And when, as time went on, the only words she heard were, 'Yes, indeed,' 'If you please,' 'Thank you,' and 'Certainly,' the young Queen grew thin and pale, and pined for her old home.

Of course every one was too polite to notice how ill she looked, but she herself knew that she could not live long, and when at last she felt she was

about to die, she sent for her fairy godmother Taboret, whom she dearly loved, and who had been kind to her always.

For a long time the Queen and fairy were alone together, but what they said nobody heard.

Soon afterwards a little Princess was born, and the Queen died. Perhaps the courtiers were sorry for the death of their gentle Queen, but of course it would not have been polite to say so.

The baby Princess was christened Ursula, and she crowed or cried to her heart's content until she was two years old. Then she began to understand when her nurses, in polite tones, told her it was naughty to make any noise at all, and she grew much quieter. Not only did she grow quieter, but her fat little face grew thin and pale, and her blue eyes less merry and bright. She was not allowed to play with other children, nor had she any games or toys. And so, until she was six years old, she passed most of her time, when she was not at lessons, looking out of the window at the birds flying against the clear blue sky, and sometimes, when her nurses were not listening, she ventured to give a sad little sigh.

It was when Ursula was six years old that the fairy Taboret made herself invisible, and flew over to the King's palace to see how things were going on. She went straight to the nursery, and found poor little Ursula sitting by the window, her head leaning on her hand. It was a very grand room, but when the fairy saw no toys or dolls, she frowned to herself and shook her head.

‘Dinner is served for your Royal Highness,’ said the head nurse to Ursula.

‘I don’t want any dinner,’ said Ursula, without turning her head.

‘It is not polite to say, “Don’t want” or “Don’t like,”’ said the nurse. ‘Come.’

So the Princess got up and went to the dinner-table, and Taboret, unseen, watched them. When she saw how little Ursula ate, and how silent every one was, she frowned even more than before, and then flew back to her fairy home. There she sat for some hours in deep thought.

At last she got up and went out to pay a visit to the largest shop in Fairyland.

It was a shop where all that was sold had magic power. The sugar was magic sugar, and charmed the milk or tea or water into which it was put. The hats were wishing caps. Indeed any charm could be had, in any form, in this wonderful shop. To it Taboret flew.

The shopman, when he saw her, came forward at once and bowed low, for Taboret was a good customer.

‘I want a Princess,’ she said.

‘A Princess!’ replied the shopman, who was really an old wizard. ‘What size? I have one or two in stock.’

‘She must be six years old now, but of course she must grow,’ said Taboret.

‘I have none of that age,’ said the wizard, ‘but one can be made. However, I must tell you that it will be expensive.’

‘Never mind that,’ said Taboret. ‘See, I want her to look exactly like this,’ and she handed a portrait of Ursula to the old man. He examined it carefully.

‘When must the Toy Princess be ready?’

‘To-morrow evening, if possible. How much will she cost?’

‘She will come to a good deal,’ said the wizard thoughtfully. ‘What kind of voice is she to have?’

‘Oh, she need not be at all talkative, so that won’t add much to the price. If she says, “Yes, indeed,” “If you please,” “Thank you,” and “Certainly,” that will be quite enough.’

‘Well, in that case, I can let you have a Toy Princess, six years old, for four footfalls from a cat, two screams from a fish, and two songs from a swan.’

‘That is a very high price. Still, when can she be ready?’

‘To-morrow evening at sunset.’

‘Very well, but beware of making her either noisy or rough,’ and with these words Taboret flew out of the shop and away to her own home. Next evening she returned.

‘Is the Toy Princess ready?’ she asked.

‘She is, and you will admire her, I am sure,’ said the shopman, and he left the shop. Soon he returned, leading by the hand a little girl so like the Princess Ursula that no one could have known which was which.

‘She is a great success,’ said Taboret. ‘No, not

one fairy in twenty would think she was a toy, and not a single mortal could ever guess.'

Taboret turned the Toy Princess round.

'Yes, she is a great success,' she repeated. 'And now I must pay you and be off.' With these words she raised her wand in the air and waved it three times.

No sooner had Taboret done this than there was heard a loud tramping. It was the footfalls of the cat. Then followed piercing screams from the fairy fish, and last, voices of wonderful beauty, which were the swans' songs. The wizard caught the sounds one after another and put them in his pocket, feeling well paid. Taboret at once picked up the Toy Princess, and, tucking her under her arm head downwards, flew away.

At Court that night the little Princess had been naughty. She had refused to go to bed. When after much difficulty her nurses had settled her in her crib, she shut her eyes fast and pretended to fall asleep, but she was really wide awake.

As soon as little Ursula was left alone, she got up and stole noiselessly to the window and sat down on the window-seat all curled up in a little bunch, while she looked out at the bright, round moon. As she gazed, the tears rose to her great blue eyes, but remembering that it was naughty to cry, she wiped them away with her nightgown sleeve.

'Ah, moon, pretty, bright moon,' she said, 'may you cry when you want to, I wonder? I think I should like to come to live with you. It must be nicer up there than down here.'

‘Would you like to go away with me?’ asked a kind voice close beside her, and, looking round, Ursula saw a funny old woman in a red cloak. The Princess was not afraid, for the old woman had a kind smile and bright black eyes, although her nose was hooked and her chin long.

‘Where would you take me?’ said Ursula.

‘To the seashore, where you could play upon the sands, and where you would have little boys and girls to romp with, and nobody to tell you not to make a noise.’

‘I’ll go, I’ll go. Oh yes, indeed I’ll go,’ cried Ursula, jumping up at once.

‘Come along, then,’ and Taboret (for you have guessed it was she) took the little Princess tenderly in her arms and folded her in the red cloak. Then they flew out of the window, and up, up, above the tall tree-tops. Yes, it was cold, but Ursula soon fell fast asleep. Still they kept flying on, over hill and dale, for miles and miles, away from the palace, toward the sea.

In a little fishing village, close to the seashore, was a cottage where a poor fisherman, named Mark, lived with his wife and three children. The two boys were called Oliver and Philip. The little girl’s name was Bell. The children played from morning till night on the seashore, and three rosier-cheeked, brighter-eyed little people were nowhere to be found. They were poor, but they were as happy as the day was long.

It was to Mark’s home that the fairy Taboret

flew with the Princess. She laid her quietly on the doorstep, and, having kissed the little girl, blew open the cottage door. Then she vanished in a twinkling.

Within the cottage, the children were asleep in bed, and their father was busily mending his nets, while their mother made a new frock for little Bell.

‘Wife, see who that is,’ said Mark, as the door flew open.

The mother got up and went to the door, and there, on the step, lay Ursula in her little white nightgown, still sleeping soundly.

‘Mark, Mark, come here! See, here is a little girl,’ and the woman lifted up the child and carried her into the cottage.

Then Ursula awoke and stared about her in fright. She did not cry (she had almost forgotten how to do that), but she trembled to the tips of her little pink toes.

She seemed to have forgotten all about her flight through the air, and all she could tell the fisherman was that she was the Princess Ursula.

At first Mark and his wife could not believe her. How would a Princess, of all people, be left on their doorstep? But when they looked at her little nightgown and saw of what fine linen it was made, and how it had a crown embroidered in one corner, they thought that, after all, Ursula must be speaking the truth.

‘Whoever she is, we must keep her until she is claimed,’ said the kind fisherman. So his wife gave

her some bread and milk, and put her to bed beside little Bell.

At the palace, next morning, when her nurses came to wake the Princess, they found a little girl as sound asleep as usual. Little did they guess that it was not the real but a Toy Princess, put there by the fairy Taboret, who had flown away with Ursula.

‘How good she is to-day,’ they said, as the Princess at once answered ‘Certainly,’ when told to get up. She let herself be dressed without a word, and all day long she said nothing but ‘Yes, indeed,’ ‘If you please,’ ‘Thank you,’ or ‘Certainly.’

Time went on and the little Princess never cried nor laughed, nor said what she really meant, nor showed what she really felt. And so she was thought the politest little girl possible, and became a great favourite with the King and all his Court.

Meantime, in the fisherman’s cottage far away, the real Princess grew up as merry and light-hearted as a bird. She went to school with Oliver and Philip and little Bell, she played with them on the yellow sands, and, as time went on, she forgot about her old, dreary life at the palace. But sometimes the fisherman’s wife would bring out the little embroidered nightgown and show it to her, and wonder where she came from and to whom she belonged. ‘I do not care whose I am, I am going to stay with you always, always,’ said Ursula.

And as she grew tall and fair, the Toy Princess at the palace grew too. The only difference was that Ursula’s face was rosy and sunburnt, while the Toy Princess was always pale. Ursula was the joy

and sunshine of every one around, while at Court the manners of the Toy Princess were the admiration of all. She never said what she meant, nor showed what she felt; she never laughed nor cried, nor indeed did she speak at all, except to say 'Yes, indeed,' 'If you please,' 'Thank you,' and 'Certainly.' So, in a land where the politest people were those who said least, you cannot be surprised that she was thought a model Princess.

As time went on the fisherman and his wife grew grey-headed. Oliver, their eldest son, now did most of the fishing, and Ursula cooked, and swept, and dusted, and mended, and was altogether so useful that the old people could not have done without her.

From time to time Taboret had come unseen to the cottage, that she might have a glimpse of Ursula. Finding her always well and merry, the fairy rejoiced that she had saved the Princess from the dreariness of her old life.

One evening, when she had not been there for some time, Taboret found Ursula standing by Oliver on the seashore, watching the waves. Unseen she drew near.

'When we are married,' said Oliver, 'we will live in that little cottage near by, so that we may come to see them every day. But we must wait until little Bell is big enough to take your place.'

'Then we had better say nothing about it yet,' said Ursula.

Taboret, when she heard this, grew grave. Dare she let a King's daughter marry a poor fisherman?

She must fly to Court and see how things were going on there. When she arrived, the King was surrounded by his Court, and Taboret at once made herself visible.

‘Pray be seated,’ said the King, who was always pleased to have the help and advice of the fairy. ‘As I was about to say to my courtiers, I now grow old, and the time has come that my dear daughter should ascend the throne and wear the crown.’

‘Before this happens, I must speak to you quietly,’ and Taboret led the King to a corner of the room.

In half an hour he returned, holding a handkerchief to his eyes. His face was white and he trembled.

‘My lords,’ he said to his courtiers, ‘I have received a terrible blow.’ Here the King sobbed aloud. ‘I could not believe it, were it not by the fairy Taboret that the news is brought.’ At this point he loudly blew his nose. ‘My lords, it is the solemn truth that my dear daughter is not my daughter at all, but a Toy Princess.’ With these words the King dropped back in his chair, overcome with grief.

Then Taboret stepped to the front and told the courtiers the story of how she had stolen the real Princess and had put a Toy Princess in her place.

The courtiers did not believe the fairy.

‘Our Princess is a truly charming young lady,’ said one.

‘Your Majesty approves the conduct of your dear daughter, is it not so?’ another asked the King.

‘Yes, indeed, certainly, just so,’ was the reply.

‘Then why should we give heed to a fairy?’ asked a third.

‘If you do not believe me,’ said Taboret, ‘call your Princess, and I shall quickly prove my words.’

‘Certainly,’ they cried, and the King commanded that his daughter should be summoned. In a few minutes she came, attended by her ladies. Not a word did she say, but, of course, she never did speak until she was spoken to. Silently she stood in the middle of the room.

‘We have sent for you,’ began the King, but before he could say more, Taboret lightly struck the Toy Princess on the head with her wand. The head fell to the floor and rolled to the feet of the King, muttering, ‘Yes, indeed, certainly.’ The body of the Princess stood stock-still and it was seen that she was a hollow toy.

The amazement and horror of the King and his courtiers caused them all to faint. When they had recovered, the King said, ‘The fairy Taboret tells me that there is somewhere a real Princess, whom she will bring to us. Meantime let our,—our,’—here the King turned in the direction of the headless Princess,—‘let her be carefully placed in a cupboard, and a holiday be given throughout the land, that all may mourn her loss.’ Having so said, he turned away weeping.

That evening Taboret flew to Mark’s cottage and told the kind fisherman and his wife and children the whole truth about Ursula, and that they must part with her.

Ursula listened with the others, and great was the grief of all as the fairy told her tale.

‘Still,’ said Ursula, ‘why need we mind? If I am a Princess, then you shall all come to the palace to live with me. I shall tell my father, the King, and he, I am sure, will send for you.’

A few days later Taboret came for Ursula in a grand coach and four, and drove her away to Court. It was a long, long drive, and on the way they stopped, that the Princess might be dressed in purple and ermine, and have roses put in her golden hair, and a chain around her sunburnt neck.

The King, surrounded by his Court, awaited the arrival of the real Princess. All looked grave and anxious. At last the door opened and Taboret appeared, leading Ursula by the hand.

‘That is your father,’ she said, pointing to the King, and thereupon Ursula ran to him, flung her arms around his neck and kissed him soundly a dozen times over. The King nearly fainted away, and all the courtiers shut their eyes and shivered.

‘Re—al—ly,’ sighed one.

‘Tr—u—ly,’ gasped another.

Ursula could not understand what had happened. She saw that every one was shocked with her, and she could not imagine why. ‘What have I done? Have I kissed the wrong person?’ she suddenly exclaimed. On hearing which, every one groaned.

‘This will never do,’ said the fairy, stepping forward, ‘if you do not want the Princess Ursula, I shall take her back to those who do. You shall have a week to decide. I shall come back then.’

And off Taboret flew on her wand, leaving the Princess to get on as best she might.

But Ursula could not get on at all. If she spoke or ran, every one looked shocked, and when at last she burst into tears, they were more shocked still.

‘This is indeed a change,’ sighed one of the ladies.

‘Our poor lost Princess!’ said another.

‘How beautifully she behaved even after her head was cut off!’ said a third.

No one cared for Ursula, who had come from a home where every one loved her. It was hard to bear, and before the week was at an end, she had grown pale and thin, and only dared to speak in a whisper.

‘This will never do,’ said Taboret, appearing suddenly, eight days after she had flown off. ‘This will never do. Do you not like living here? Are they not kind to you?’

‘Like being here? I hate it. Hate it, hate it, hate it. Take me back, take me back, dear Taboret, to Oliver and Philip and Bell.’ And Ursula wept aloud.

Taboret only smiled and patted her head. Then she went to the King and his courtiers.

‘Why do I find the Princess Ursula in tears?’ she demanded. ‘You behaved kindly to the Toy Princess, what do you mean by being cruel to your own flesh and blood daughter?’

‘The Princess who so unfortunately lost her head,’ began the King, ‘was always——’



‘I really believe,’ interrupted Taboret, ‘that you would like to have the doll back again. Very well, take your choice. Which will you have, Ursula or the Toy Princess?’

The King sank back in his chair. ‘Ask my courtiers,’ he said. So the courtiers were asked, and they begged that both Princesses might be brought.

Ursula came in with eyes still red with crying. The Toy Princess was brought carefully from the cupboard. Her head was laid on a table beside her.

‘Now all say which you prefer,’ said Taboret.

And they all, every one of them, chose the Toy Princess.

‘You shall have what you want, sillies that you are,’ said the fairy. And, with a wave of her wand, she caused the head of the Toy Princess to be fastened on its body. As soon as this was done, the doll turned slowly round, and, in its old voice, said, ‘Certainly.’

When the King and his courtiers heard this, they made a sound as much like a cheer as they thought would be polite.

‘We will at once,’ said the King, ‘arrange for my dear daughter to wear the crown and to sit upon the throne.’

On hearing this the courtiers again made a sound as like a cheer as they thought would be polite.

Taboret laughed, and, taking the real Princess in her arms, flew back to Mark’s cottage.

That evening there were quiet and polite re-

joicings at Court because of the recovery of the Toy Princess, but from the fisherman's cottage on the beach went up shouts of joy and laughter. For Ursula had come back and would never again leave her old friends, but would marry Oliver and live happily ever afterwards, by the blue, blue sea.

THE THREE GOLDEN HAIRS

FAR away and long ago a baby-boy was born in a little village. The baby's father looked up at the dark blue sky and saw a big bright star shining over his cottage. 'Ah,' he said to his wife, 'our son is indeed born under a Lucky Star. He will be happy all his life long, and who knows but he will marry the Princess.'

When the neighbours heard this they nodded their heads, and whispered, 'He will certainly marry the Princess, for he has been born under a Lucky Star.'

Now in those long ago days, the King often rode about in disguise, and it happened that he was passing through this village as the people were boasting that the new baby would marry the Princess.

The King was not at all pleased, and at once made up his mind that such a misfortune should not befall his daughter. So he went straight to the father and mother of the baby-boy and talked to them kindly. 'What a fine baby!' he said. 'You must be sorry that you are too poor to give him every comfort. Now I am well off, and, if you give him to me, he shall want for nothing.'

At first the parents would not hear of parting with their little son, but when the disguised King

told them of all the wonderful things he would do for the child, they said, 'Very well, he shall be yours. No harm can befall him, for he was born under a Lucky Star.'

So the wicked King carried off the baby, and he had not gone far before he packed it in a box. Then, when he reached a fast flowing river, he tied his horse to a tree, and threw the box into the water. 'Now,' he said, chuckling, 'now I should like to know what your Lucky Star will do for you.' And he rode away.

But the box did not sink. Instead, it floated on and on like a little boat, and the baby was as snug and happy as if he had been in his own cradle at home.

Further and further down the river glided the box, until, when near a mill, it was caught in the twigs of a willow-tree.

The miller's boy was fishing close by. 'A box! what can be in it?' he exclaimed, wading into the water. Having disentangled it from the willow twigs, he carried it to the river-bank and opened the lid. Picture his surprise when two brown eyes looked up into his and a friendly little hand was outstretched. 'Well, I don't know what to do with you,' said the miller's boy, 'you had better come along to my master,' and he lifted up the box, and ran to the mill. 'Look, master, look,' he cried, 'it is a queer gift the river has brought you.' And leaving the box in the miller's hands, the boy ran off.

Now the miller and his wife had no children, and there was nothing in the world they longed for

I DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
TO DO
WITH
YOU.

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so much as a little son. So you may imagine how the miller's eyes sparkled as he carried the precious box to his wife. And her joy knew no bounds as the miller told her that the baby belonged to them now, that he was the river's gift, and they need never, never, never part with him.

No child was more dearly loved or more carefully tended, and he grew up to be a handsome lad and the pride of the countryside.

One day the King, passing that way, took shelter in the mill to escape a heavy shower. He was not disguised, and the miller was pleased when the King noticed his boy.

'Is that handsome lad your son?' he asked.

'No, your Majesty, but he has been as a son to us for fourteen years. Strange as it sounds, he floated to our door in a wooden box.'

Then the King knew that the baby he had tried to drown fourteen years ago, now stood beside him, a handsome lad. He had indeed been born under a Lucky Star.

But the King showed nothing of the anger that burned within him. 'My good man,' he said to the miller, 'may the lad be spared to carry a letter for me to the Queen?'

'Without loss of time, your Majesty,' replied the miller. And turning to the lad, he said, 'Make haste to do the bidding of your King.'

Little did the lad dream what was written in that letter to the Queen. Little did he guess that he carried his own death-warrant. It ran in these words: 'As soon as the messenger delivers this

letter, seize him and put him to death. Let him be dead and buried ere my return.'

The lad, proud to be the King's messenger, put off no time, but ran swiftly until night fell. Then he lost his way, and, wandering into a wood, was well-nigh in despair, when he saw a light gleam through the trees. It came from the window of a tiny cottage.

Overjoyed to think that here he would find rest, he entered without knocking. Up started an old woman who was sitting by the fireside. 'Who are you, and what do you want, and where do you come from?' she asked in great agitation.

'I come from the mill, and I carry a letter to the Queen,' answered the lad.

'But what do you want here? This cottage belongs to robbers, and if they find you, you will not leave it alive.'

'I am too tired to go further, and I am afraid of no one.' So saying the boy settled himself by the fire and fell fast asleep.

'What is the meaning of this?' growled the robbers, as they entered. 'How dare you let any one come in?'

'It is only a poor lad who carries a letter to the Queen,' said the old woman.

When the robbers heard this, they forgot to be angry in their eagerness to search the pockets of the sleeping lad. Having found the letter, they read it, and then they felt quite sorry for the boy, although they had meant to kill him themselves.

‘Let us,’ said the robber chief, ‘destroy this letter and write another.’

So they did, and this is what it said. ‘As soon as the messenger delivers this letter, welcome him with every honour, and marry him to the Princess. Let them be married ere my return.’

Next morning, when the boy woke, he saw no one but the old woman, and bidding her good-bye, he set off with a light heart. Little did he dream that any one had tampered with the letter in his pocket.

When at last the lad reached the palace and presented what he believed to be the King’s message to the Queen, he was overcome with surprise. For no sooner had the Queen read the letter than she commanded that all should do homage to the lad, and that the joy-bells should peal loud and far, for to-morrow he would wed the Princess. ‘Such,’ she ended, ‘such is his Majesty’s command.’

When the King reached the palace, what was his dismay to find that the miller’s boy, instead of being dead and buried, was now the husband of the Princess. White with passion, he demanded of the Queen why she had not carried out his orders.

‘But I did, indeed I did,’ said the puzzled Queen, handing him the robber’s letter.

Then the King saw what had been done, and sent for the miller’s boy.

‘How dared you tamper with my letter, you wicked lad?’ he shouted angrily.

‘If the letter has been tampered with, it was not by me,’ replied the boy. And then he told of the

night he had spent in the robbers' cottage, and how he thought they must have done the mischief.

'Well, whoever did it,' said the furious King, 'I cannot have a beggar for my son-in-law. You shall not keep the Princess, unless you bring me three golden hairs from the head of the Dark King who lives in the heart of the Black Mountain.' But to himself the King said, 'The lad will never come back, for he who reaches the heart of the Black Mountain never returns again.'

Off set the miller's son as gaily as ever, for he was born under a Lucky Star, and what evil could betide him?

Soon he came to a great city. At the gate he was stopped by the sentinel. 'Who are you, and what do you know?'

'I know all about everything,' answered the lad.

'Then tell me, pray, why this fountain which once ran with wine, now gives not even water.'

'Let me pass, and I will tell you when I return,' said the miller's boy.

And he passed on and came to another town. Again he was stopped by the sentinel. 'Who are you, and what do you know?'

'I know all about everything,' answered the boy.

'Then tell me, pray, why this apple-tree which once bore golden apples, now bears no apples at all.'

'Let me pass, and I will tell you when I return,' said the miller's boy.

And he passed on and came to a broad river. In a boat by the bank sat a ferryman. 'Who are you, and what do you know?'

‘I know all about everything,’ answered the lad.

‘Then tell me, pray, why I have to spend my life rowing people across the river.’

‘Row me over, and I will tell you when I return,’ said the miller’s boy.

So the ferryman rowed him over, and there he was at last at the entrance to the Black Mountain. Darker and darker grew the path as he trod onward. Owls screeched and bats flapped around him. But unafraid he hastened on until he reached the heart of the Black Mountain. And there what did he see? The Dark King’s grandmother busily cooking dinner.

When the old woman caught sight of the miller’s boy, she pounced upon him. ‘Foolish fellow, what do you here? Know you not that the Dark King will devour you the moment he comes home?’

‘I have come to get three golden hairs from the Dark King’s head,’ said the boy. ‘Get them I must, or I shall lose the Princess.’

The old woman listened in amazement to the fearless lad. She could not but like one so brave. ‘My boy, I must help you,’ she said. ‘First I will turn you into an ant, that you may hide in the folds of my dress, and then you will not be discovered by the Dark King. Afterwards I shall see if I can pull three golden hairs from his head.’

‘Ah, but that is not all,’ said the lad. ‘I must know the answers to three questions. Why does the fountain in a great city no longer run with

wine? Why does the golden apple-tree bear no apples at all? Why must the ferryman row across the river from morning till night?’

‘The Dark King shall tell us, the Dark King shall tell us,’ replied the old woman. Listen, and you will hear.’ With these words she turned her visitor into an ant, and hid him in the folds of her dress.

In a moment in strode the giant, sniffing the air. ‘I smell human flesh, I smell human flesh,’ he roared. ‘I will roast him, where is he?’

‘Nonsense as usual,’ said his grandmother, ‘sheer nonsense. You see there is no human being here. Sit down and have supper.’

So the giant sat down and devoured an ox. After that he grew sleepy and lay down on the rug before the fire, resting his head in his grandmother’s lap.

The old woman stroked his hair very gently until his eyes closed. Then suddenly she tweaked a golden hair from his head.

The Dark King gave a howl and sat straight up.

‘What do you mean? What are you doing?’ he shouted.

‘Tuts, tuts,’ said the grandmother, soothingly, ‘I had fallen asleep like you, and I had such a bad dream that I woke up in a fright and caught hold of your hair.’

‘What was the dream?’ asked the giant.

‘Oh, I dreamed of a fountain that once ran with wine and now does not give even water.’

‘I can explain that,’ said the Dark King. ‘A fat

frog sits on the stone at the mouth of the fountain. If that frog were killed, the fountain would run with wine as before.'

Then the Dark King lay down again, and his grandmother gently stroked his hair till he fell asleep. This time she waited until his snores shook the Black Mountain before she tweaked out a second golden hair.

'How dare you, how dare you?' roared the giant, bounding to his feet.

'It was another dream, a strange dream,' said the old woman.

'What was the dream?' asked the giant.

'Oh, I dreamed of an apple-tree that once bore golden apples and now does not bear any apples at all.'

'I can explain that,' said the Dark King. 'A mouse gnaws at the roots of the tree. If that mouse were killed, the apple-tree would bear golden fruit as before.'

Then once more the giant stretched himself upon the hearthrug, and, with his head in his grandmother's lap, fell fast asleep.

Tweak! out came the third golden hair.

Bellowing with rage the Dark King held his head, as he roared, 'Was that another dream?'

'Yes, I am sorry,' said the old woman, 'but I dreamed that there is a ferryman who rows his boat from bank to bank of a swift river and can never leave it from morn till night, nor from night till morn.'

'I can explain that,' said the Dark King. 'The

stupid man has only to place the oar in the hand of the first passenger he ferries across, and then he will be free, and the passenger will become the ferryman.'

Again the giant fell asleep, and this time his grandmother let him snore till morning. Then after he had set out on his daily prow, the old woman took the ant from the folds of her dress and changed him into the handsome lad that he was.

'Here are the three golden hairs,' she said, 'and you can answer the three questions now. What more would you have?'

'Nothing, my good woman, nothing, I have all that I want, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

With these words the boy rushed from the Black Mountain and ran on and on until he came to the river where the ferryman plied his boat.

'Can you tell me the answer to my question?' the man asked eagerly.

'Yes, row me across to the other side and I will tell you,' said the lad.

So the ferryman rowed him over, and, when they reached the other side, the boy sprang from the boat, saying, 'You have only to put the oar in the hand of your next passenger, and he will become the ferryman, and you will be free.' The grateful man shouted his thanks after the boy, who ran on towards the town where once the golden apple-tree grew.

'Can you tell me the answer to my question?' asked the sentinel.

‘Yes, kill the mouse that gnaws at the roots of the tree, and it will bear golden apples as before.’

‘A thousand thanks,’ said the sentinel. ‘In token of my gratitude accept these,’ and he presented the boy with two asses laden with gold.

So, driving his asses before him, the boy journeyed on until he came to the city of the wonderful fountain.

‘Can you tell me the answer to my question?’ asked the sentinel.

‘Yes, kill the frog that sits on the stone at the mouth of the fountain, and it will then run with wine as before.’ So delighted was the sentinel to hear this that he, too, presented the boy with two asses laden with gold.

Right merrily did the lad now journey on to the palace. When he reached it, and the King saw the riches with which he was laden, not to speak of the three golden hairs, his astonishment knew no bounds.

‘The Princess is yours indeed,’ he said, ‘but tell me whence comes this wealth of gold?’

‘From the banks of a great river. I found it scattered among the sand.’

‘Where is that river? Direct me to it. Should I also find gold?’ hurriedly asked the greedy King.

‘Certainly you should find it, you have only to go to the ferryman and ask him to ferry you across.’

In great haste the King set off, and he had no difficulty in finding the river and the ferryman.

‘Ferry me across,’ said the breathless King, stepping into the boat.

But no sooner had he sat down than the ferryman, putting the oar in the King's hand, leapt to the shore.

So the cruel and greedy King became the ferryman, and he still rows across the river from morning till night, for no one has yet been found who will take the oar from his hand.

But the boy who was born under the Lucky Star lives happily with the Princess.

THE FOUR WHITE SWANS

IN the days of long ago there lived in the Green Isle of Erin a race of brave men and fair women—the race of the Dedannans. North, south, east, and west did this noble people dwell, doing homage to many chiefs. But one blue morning, after a great battle, the Dedannans met on a wide plain to choose a King. ‘Let us,’ they said, ‘have one King over all. Let us no longer have many rulers.’

Forth from among the Princes rose five well fitted to wield a sceptre and to wear a crown, but yet most royal stood Bove Derg and Lir. And forth did the five chiefs wander from the gathering, that the Dedannan folk might freely say to whom they would most gladly do homage as King.

Not long did they wander, for soon there arose a great cry, ‘Bove Derg is King. Bove Derg is King.’ And all were glad, save Lir.

But Lir was angry, and he left the plain where the Dedannan people were gathered, taking leave of none, and doing Bove Derg no reverence. For jealousy filled the heart of Lir.

Then were the Dedannans wroth, and a hundred swords were unsheathed and flashed in the sunlight on the plain. ‘We go to slay Lir who doeth not

homage to our King and regardeth not the choice of the people.'

But wise and generous was Bove Derg, and he bade the warriors do no hurt to the offended Prince.

So for long years did Lir live in discontent, yielding obedience to none. But at length a great sorrow fell upon him, for his wife, who was dear unto him, died, and she had been ill but three days. Loudly did he lament her death, and heavy was his heart with sorrow.

When tidings of Lir's grief reached Bove Derg, he was surrounded by his mightiest chiefs. 'Go forth,' he said, 'in fifty chariots go forth. Tell Lir I am his friend as ever, and ask that he come with you hither. Three fair foster-children are mine, and one may he yet have to wife, will he but bow to the will of the people, who have chosen me their King.'

When these words were told to Lir, his heart was glad. Speedily he called around him his train, and in fifty chariots set forth. Nor did they slacken speed until they reached the palace of Bove Derg by the Great Lake. And there at the still close of day, as the setting rays of the sun fell athwart the silver waters, did Lir do homage to Bove Derg. And Bove Derg kissed Lir and vowed to be his friend for ever.

And when it was known throughout the Dedannan host that peace reigned between these mighty chiefs, brave men and fair women and little children rejoiced, and nowhere were there happier hearts than in the green Isle of Erin.

Time passed, and Lir still dwelt with Bove Derg

in his palace by the Great Lake. One morning the King said, 'Full well you know my three fair foster-daughters, nor have I forgotten my promise that one you should have to wife. Choose her whom you will.'

Then Lir answered, 'All are indeed fair, and choice is hard. But give unto me the eldest, if it be that she be willing to wed.'

And Eve, the eldest of the fair maidens, was glad, and that day was she married to Lir, and after two weeks she left the palace by the Great Lake and drove with her husband to her new home.

Happily dwelt Lir's household and merrily sped the months. Then was there born unto Lir twin babes. The tiny girl they called Finola, and her brother did they name Aed.

Yet another year passed and again twins were born, but before the infant boys knew their mother, she died. So sorely did Lir grieve for his beautiful wife that he would have died of sorrow, but for the great love he bore his motherless children.

When news of Eve's death reached the palace of Bove Derg by the Great Lake, all mourned aloud, for love of Eve and sore pity for Lir and his four babes. And Bove Derg said to his mighty chiefs, 'Great indeed is our grief, but in this dark hour shall Lir know our friendship. Ride forth, make known to him that Eva, my second fair foster-child, shall in time become his wedded wife and shall cherish his lone babes.'

So messengers rode forth to carry these tidings to

Lir, and in time Lir came again to the palace of Bove Derg by the Great Lake, and he married the beautiful Eva and took her back with him to his little daughter, Finola, and to her three brothers, Aed and Fiacra and Conn.

Four lovely and gentle children were they. And with tenderness did Eva care for the little ones who were their father's joy and the pride of the Dedannans.

As for Lir, so great was the love he bore them, that at early dawn he would rise, and, pulling aside the deerskin that separated his sleeping-room from theirs, would fondle and frolic with the children until morning broke.

And Bove Derg loved them well-nigh as did Lir himself. Ofttimes would he come to see them, and ofttimes were they brought to his palace by the Great Lake.

And through all the Green Isle, where dwelt the Dedannan people, there also was spread the fame of the beauty of the children of Lir.

Time crept on, and Finola was a maid of twelve summers. Then did a wicked jealousy find root in Eva's heart, and so did it grow that it strangled the love which she had borne her sister's children. In bitterness she cried, 'Lir careth not for me; to Finola and her brothers hath he given all his love.'

And for weeks and months Eva lay in bed planning how she might do hurt to the children of Lir.

At length, one midsummer morn, she ordered

forth her chariot, that with the four children she might come to the palace of Bove Derg.

When Finola heard it, her fair face grew pale, for in a dream had it not been revealed unto her that Eva, her step-mother, should that day do a dark deed among those of her own household? Therefore was Finola sore afraid, but only her large eyes and pale cheeks spake her woe, as she and her brothers drove along with Eva and her train.

On they drove, the boys laughing merrily, heedless alike of the black shadow resting on their step-mother's brow, and of the pale, trembling lips of their sister. As they reached a gloomy pass, Eva whispered to her attendants, 'Kill, I pray you, these children of Lir, for their father careth not for me, because of his great love for them. Kill them, and great wealth shall be yours.'

But the attendants answered in horror, 'We will not kill them. Fearful, O Eva, were the deed, and great is the evil that will befall thee, for having it in thine heart to do this thing.'

Then Eva, filled with rage, drew forth her sword to slay them with her own hand, but too weak for the monstrous deed, back she sank in the chariot.

Onward they drove, out of the gloomy pass into the bright sunlight of the white road. Daisies with wide-open eyes looked up into the blue sky overhead. Golden glistened the buttercups among the green shamrock. From the ditches peeped the forget-me-not. Honeysuckle scented the hedges. Around, above, and afar, carolled the lark, the linnet, and the thrush. All was colour and sun-

shine, scent and song, as the children of Lir drove onward to their doom.

Not until they reached a still lake were the horses unyoked for rest. There Eva bade the children undress and go bathe in the waters. And when the children of Lir reached the water's edge, Eva was there behind them, holding in her hand a fairy wand. And with the wand she touched the shoulder of each. And, lo! as she touched Finola, the maiden was changed into a snow-white swan, and behold! as she touched Aed, Fiacra, and Conn, the three brothers were as the maid. Four snow-white swans floated on the blue lake, and to them the wicked Eva chanted—

‘Upon the breast of Darvra’s lonely water
Ye four white swans must sail ’mid grief and gloom,
And loud though Lir bemoan his sons and daughter,
Naught may avail to save them from their doom.’

As she finished, the swans turned towards her, and Finola spake. ‘Evil is the deed thy magic wand hath wrought, O Eva, on us the children of Lir, but greater evil shall befall thee, because of the hardness and jealousy of thine heart.’ And Finola’s white swan-breast heaved as she sang—

‘By Eva, who loved us long ago,
We’re fated to live a life of woe;
Her wand of magic and pitiless words
Have changed us into four snow-white birds,
And doomed us to live for evermore
By tempests driven from shore to shore.’

The song ended, again spake the swan-maiden.
‘Tell us, O Eva, when death shall set us free.’

And Eva made answer, 'Three hundred years shall your home be on the smooth waters of this lone lake. Three hundred years shall you pass on the stormy waters of the sea betwixt Erin and Alba, and three hundred years shall ye be tempest-tossed on the wild Western Sea. Until Decca be the Queen of Largnen, and the good Saint come to Erin, and ye hear the chime of the Christ-bell, neither your complaints nor prayers, neither the love of your father Lir, nor the might of your King, Bove Derg, shall have power to deliver you from your doom. But lone white swans though ye be, ye shall keep for ever your own sweet Gaelic speech, and ye shall sing, with plaintive voices, songs so haunting that your music will bring peace to the souls of those who hear. And still beneath your snowy plumage shall beat the hearts of Finola, Aed, Fiacra, and Conn, and still for ever shall ye be the children of Lir.'

And Eva chanted—

'Sail o'er the lone lake, swans with the white breast,
Three hundred years on its bosom to glide,
Thence to the wild stream Moyle in its unrest,
Three hundred years 'mid its storms to abide.

'Yet is not ended the tale of thy dire doom,
Three hundred years on the wild Western Sea,
Tempest-tossed, frost-bit, wrapt in its black gloom,
Must ye as birds of the sea-desert be.

'For till the three times three hundred lone years
Roll with their burden of terror and pain,
Lir's grief avails naught, nor can his salt tears;
Threats and entreaties and weeping are vain.

‘But when the Christ-bell steals o’er the wild sea,
When the good Kemoc has come to the West,
Then once again from direst of dooms free,
Sorrow shall vanish, and ye shall have rest.’

Then did Eva order the horses to be yoked to the chariot, and away westward did she drive. And swimming on the lone lake were four white swans.

When Eva reached the palace of Bove Derg alone, greatly was he troubled lest evil had befallen the children of Lir.

But the attendants, because of their great fear of Eva, dared not to tell the King of the magic spell she had wrought by the way. Therefore Bove Derg asked, ‘Wherefore, O Eva, come not Finola and her brothers to the palace this day?’

And Eva answered, ‘Because, O King, Lir no longer trusteth thee, therefore would he not let the children come hither.’

But Bove Derg believed not his foster-daughter, and that night he secretly sent messengers across the hills to the dwelling of Lir.

When the messengers came there, and told their errand, great was the grief of the father. And in the morning with a heavy heart he summoned a company of the Dedannans, and they together set out for the palace of Bove Derg. And it was not until sunset, as they reached the lone shore of Lake Darvra, that they slackened speed.

Lir alighted from his chariot and stood spell-bound. What was that plaintive sound? The Gaelic words, his dear daughter’s voice, more en-

chanting even than of old, and yet, before and around, only the lone blue lake. The haunting music rang clearer; and Lir heard—

‘Winding down the sunlit vale,
 See a glittering warrior band,
 Slow, yet eagerly they come,
 Marching to the silver strand.
 Well I know ye who ye are,
 Well I know whom ye would seek,
 Come and rest upon the shore,
 Come and hear the white swans speak.’

As the last words died away, four snow-white swans glided from behind the sedges, and with a wild flap of wings flew toward the eastern shore. There, stricken with wonder, stood Lir.

‘Know, O Lir,’ said Finola, ‘that we are thy children, changed by the wicked magic of our step-mother into four white swans.’ When Lir and the Dedannan people heard these words, they wept aloud.

Yet still spake the swan-maiden. ‘Three hundred years must we float on this lone lake, three hundred years shall we be storm-tossed on the waters between Erin and Alba, and three hundred years on the wild Western Sea. Not until the good Saint come to Erin, and the chime of the Christ-bell be heard in the land, not until then shall we be saved from our doom.’

Then great cries of sorrow went up from the Dedannans, and again Lir sobbed aloud. But at the last silence fell upon his grief, and Finola told how she and her brothers would keep for ever their own

sweet Gaelic speech, how they would sing songs so haunting that their music would bring peace to the souls of all who heard. She told, too, how, beneath their snowy plumage, the human hearts of Finola, Aed, Fiacra, and Conn should still beat—the hearts of the children of Lir. ‘Stay with us to-night by the lone lake,’ she ended, ‘and our music will steal to you across its moonlit waters and lull you into peaceful slumber. Stay, stay with us.’

And Lir and his people stayed on the shore that night and until the morning glimmered. Then, with the dim dawn, silence stole over the lake.

Speedily did Lir rise, and in haste did he bid farewell to his children, that he might seek Eva and see her tremble before him.

Swiftly did he drive and straight, until he came to the palace of Bove Derg, and there by the waters of the Great Lake did Bove Derg meet him. ‘Oh, Lir, wherefore have thy children come not hither?’ And Eva stood by the King.

Stern and sad rang the answer of Lir. ‘Alas! Eva, your foster-child, hath, by her wicked magic, changed them into four snow-white swans. On the blue waters of Lake Darvra dwell Finola, Aed, Fiacra, and Conn, and thence come I that I may avenge their doom.’

A silence as the silence of death fell upon the three, and all was still save that Eva trembled greatly. But ere long Bove Derg spake. Fierce and angry did he look, as, high above his foster-daughter, he held his magic wand. Awful was his voice as he pronounced her doom. ‘Wretched

woman, henceforth shalt thou no longer darken this fair earth, but as a demon of the air shalt thou dwell in misery till the end of time.' And of a sudden from out her shoulders grew black, shadowy wings, and, with a piercing scream, she swirled upward, until the awe-stricken Dedannans saw naught save a black speck vanish among the lowering clouds. And as a demon of the air do Eva's black wings swirl her through space to this day.

But great and good was Bove Derg. He laid aside his magic wand and so spake: 'Let us, my people, leave the Great Lake, and let us pitch our tents on the shores of Lake Darvra. Exceeding dear unto us are the children of Lir, and I, Bove Derg, and Lir, their father, have vowed henceforth to make our home for ever by the lone waters where they dwell.'

And when it was told throughout the Green Island of Erin of the fate of the children of Lir and of the vow that Bove Derg had vowed, from north, south, east, and west did the Dedannans flock to the lake, until a mighty host dwelt by its shores.

And by day Finola and her brothers knew not loneliness, for in the sweet Gaelic speech they told of their joys and fears; and by night the mighty Dedannans knew no sorrowful memories, for by haunting songs were they lulled to sleep, and the music brought peace to their souls.

Slowly did the years go by, and upon the shoulders of Bove Derg and Lir fell the long white hair. Fearful grew the four swans, for the time was not far off, when they must wing their flight north to the wild sea of Moyle.

And when at length the sad day dawned, Finola told her brothers how their three hundred happy years on Lake Darvra were at an end, and how they must now leave the peace of its lone waters for evermore.

Then, slowly and sadly, did the four swans glide to the margin of the lake. Never had the snowy whiteness of their plumage so dazzled the beholders, never had music so sweet and sorrowful floated to Lake Darvra's sunlit shores. As the swans reached the water's edge, silent were the three brothers, and alone Finola chanted this farewell song—

'Farewell, farewell,
Our father dear,
Hence must we fly
In grief and fear.

'Farewell, farewell,
Our doom is sure,
And hither we
May come no more.

'Farewell, farewell;
In years to be
The Christ-bell's chime
Shall set us free.

'Farewell, farewell;
Come, brothers, come,
No power can quell
The voice of doom.'

With bowed white heads did the Dedannan host listen to Finola's chant, and when the music ceased and only sobs broke the stillness, the four swans

spread their wings, and, soaring high, paused but for one short moment to gaze on the kneeling forms of Lir and Bove Derg. Then, stretching their graceful necks toward the north, they winged their flight to the waters of the stormy sea that separates the blue Alba from the Green Island of Erin.

And when it was known throughout the Green Isle that the four white swans had flown, so great was the sorrow of the people that they made a law that no swan should be killed in Erin from that day forth.

With hearts that burned with longing for their father and their friends, did Finola and her brothers reach the sea of Moyle. Cold and chill were its wintry waters, black and fearful were the steep rocks overhanging Alba's far-stretching coasts. From hunger, too, the swans suffered. Dark indeed was all, and darker yet as the children of Lir remembered the still waters of Lake Darvra and the fond Dedannan host on its peaceful shores. Here the sighing of the wind among the reeds no longer soothed their sorrow, but the roar of the breaking surf struck fresh terror in their souls. The desolate cry of the curlew had echoed the human yearning of their hearts in the glen beyond their mountain lake, here the shriek of the gull told not of desolation but of despair.

Thus in misery and terror did their days pass, until one night the black, lowering clouds overhead told that a great tempest was nigh. Then did Finola call to her Aed, Fiacra, and Conn. 'Be-

loved brothers, a great fear is at my heart, for, in the fury of the coming gale, we may be driven the one from the other. Therefore, let us say where we may hope to meet when the storm is spent.'

And Aed answered, 'Wise art thou, dear, gentle sister. If we be driven apart, may it be to meet again on the rocky isle that has ofttimes been our haven, for well known is it to us all, and from far can it be seen.'

Darker grew the night, louder raged the wind, as the four swans dived and rose again on the giant billows. Yet fiercer blew the gale, until at midnight loud bursts of thunder mingled with the roaring wind, but, in the glare of the blue lightning's flashes, the children of Lir beheld each the snowy form of the other. The mad fury of the hurricane yet increased, and the force of it lifted one swan from its wild home on the billows, and swept it through the blackness of the night. Another blue lightning flash, and each swan saw its loneliness, and uttered a great cry of desolation. Tossed hither and thither, by wind and wave, the white birds were well-nigh dead when dawn broke. And with the dawn fell calm.

Swiftly as her tired wings would bear her, Finola sailed to the rocky isle, where she hoped to find her brothers. But alas! no sign was there of one of them. Then to the highest summit of the rocks she flew. North, south, east, and west did she look, yet naught saw she save a watery wilderness. Now did her heart fail her, and she sang the saddest song she had yet sung.

'Alas, for my brothers, Fiacra and Conn,
Alas, for my twin brother Aed,
Beneath my swan breast
My heart will not rest,
But frameth a dirge for the dead.

'No more will they cradle beneath my white wing,
No more lie for warmth 'neath my breast.
Alone to the tomb
I suffer our doom,
Alone, without pity, unblest.

The sad song sung, Finola raised her eyes, and lo !
Conn came slowly swimming towards her with
drenched plumage and head that drooped. And as
she looked, behold ! Fiacra appeared, but it was as
though his strength failed. Then did Finola swim
toward her fainting brother and lend him her aid,
and soon the twins were safely on the sunlit rock,
nestling for warmth beneath their sister's wings.
But Finola's heart still beat with alarm as she
sheltered her younger brothers, for Aed came not,
and she feared lest he were lost for ever. But,
at noon, sailing he came over the breast of the blue
waters, with head erect and plumage sunlit. And
under the feathers of her breast did Finola draw him,
for Conn and Fiacra still cradled beneath her wings.
'Rest here, while ye may, dear brothers,' she said.
And she sang to them a lullaby so surpassing sweet
that the sea-birds hushed their cries and flocked to
listen to the sad, slow music. And when Aed and
Fiacra and Conn were lulled to sleep, Finola's notes
grew more and more faint, and her head drooped,
and soon she too slept peacefully in the warm
sunlight.

But few were the sunny days on the sea of Moyle, and many were the tempests that ruffled its waters. Still keener grew the winter frosts, and the misery of the four white swans was greater than ever before. Even their most sorrowful Gaelic songs told not half their woe. From the fury of the storm they still sought shelter on that rocky isle where Finola had despaired of seeing her dear ones more.

Slowly passed the years of doom, until one mid-winter a frost more keen than any known before froze the sea into a floor of solid black ice. By night the swans crouched together on the rocky isle for warmth, but each morning were they frozen to the ground and could free themselves only with sore pain, for they left clinging to the ice-bound rock the soft down of their breasts, the quills from their white wings, and the skin of their poor feet.

And when the sun melted the ice-bound surface of the waters, and the swans swam once more in the sea of Moyle, the salt water entered their wounds, and they well-nigh died of pain. But in time the down on their breasts and the feathers on their wings grew, and they were healed of their wounds.

The years dragged on, and by day Finola and her brothers would fly toward the shores of the Green Island of Erin, or to the rocky blue headlands of Alba, or they would swim far out into a dim grey wilderness of waters. But as night fell it was their doom to return ever to the sea of Moyle.

One day, as they looked towards the Green Isle, they saw coming toward the coast a troop of horse-



men mounted on snow-white steeds, and their armour glittered in the sun.

A cry of great joy went up from the children of Lir, for they had seen no human form since they spread their wings above Lake Darvra, and flew to the stormy sea of Moyle.

‘Speak,’ said Finola to her brothers, ‘speak, and say if these be not our own Dedannan folk.’ And Aed and Fiacra and Conn strained their eyes, and Aed answered, ‘It seemeth, dear sister, to me, that it is indeed our own people.’

As the horsemen drew nearer and saw the four swans, each man shouted in the Gaelic tongue, ‘Behold the children of Lir!’

And when Finola and her brothers heard once more the sweet Gaelic speech, and saw the faces of their own people, their happiness was greater than can be told. For long they were silent, but at length Finola spake. Of their life on the sea of Moyle, she told, of the dreary rains and blustering winds, of the giant waves and the roaring thunder, of the black frost, and of their own poor battered and wounded bodies. Of their loneliness of soul, of that she could not speak. ‘But tell us,’ she went on, ‘tell us of our father, Lir. Lives he still, and Bove Derg, and our dear Dedannan friends?’

Scarce could the Dedannans speak for the sorrow they had for the children of Lir, but they told how Lir and Bove Derg were alive and well, and were even now celebrating the Feast of Age at the house of Lir. ‘But for their longing for you, your father and friends would be happy indeed.’

Glad then and of great comfort were the hearts of Finola and her brothers. But they could not hear more, for hasten they must to fly from the pleasant shores of Erin to the sea-stream of Moyle, which was their doom. And as they flew, Finola sang, and faint floated her voice over the kneeling host.

‘ Oh, happy dwells our father Lir,
With mead cup and with song of cheer,
While on the storm-swept briny foam,
His children find their cruel home.

‘ Of royal lineage, long ago
Soft clad in purple did we go,
But now the north wind’s icy breath
Blows thro’ our feathers, cold as death.

‘ The hazel mead in days of old
We quaffed from cups of purest gold;
But sandy seaweed, bitter brine,
Are now our daily food and wine.

‘ Once harpers lulled us to our rest
While couches soft our bodies prest:
Now wild winds croon our lullaby,
Our bed a rock or frozen sea.

‘ Alas, for days now fled for aye,
When, crowned with flowers, we took our way
O’er sunlit paths. Our flowers are dead,
Grey wintry skies bend o’er our head.

‘ Beneath my wing and to my breast
The sons of Lir are closely prest,
Yet sheltered thus scarce find repose
While fierce the icy north wind blows.

‘ Oh, happy dwells our father Lir,
With mead cup and with song of cheer,
While on the storm-swept briny foam,
His children find their cruel home.’

Aloud wept the Dedannan host as the sad song grew fainter and more faint. Then, as the snow-white birds faded from sight, the sad company turned the heads of their white steeds from the shore, and rode southward to the home of Lir.

And when it was told there of the sufferings of Finola and her brothers, great was the sorrow of the Dedannans. Yet was Lir glad that his children were alive, and he thought of the day when the magic spell would be broken, and those so dear unto him would be freed from their bitter woe.

Once more were ended three hundred years of doom, and glad were the four white swans to leave the cruel sea of Moyle. Yet might they fly only to the wild Western Sea, and tempest-tossed as before, here they in no way escaped the pitiless fury of wind and wave. Worse than aught they had before endured was a frost that drove the brothers to despair. Well-nigh frozen to a rock, they one night cried aloud to Finola that they longed for death. And she, too, would fain have died.

But that same night did a dream come to the swan-maiden, and, when she awoke, she cried to her brothers to take heart. 'Believe, dear brothers, in the great God who hath created the earth with its fruits and the sea with its terrible wonders. Trust in Him, and He will yet save you.' And her brothers answered, 'We will trust.'

And Finola also put her trust in God, and they all fell into a deep slumber.

When the children of Lir awoke, behold ! the sun shone, and thereafter, until the three hundred years on the Western Sea were ended, neither wind, nor wave, nor rain nor frost did hurt to the four swans. But on a grassy isle they lived and sang their wondrous songs by day, and by night they nestled together on their soft couch, and awoke in the morning to sunshine and to peace. And there on the grassy island was their home, until the three hundred years were at an end. Then Finola called to her brothers, and tremblingly she told, and tremblingly they heard, that they might now fly eastward to seek their own old home.

Lightly did they rise on outstretched wings, and swiftly did they fly until they reached land. There they alighted and gazed each at the other, but too great for speech was their joy. Then again did they spread their wings and fly above the green grass on and on, until they reached the hills and trees that surrounded their old home. But, alas ! all was desolation. Only the ruins of Lir's dwelling were left. Around was a wilderness overgrown with rank grass, nettles, and weeds.

Too downhearted to stir, the swans slept that night within the ruined walls of their old home, but, when day broke, each could bear the loneliness no longer, and Finola sang—

‘ Alas, for the home of our youth,
Its heroes and sunshine and song ;
The glory hath fled,
Its heroes are dead,
The grass o’er their graves groweth long.

‘Alas, for the home of our youth,
Lone, ruined, and silent and bare;
No hounds of the chase,
No maidens to grace
The halls of the brave and the fair.

‘Alas, for the home of our youth,
All dark as our terrible doom,
Our tired bodies ache,
Our hearts well-nigh break;
We cry for the peace of the tomb.’

The song sung, again the swans flew westward. And it was not until they came to Inis Glora that they alighted. On a small lake in the heart of the island they made their home, and, by their enchanting music, they drew to its shores all the birds of the west, until the lake came to be called ‘The Lake of the Bird-flocks.’

Slowly passed the years, but a great longing filled the hearts of the children of Lir. When would the good Saint come to Erin? When would the chime of the Christ-bell peal over land and sea?

One rosy dawn the swans awoke among the sedges and rushes of the Lake of the Bird-flocks, and strange and faint was the sound that floated to them from afar. Trembling, they nestled close the one to the other, until the brothers stretched their wings and fluttered hither and thither in great fear. Yet trembling they flew back to their sister, who had remained silent among the sedges. Crouching by her side they asked, ‘What, dear sister, can be the strange, faint sound that steals across our island?’

With quiet, deep joy Finola answered, ‘Dear

brothers, it is the chime of the Christ-bell that ye hear, the Christ-bell of which we have dreamed through thrice three hundred years. Soon the spell will be broken, soon our sufferings shall end.' Then did Finola glide from the shelter of the sedges across the rose-lit lake, and there by the shore of the Western Sea she chanted this song of hope—

‘Rosy the dawn that glimmers o’er the grey lake,
Rosy and gold the eastern sky now gleams;
Loudly their songs the bird-flocks on the shore make,
Softly the Christ-bell steals across our dreams.

‘Rosy our dreams as eastern sky at daybreak,
Flushed with bright hope we wake, and terrors cease;
Brothers, have cheer, for floating o’er the lone lake,
Softly the Christ-bell tolls a hymn of peace.

‘Thank ye the Lord, victorious o’er the world’s strife,
Thanks sing to Him who ruleth land and sea,
Broken the cruel spell, dooming us to bird life,
Hope swells our white breasts, soon we shall be free.’

Calm crept into the hearts of the brothers as Finola sang, and, as she ended, once more the chime stole across the isle. No longer did it strike terror into the hearts of the children of Lir, rather as a note of peace did it sink into their souls.

Then, when the last chime died, Finola said, ‘Let us sing to the great King of Heaven and Earth.’

Far stole the sweet strains of the white swans, far across Inis Glora, until they reached the good Saint Kemoc, for whose early prayers had chimed the Christ-bell.

And he, filled with wonder at the surpassing sweetness of the music, stood mute, but when it

was revealed unto him that the voices he heard were the voices of Finola, and Aed, and Fiacra, and Conn, who thanked the High God for the chime of the Christ-bell, he knelt and also gave thanks, for it was to seek the children of Lir that the Saint had come to Inis Glora.

In the glory of noon, Kemoc reached the shore of the little lake, and saw four white swans gliding on its waters. And no need had the Saint to ask whether these indeed were the children of Lir.

Rather did the good Kemoc give thanks to the High God who had brought him hither. Then gravely said he to the swans, 'Come ye now to land, and put your trust in me, for it is in this place that ye shall be freed from your enchantment.'

These words did the four white swans hear with great joy, and coming to the shore they placed themselves under the care of the Saint. And he led them to his cell, and there they dwelt with him. And Kemoc sent to Erin for a skilful workman, and ordered that two slender chains of shining silver be made. Betwixt Finola and Aed did he clasp one silver chain, and with the other did he bind Fiacra and Conn.

Then did the children of Lir dwell with the holy Kemoc, and he taught them that wonderful story of Christ that he and Saint Patrick had brought to the Green Isle. And the story so gladdened their hearts that the misery of their past sufferings was well-nigh forgotten, and they lived in great happiness with the Saint. Dear to him were they, dear as though they had been his own children.

Thrice three hundred years had gone since Eva had chanted the fate of the children of Lir. 'Until Decca be the Queen of Largnen, until the good Saint come to Erin, and ye hear the chime of the Christ-bell, shall ye not be delivered from your doom.'

The good Saint had indeed come, and the sweet chimes of the Christ-bell had been heard, and the fair Decca was now the Queen of King Largnen.

Soon were tidings brought to Decca of the swan-maiden and her three swan-brothers. Strange tales did she hear of their haunting songs. It was told her, too, of their cruel miseries. Then begged she her husband, the King, that he would go to Kemoc and bring to her these human birds.

But Largnen did not wish to ask Kemoc to part with the swans, and therefore did he not go.

Then was Decca angry, and swore she would live no longer with Largnen, until he brought the singing swans to the palace. And that same night she set out for her father's kingdom in the south.

Nevertheless Largnen loved Decca, and great was his grief when he heard that she had fled. And he commanded messengers to go after her saying he would send for the white swans, if she would but come back. Therefore Decca returned to the palace, and Largnen sent to Kemoc to beg of him the four white swans. But the messenger returned without the birds.

Then was Largnen wroth, and set out himself for the cell of Kemoc. But he found the Saint in the little church, and before the altar the four white swans.

‘Is it truly told me that you refused these birds to Queen Decca?’ asked the King.

‘It is truly told,’ replied Kemoc.

Then Largnen was more wroth than before, and seizing the silver chain of Finola and Aed in one hand, and the chain of Fiacra and Conn in the other, he dragged the birds from the altar and down the aisle, and it seemed as though he would leave the church. And in great fear did the Saint follow. But lo! as they reached the door, the snow-white feathers of the four swans fell to the ground, and the children of Lir were delivered from their doom. For was not Decca the bride of Largnen, and the good Saint had he not come, and the chime of the Christ-bell was it not heard in the land?

But aged and feeble were the children of Lir. Wrinkled were their once fair faces, and bent their little white bodies.

At the sight, Largnen, affrighted, fled from the church, and the good Kemoc cried aloud, ‘Woe to thee, O King!’

Then did the children of Lir turn toward the Saint, and thus Finola spake: ‘Baptize us now, we pray thee, for death is nigh. Heavy with sorrow are our hearts that we must part from thee, thou holy one, and that in loneliness must thy days on earth be spent. But such is the will of the High God. Here let our graves be digged, and here bury our four bodies, Conn standing at my right side, Fiacra at my left, and Aed before my face, for thus did I shelter my dear brothers for thrice three hundred years ’neath wing and breast.’

And as Finola prayed, so it was, for, in those days, the dead were oftentimes buried in such wise.

Then did the good Kemoc baptize the children of Lir, and thereafter the Saint looked up, and lo! he saw a vision of four lovely children with silvery wings, and faces radiant as the sun; and as he gazed they floated ever upward, until they were lost in a mist of blue. Then was the good Kemoc glad, for he knew that they had gone to Heaven.

But, when he looked downward, four worn bodies lay at the church door, and Kemoc wept sore.

And the Saint ordered a wide grave to be dug close by the little church, and there were the children of Lir buried, Conn standing at Finola's right hand, and Fiacra at her left, and before her face her twin brother Aed.

And the grass grew green above them, and a white tombstone bore their names, and across the grave floated morning and evening the chime of the sweet Christ-bell.

THE SWINEHERD

IN the days of long ago there lived a handsome young Prince. His kingdom was small and he was poor. But, although this Prince owned neither vast lands nor great riches, there were a hundred Princesses who would have said 'Yes,' if he had asked, 'Will you marry me?'

However, the Prince had set his heart upon winning the daughter of the Emperor. One day, to show how much he loved her, the Prince sent this Princess two presents, each in a silver casket. One was a rose and the other was a nightingale.

The rose was no ordinary rose. It grew on a tree that blossomed only once every five years, and then bore but one flower. And the scent of this rose was so sweet that, by simply smelling it, one forgot all sorrow.

And the nightingale was no ordinary nightingale. She sang as if all the music of the world dwelt in her little throat.

On the day that these presents arrived at the palace, the Princess and her ladies-in-waiting were playing at visiting. The Emperor ordered the silver caskets to be taken to the hall where they played, and when the Princess saw them, she clapped her hands with delight. 'Open, open

quickly, and let me look inside!' she exclaimed. The Emperor opened one casket and took out the rose.

'How exquisitely it is made,' cried all the ladies in a breath.

'It is truly wonderful,' said the Emperor.

The Princess then touched it, and the smile fled from her lips. Her cheeks grew white with disappointment. 'Oh, papa, I thought it was a beautiful ornament, but it is only a real rose,' and she cried as if her heart would break.

'Shocking!' said all the ladies, 'to send our Princess such a present.'

The Emperor then opened the second casket, and out flew the nightingale.

'How exquisitely it is made,' cried all the ladies.

'It is truly wonderful,' said the Emperor.

And as the little bird warbled tune after tune, the Princess dried her tears and danced for joy. 'What a lovely toy!' she exclaimed. 'I like it better than any musical box.'

'It is a real bird, your Highness,' said the messenger who brought it.

'A real bird!' screamed the Princess, stamping her foot, 'then it may fly away. Go. Tell your Prince that I shall never marry one who dared to mock me with such paltry gifts.'

So the messenger returned to the poor Prince and told him all he had heard and seen at the palace.

The Prince listened quietly. Then he thought and thought. At last he had an idea. Smearing his face black and brown, pulling his cap down over

his eyes and disguising himself as a peasant, the Prince wandered to the palace.

‘Good morning, your Majesty. Can you give work to a poor man?’ he asked.

‘There is some one wanted to look after the pigs,’ said the Emperor. ‘You are welcome to the job.’

And so it was that the Prince became a swineherd, and lived in a little hut close by the pig-stye.

Now there was no one far or near who used his hands so cleverly as this swineherd Prince. All day long, when he was not feeding the pigs, he sat busily making a little saucepan. It was a wonderfully dainty saucepan, ornamented with little bells that tinkled while the pot boiled. The tune the bells tinkled was—

‘The mill can never grind
With the water that is past.’

And when the swineherd held his finger in the steam that rose from this saucepan, he could smell the dinner that was being cooked in each kitchen in the town.

One morning the Princess and her ladies-in-waiting were playing at ball not far from the swineherd’s hut. ‘Hush,’ said the Princess holding up her finger, ‘listen.’ And as they listened, they heard floating to them—

‘The mill can never grind
With the water that is past.’

‘My tune, my tune!’ cried the Princess in glee. ‘What a musical swineherd to be able to play it! And what a pretty tone the instrument has! Go,

Priscilla,' she went on, turning to one of the group, 'ask him what it costs.'

Lady Priscilla first went to the palace for her goloshes, then she flew across the grounds and gingerly entered the hut. There she saw that the tune was played by a pot that boiled on the fire.

'What will you take for the saucepan?' asked Lady Priscilla.

'Ten kisses from the Princess,' said the swineherd.

'Wh—at?'

'I will not take fewer.'

Lady Priscilla returned to the Princess.

'Well, what does he say?' she asked.

'Oh, I don't—I mustn't—I can't—I really—it is too shocking.'

'Then whisper.' And Lady Priscilla whispered.

'The wretched, bold, impudent fellow,' said the Princess indignantly, and she walked off. But as she went, the saucepan bells again began to tinkle—

'The mill can never grind
With the water that is past.'

The Princess turned. 'Ask the swineherd,' she said, 'if he will have ten kisses from the ladies of my court.'

'Oh no!' screamed the ladies, shuddering.

But Lady Priscilla was ordered to carry the message.

'No, thank you. Ten kisses from the Princess, or I keep my pot,' was the swineherd's reply.

'How trying, how exceedingly awkward,' said the Princess when she heard. 'But I must have the



saucepan, so all stand round me and spread wide your skirts that no one may see.'

Then the swineherd was called, and he took the ten kisses, and the Princess got the saucepan.

It was not long before the Princess found out the full magic power of the pot, which was kept boiling constantly. So now, instead of playing at visiting or at ball, she and her ladies amused themselves finding out who were having pancakes for dinner, who cherry-pie, who apple-fritters, and who rice-pudding.

'How interesting!' said one, clapping her hands.

'How exciting!' exclaimed another, whirling round.

'Hush!' said the Princess. 'Remember that I am the Emperor's daughter, and no one must know of our plaything or how we came by it.'

'Never, NEVER, NEVER,' cried the ladies-in-waiting.

Meanwhile the swineherd Prince was not idle. Each day he made some new wonder. Most marvellous of all was a rattle which, when whirled round, played all the waltzes and jigs that had been heard since the beginning of the world.

As the Princess one day passed the hut, the strain of a waltz reached her.

'Go,' she again said, turning this time to Lady Clarinda, 'ask the swineherd the price of the instrument I hear. But remember, no more kisses!'

Lady Clarinda entered the hut on tiptoe, and saw the rattle whirling round and round.

'What will you take for the rattle?' she asked.

'A hundred kisses from the Princess.'

'Wh—at?'

‘Not one fewer.’

‘The poor fellow is out of his mind,’ said the Princess when she heard. And she walked away. But again she turned. ‘Tell him that he shall have ten kisses as before. If he wants more, he must take them from my ladies-in-waiting.’

‘Oh no!’ shrieked the ladies in chorus.

‘Nonsense,’ said the Princess. ‘If I can kiss him, you can.’

So again Lady Clarinda went to the hut.

‘A hundred kisses from the Princess, or I keep my rattle,’ said the swineherd.

When the Princess heard this she sighed deeply, she but said, ‘Stand round me and spread wide your skirts. The rattle must be mine.’

‘Whatever is the meaning of that crowd near the pig-stye?’ wondered the Emperor, as he stood on the palace balcony. ‘Why, it is the ladies-in-waiting. What are they up to now?’ And going downstairs his Majesty crossed the grounds, and, unnoticed, stood near the circle.

‘Eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three,’ counted the ladies.

‘What does it mean?’ thought the Emperor.

‘Eighty-four, eighty-five, eighty-six.’

His Majesty stood on tiptoe. There was his daughter in the centre of the group, the swineherd’s arm around her.

Taking off his slipper, the Emperor flung it at the swineherd’s head, just as he was taking the eighty-seventh kiss.

‘March! Out of my kingdom! Begone,’ he cried. And the Princess and the swineherd were thrust out of the city.

It was pouring wet, and, without the city walls, the swineherd scolded and the Princess wept.

‘Alas!’ cried she, ‘if only I had married the handsome young Prince! How miserable I am!’

The swineherd disappeared behind a tree, washed the brown and black stains from his face, and threw aside his disguise. Then he stepped forward dressed as a prince. The Princess bowed before him.

‘Too late,’ said the Prince. ‘You did not care for me when I gave you my best. You could prize neither the rose nor the nightingale. But for the sake of a paltry plaything you would kiss a swineherd. You are rightly served.’

Then the Prince went back to his own little kingdom, but the door of his castle was never opened to the foolish Princess who followed him. She had to stand without, and sing the words that were now so full of meaning—

‘The mill can never grind
With the water that is past.’

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

LONG ago and long ago, in a beautiful country where the mountains wear snow-caps all the year round, there stood not far the one from the other a castle, a farm, and a monastery. All were built on the bank of a great river which flowed down a mountain-side. Furthest up the mountain was the castle, furthest down the monastery, and between them stood the farm. The swift river which ran past these dwellings carried with it large blocks of ice to the silent valley below. A lonely valley it was, and never lonelier than at the Christmas time of which I am going to tell you. For across the mountains had the Count gone from the castle, and with him, all who could draw the sword. And among the little company was the farmer. He had, indeed, left home with a heavy heart. Always before had he been ready for battle, but to-day he grieved sorely to leave his wife and his little three-year-old girl.

Christmas was but a day off, and in the kitchen at the farm the servants made ready the Christmas feast. But the mistress of the house was not there. And why? Because she was sitting mournfully beside the bed of her little daughter. Estelle was the apple of her eye, and Estelle was ill. So feverish was she, that her head throbbed and her throat felt

dry and parched. On one side of the little girl's bed sat her mother, on the other stood a doctor from the monastery. As he looked at the child, he shook his head sadly. Then he mixed a doze of medicine and gave it to her.

No sooner had Estelle taken the draught than heavy footsteps were heard outside the door, and in a moment an old man entered, carrying in his left hand a broad-brimmed hat, and in his right a lamb carved out of wood. He was the shepherd at the farm.

The old man frowned as the doctor took the medicine-glass from Estelle. Then he stepped up to the little bed and held the toy-lamb before the child. He had painted its eyes black, and its mouth he had made red with the juice of a berry.

But Estelle would not look at the toy, so the old shepherd laid it on the table beside her, and slipped away as quietly as he could. Again the doctor from the monastery gave a dose of medicine to the little one, and then he, too, stole softly away, leaving Estelle and her mother alone.

Now the child sank into a deep sleep, and she slept all day until sundown. The mother's heart was cheered. By the window she knelt and thanked the good God. Then still kneeling, she gazed as she had so often gazed before upon the gorgeous brilliance of the setting sun, and she rejoiced. She watched its golden glow fade, and within her heart there was peace.

But the peace was short-lived. As the evening shadows fell, Estelle awoke. Again her little body

tossed from side to side. Her forehead burned like fire. She knew not what words she said, and suddenly, raising her head from the pillow, she sat bolt upright. 'See, mother, see the beautiful lady and all the little children. And the beautiful lady gives me white roses, Christmas roses.' Then the little one fell back on her pillow and her eyes closed.

The mother now knelt by the little white bed sobbing softly. What could her little daughter's strange words mean? Had she seen in a dream the angels of heaven? Was she going to them? Must she die?

But it was not for long that the mother knelt in despair. She hastened to find a servant to send to the monastery for the doctor. But it was Christmas Eve, and men-servants and maids were at church. One old woman alone had been left behind.

'Keep watch by the little Estelle while I am gone,' said the mistress of the farm, hastily wrapping her cloak about her. Then with a glance at the sleeping child, she stepped out into the twilight that rested, a grey garment of mist, over the snowfields.

She would go to the monastery and fetch the doctor. Down the mountain-side she sped, and now came to a pine-forest. Through it she must pass. There was no lonelier spot, and the silence was broken only by two crows that flapped their wings overhead. But a light gleamed through the pine-trees. It shone from the monastery church. The mother hastened her steps across the crisp snow. Suddenly she stood still. She held her breath. Was she in a dream?



Through the forest tripped a procession of tiny children with pale faces. They were led by a tall, beautiful lady, who wore a long flowing robe.

The mother, trembling at the strange sight, hid behind the trunk of a tree and let the procession pass. But at the very end came a little maiden who could barely keep pace with the others, for she would step upon her dress, which trailed upon the ground. And the mother-heart of the farmer's wife went out toward the little one, and, forgetting her own fears, she came out from her hiding-place, and stooped down, and tucked up the little frock. Now the child could keep pace with her companions.

At the same moment, the tall, beautiful lady turned her head, and seeing the kind deed, she pointed with her forefinger to the ground at her feet. As she did so, the monastery bells rang through the air, and the procession vanished like mist scattered by the wind. Estelle's mother stood in the twilight, alone on the snow-covered ground.

Wonderingly she approached the spot to which the lady had pointed, and there, through the crisp snow, broad green leaves and white blossoms had pierced their way. A bed of Christmas roses lay at her feet.

'My child's dream ! white roses ! Christmas roses !' exclaimed the mother, as she gathered three blossoms and hurried back to the farm.

The lame old woman still kept watch, and on the other side of the bed stood the shepherd. He did not believe the medicine the doctor from the

monastery gave Estelle did her any good, and so the old man had prepared her a drink from wild berries. It was 'a fine cure for the fever,' he said.

The mother stepped up to the bed, laid the three roses on the counterpane, and watched the child anxiously. The little one seized the blossoms with tiny, trembling hands, smelt them, and then sneezed loud and strong.

'God bless her!' exclaimed mother, shepherd, and maid, with one voice. Then the child asked for a sip of cold water, turned on her side, and fell asleep.

'Thank God! the fever has left her,' said the shepherd. 'The sneeze has saved her—and my drink made from the berries. But where did you gather these Christmas roses?'

The farmer's wife quietly told the old man of what had happened in the pine-forest.

'And you did not know that was the Queen of the Fairies and her elves? Why, every year from Christmas Eve to Twelfth Night she roams the forest. Her home was on the mountain-side until the monks built the monastery, but at the first chime of the church bell she vanished like mist, and her elves with her. Since then, she returns only at Christmastide. It was good for you, mistress, that you were kind to the elf. The Fairy never fails to help those who befriend her children. Last year'—and the old man would have talked on until cock-crow, if the farmer's wife had not gently led him to the door of the sick-room.

Now the mother was once more alone with her child. The little one still slept, and in her hand

were the three Christmas roses. Once only she murmured in her sleep. It was when a burst of music from the church organ, ushering in Christmas Day, rang across forest and field, and was heard through the closed windows of the farm. But it was only a murmur, and little Estelle slept till morning. The mother knelt long by the bedside in prayer.

When the doctor from the monastery came early next morning, he found the little patient sitting up in bed, playing with her toy-lamb. On the counterpane lay the Christmas roses.

‘The fever has gone, the fever has gone!’ exclaimed the delighted doctor. ‘It was the costly medicine that I prepared for your child that has worked the miracle. You will, I am sure, send a present of thanksgiving to the monastery.’

But the mistress of the farm drew aside the doctor, and told him of what had happened in the pine-forest, and of all the shepherd had told her.

‘You have dreamed,’ he said as he listened to her story, ‘you have dreamed, or the snow has blinded your eyes.’ But when he was shown the three white blooms, he said, ‘It must have been the little angels from heaven that you saw, led by the Queen of Heaven herself. You will send a present to the monastery in gratitude to her for her healing gift of the roses, and in gratitude to me for the costly draught.’

And the farmer’s wife promised, and that same Christmas morning a side of bacon, two fat geese, eggs, butter, and a bottle of red wine were carried by a panting maid to the monastery.

But the old shepherd who came later in the day to see little Estelle, and heard of the doctor's visit, said, 'It was the draught I prepared from the berries and the gift of the toy-lamb that worked the miracle.'

And the mother said, 'You, too, shall have a Christmas gift, and she sent to his cottage a goose and butter and eggs.'

When Estelle's father returned from the battle, having won the victory, he found his little girl sitting up well and happy on the rug before the fire, playing with a toy-lamb. On the window-sill stood a vase, in which still bloomed the magic roses that had been the reward of his wife's gentle deed.

And often, in days to come, Estelle heard the tale of that Christmastide when she was three years old, and she ever strove to follow in the footprints of that Heavenly Queen—or was it, after all, the Queen of the Fairies?—who had revealed to her mother the magic roses, which gleamed as white as the crisp snow among which they bloomed.

THE HUNCHBACK

IN an olden city of the East lived a tailor and his wife. They were rich, and happy, and fond of amusement, and often they would go out in search of sights that would give them a hearty laugh.

One evening, as they were returning home, they saw a hunchback playing on a tambourine and singing merrily. A number of onlookers had gathered round him, and the tailor and his wife gladly joined the little group.

So entertaining did they find the hunchback, that the tailor invited the little man home to supper. The invitation was at once accepted, and the tailor, his wife, and the hunchback set off together. But when they had gone some way the tailor said he must remain behind to purchase supper. This he did, while his wife and the hunchback continued on their way, and reached home.

Presently the tailor followed, having bought some cooked fish, and bread and sweets. Then they sat down to eat.

But the tailor's wife, whether because she grudged nothing to her guest, or for what reason I cannot tell, crammed a large piece of fish into the mouth of the hunchback. Then covering his mouth with

her hand, she exclaimed, 'Chew it thou shalt not, but at one gulp must thou swallow it whole!'

As he had no choice, this the hunchback did, and there being a large and sharp bone in the portion, it stuck in his throat, choked him, and he died.

The tailor, on seeing the fate of the merry little man, threw his arms in the air, and cried, 'Alas! that the poor creature should have died at our hands. Alas! alas!' And he wailed loud and long.

'Foolish one!' exclaimed his wife, 'whence this idle grief?'

'But what can I do?' asked the distracted tailor; 'it is at our hands that this innocent man has met his death.'

'Arise,' she answered, 'and carry him in thine arms. Around him cast a silken shawl. Then follow me, for this very night we must set forth. And to those who question, say, "This is my poor son, and yonder is his mother. We take him to the doctor that he may be healed of his sickness."'

The tailor no sooner heard these words than he lifted the hunchback tenderly, and followed his wife out of the house and through the streets of the city.

'Alas! my child,' cried the woman, as she turned to look at the bundle in her husband's arms. 'Alas, that thou shouldst bear such pain! In what part is it that thou sufferest most? Wherefore, oh wherefore should the small-pox thus attack my son?'

So it was that all who saw them said, 'Poor creatures! Their son is smitten with the small-pox.'

So they trudged on, asking first of one, then of another, the abode of the doctor.

And the people directed them to the house of a physician not far off, and when they came thither the tailor knocked at the door.

Then there came to answer it a black slave-girl, who, when she saw a bundle in the man's arms, believed it to be a child. 'You would see my master?' she asked.

'Yea,' replied the tailor's wife, 'for our boy is ill. Therefore take this piece of gold and give it to the doctor, and ask him to come down to see the lad.'

Then the black slave-girl made haste and went upstairs to carry the message to her master.

She had no sooner gone than the tailor's wife followed her as far as the first landing, and turning to her husband, said, 'Place the hunchback against this wall, and let us be gone.'

Therefore the tailor set the dead hunchback against the wall on the first landing, and went downstairs after his wife, and out into the dark night.

Meantime the black slave-girl told her master that at the door were a man and woman with their sick child, and that they had sent up a piece of gold in order to have his advice.

When the physician's eyes fell upon the money, he rejoiced, for he was a Jew, and loved the sight of gold. 'I will go at once,' he said, and getting up in haste, he went downstairs in the dark. On the landing he knocked against the dead hunchback, who went rolling to the bottom of the stair.

'Alas!' exclaimed the doctor, 'this poor creature

has died at my hands, alas! alas!' and he wailed loud and long.

Presently he went upstairs and told his wife what had befallen.

'Foolish man, wherefore sittest thou idle? If the dead man remain here until daybreak, then will our lives be lost. Let us rather carry him to the house of the Sultan's steward, and let him down through the roof into the passage beneath.'

So the Jew doctor and his wife between them carried the dead hunchback to the house where dwelt the Sultan's steward. Then by the roof they gently let him down into the passage below. Having done thus, they walked away.

Not long afterwards the Sultan's steward, who had been out, returned home. Having lighted a candle, he went upstairs to go to bed. And there, leaning against the wall of the upstairs passage, sat a man.

Of late, the Sultan's steward had had many goods stolen from his house. Now he had discovered the thief. Such leastways was his thought.

'Ah,' he exclaimed, 'ah, thou shalt not escape me this time. Thou art asleep, art thou? Well, thou wilt get a surprise when thou wakest.' With that the steward seized a stick and struck the hunchback on the chest. A second stroke fell upon the shoulder, and the dead man fell over.

'Merciful Heavens, help me,' exclaimed the terrified steward, as, bending over the supposed thief, he found, to his horror, that the man was dead.

It was now very late. Day would soon dawn,

and if the steward was to act it must be at once.

Lifting the hunchback up on his shoulders, he went forth and stopped not at all until he came to the market-place. There he placed the dead man, standing upon his feet against the wall. And so he left him.

Soon afterwards the Sultan's broker drew near the market-place. He had drunk too much wine, and therefore his mind worked foolishly. Early in the night some one had snatched off his turban, and now, when he saw a man standing against the wall of the market-place, he thought, 'That fellow will do likewise. He, too, will knock off my turban. I will not have it.' So saying, he clenched his fist and struck the hunchback on the neck.

Down fell the dead man upon the pavement.

The broker, still not thinking clearly, called out to the watchman of the market to come to help him punish a man who meant to knock off his turban. Then he jumped up and down upon the chest of the dead man, while with his hands he tried to throttle him.

When the watchman arrived on the spot, he immediately saw that the hunchback was dead, and seizing the hands of the broker, he bound them behind his back and led him to the house of the magistrate.

On the way the broker became sober, and exclaimed, 'Alas, how strange that this hunchback should have died from a blow of my hand. I had given him but one blow when he fell down dead.'

The hunchback and the broker passed the re-

mainder of the night in the magistrate's house, and in the morning the gallows were set up, that the broker might die for his crime.

The executioner had arrived, and the rope had been thrown around the neck of the condemned man, when the Sultan's steward pushed his way through the crowd.

'Stay,' he cried, 'it was I who killed the hunchback.'

'Thou!' said the magistrate, 'and wherefore didst thou kill him?'

'Because,' replied the steward, 'when late last night I entered my house, I at last found the thief who had robbed me of my goods. With my stout stick I struck him once upon the chest and once upon the shoulders. At the second stroke he fell down, a dead man. Seeing this, I carried him on my shoulders to the market-place, and there I left him, standing upon his feet against the wall.'

When the magistrate heard these words, he said, 'Hang the steward and set the broker free.'

So the executioner took the rope from off the neck of the broker, and threw it around the neck of the steward, and was about to hang him when the Jew doctor rushed through the crowd.

'Stop,' he cried, 'it was I who killed the hunchback. He came to my house to be cured of a sickness. Coming downstairs in the dark, and seeing not the man, I knocked against him, and he fell to the ground dead.'

When the magistrate heard these words, he said, 'Hang the doctor and set the steward free.'

So the executioner took the rope from off the neck of the steward, and threw it around the neck of the doctor, and was about to hang him when the tailor arrived, and forcing his way through the people, cried, 'Stay, it was I who killed the hunchback. It happened thus. Yesterday I was out with my wife in search of amusement, and, coming home in the evening, we saw this hunchback singing merrily and playing on a tambourine. We invited him to our house to sup, and my wife, for what reason I cannot tell, crammed a large piece of fish into his mouth, whereupon, swallowing it at a gulp, he choked upon a fish bone. Then we took him to the house of the Jew doctor, and the door was opened by a black slave-girl. While she went to tell her master that a patient awaited his advice, I carried the dead man upstairs to the first landing, and set him against the wall. My wife and I then walked away. Therefore, when the doctor came downstairs in the dark, and knocked the hunchback so that he fell to the ground, he knew not that he was already a dead man, but thought that he had killed him. Thou seest it was not so, therefore hang me and set the doctor free.'

When the magistrate heard these words, he said, 'So do. Hang the tailor and set the doctor free. This verily is a story that should be told in a book.'

So the executioner took the rope from off the neck of the Jew doctor, and threw it around the neck of the tailor, and was about to hang him, when a messenger tore through the crowd, crying, 'Stop, by the command of the Sultan, stop.'

Now news had been brought to the Sultan of the death of the hunchback, who was in truth his own jester. And when he heard that first one and then another had come before the magistrate pleading guilty of the hunchback's death, he ordered that one and all should be brought before him.

So the magistrate, and the executioner, and the tailor, and the doctor, and the steward, and the broker all came before the Sultan, bearing with them the dead hunchback. And when they entered the presence-chamber, they fell upon their knees, while the magistrate related to the Sultan all that had happened.

And the Sultan, although he mourned for the death of his jester, was moved to merriment by the strange tale, and ordered that it should be written down in letters of gold for all to read. And since that day it has been a favourite story with thousands of boys and girls, and I hope you will like it too.

THE FROG PRINCE

IN olden days there lived a King whose daughters were all beautiful, but the face of the youngest was radiant as the sun.

The favourite plaything of this Princess was a golden ball. Often when it was too hot to play in the palace gardens, she would wander with her ball into the forest, and toss or bounce it under the shade of an old lime-tree. Then when she grew tired, she would sit by the edge of a cool well beneath the lime, and wish it might be summer all the year round.

One bright morning the Princess was playing as merrily as ever with her golden ball. Toss, catch, toss, catch, toss,—but this time the Princess did not catch. The ball fell on the sloping grass, rolled straight into the silver well, and immediately disappeared.

The poor Princess sat down and wept as if her heart would break. Nothing, she felt, could ever make up for the loss of her golden ball.

As she cried bitterly, sitting by the edge of the well, she was startled to hear a voice ask, ‘What is the matter, Princess?’

Looking round, she saw a frog stretch its broad ugly face out of the water.

‘Oh, it is you, is it, old Splasher?’

‘Yes; what is the matter, Princess?’

‘Matter? I want my ball, my golden ball. It has fallen into the water.’

‘There is no need to cry about that, I can bring it to you.’

‘Oh, thank you, thank you, dear Frog.’

‘But what will you give me, when I bring you your golden ball?’

‘Oh, anything, anything,—my silken robes, my pearls, my diamonds, even my crown.’

‘What care I for silken robes, for pearls, for diamonds, or even for the crown you wear upon your head? If you will promise to let me sit at your table, eat off your golden plate, drink from your silver cup, and sleep in your little white bed, then I will fetch you the golden ball.’

‘Yes, yes, I promise. Bring it. Quick.’

The Frog disappeared under the water, and the Princess thought, ‘What nonsense the silly old Splasher talks. Of course he cannot come with me to the palace. This well in the forest is his home, and here he must live and croak until he die.’

In a little while the Frog came back, carrying in his mouth the golden ball. He threw it on the grass, at the feet of the Princess.

‘Oh, my ball, my pretty toy,’ she exclaimed, as she picked it up, and ran off toward the palace.

‘Wait, wait,’ croaked the Frog, ‘I cannot run so quickly.’

But the Princess did not listen. She hurried



home, rejoicing to possess once more her favourite plaything, but forgetful of the kind Frog and her promise.

The next day, as the Princess was sitting at dinner with the King and his courtiers, they heard a sound, as of something coming flip-flop upstairs. All laid down their knives and forks to listen. Flip-flop, flip-flop. The sound came nearer and nearer. Flip-flop, flip-flop. Then it ceased just outside the door of the dining-hall, and one knock after another was heard, while a voice croaked—

‘ Youngest daughter of the King,
Listen to the song I sing.
Yesterday beside a well
In the leafy forest dell
Tossing high your golden ball,
On the grass you let it fall.
Who shall picture your dismay
As you watched it roll away,
And in the well of water bright,
Slowly disappear from sight?
Oh, your sighs, your tears that fell!
Till a voice spoke from the well,
“ Princess, if your ball I save,
Will you grant the boon I crave?
Gold and pearl and ruby rare
Give to those who count them fair,
I but ask as my reward
Leave to grace your father’s board,
Off your golden plate to sup,
Drink out of your silver cup,
And when darkness veils the sky,
In your snow-white bed to lie.”
“ Oh,” you cried, “ I grant it all!
Only give me back my ball.”

Princess, from my cool retreat
See me toiling to your feet;
Task accomplished claims its due,
Yield the boon I sought of you.'

'My daughter,' said the King, 'what you have promised, you must perform. Open the door.'

So the Princess opened it, and the Frog came in and flopped along close to her feet, until she sat down.

Then he reminded her, 'You promised I should sit at your table.'

The Princess hesitated, but the King said, 'What you have promised, you must perform.' So a chair was placed for the Frog by the Princess.

But the Frog asked to be put on the table. 'You promised that I should eat off your golden plate and drink from your silver cup.'

The Princess drew her plate away, and lifted the cup in her hand, but the King repeated, 'What you have promised, you must perform.'

So the Frog thoroughly enjoyed dinner, but the Princess could not swallow a morsel.

When evening came, the Frog said, 'I am tired. Carry me now to your little white bed. We must sleep.'

Then the Princess began to cry. How could she let that cold slippery frog, that she could not bear to touch, sleep in her little bed?

But the King said once more, 'What you have promised, you must perform.' Then he added, 'You must never despise anything that has helped you in time of need.'

So the Princess caught the Frog with the tips of two fingers, and carried him upstairs to her own pretty room. There she put him down in a corner. But when she popped into bed, the Frog came jumping towards her, and croaked, 'You promised I should sleep in your little white bed. If you do not let me, I shall call the King.'

'You hideous thing, you may sleep there,' she exclaimed angrily, picking him up, and flinging him with all her might against the wall.

The Frog struck the wall and fell to the ground. Then——

The Princess rubbed her eyes. Who was that handsome Prince standing where the Frog had fallen? And where was the Frog? Was it a dream? The Princess pinched herself. No, she was wide awake.

'I was changed into a frog,' said the Prince, 'by a wicked fairy, and a frog I had to remain until I was flung from the hand of a fair Princess. So you have saved my life, and I want, above everything in the world, to marry you, and to take you back with me to the kingdom that I left so long ago.'

Then the face of the Princess was once more as radiant as the sun, and the King, when he heard the tale, was almost as glad as his daughter, and ordered the wedding-feast to be got ready without delay.

And the day after the wedding, a golden coach, drawn by eight snow-white horses, dashed up to the palace gates, to carry the Prince back to his kingdom, and with him his fair bride.

Behind the coach rode Henry, the faithful servant

whose heart had nearly burst with grief when his master was turned into a frog.

As they rode gaily off, bowing to the cheering crowd, the horses pranced, the bells on the reins jingled, and all was rejoicing and merriment. But suddenly the Prince and Princess were startled by the sound of a terrific crack.

‘What was that?’ the Prince asked the faithful Henry.

‘Dear master,’ replied the servant with a smile, ‘there is nothing to fear. I can explain the strange noise. Years ago, when you were turned into a frog, I bound my heart with iron bands to keep it from breaking, and the sound you heard was the cracking of the bands, which I no longer need.’

Then they rode on, and as they passed the well in the forest, the Princess drew from her pocket the golden ball, and rejoiced to think of all the good fortune it had brought to her and to her dear Prince.

THE HEART OF THE PRINCESS JOAN

It was long ago and long ago that there lived a proud Queen who hated all fairy folk. This was because they had more power than she herself. Nothing made this Queen more angry than if a fairy came near the palace where she and the King lived.

One day there was great rejoicing throughout the land, for to the King and the Queen came a tiny baby girl. Every one was glad, and most glad of all were the father and mother of the little Princess Joan.

The proud Queen spent long hours by the cradle watching the tiny pink and white face and telling the little Princess how great she would be in the far-off days to come.

‘My pretty one,’ she murmured, ‘you will be rich, and you will be beautiful, and you will marry a Prince. Then some day you will be Queen, and sit upon a throne, and wear a crown, and live in a fine palace, and have jewels and lands to your heart’s content.’

One morning, just as the Queen had finished talking to Baby Joan, she heard a little rustling noise, and, looking up, she saw, there, at the other side of

the cradle, what do you think? A fierce-looking woman dressed in yellow from top to toe. Her hair was quite covered by a yellow cap, and her eyes were as yellow as her dress. 'Pray, how do you know, Queen, that your child will be so happy?' she asked. 'By whose help will you get for her such riches?'

'I will ask the help of none,' answered the proud mother, 'for I am Queen of the land, and what I wish, that shall be.'

The yellow woman laughed. 'Be not too sure, vain Queen, but give heed to my words. When next the moon shines bright, guard well the Princess, lest aught that is already hers be stolen from her.'

'Foolish one,' answered the Queen, 'know you not that no thief dare come near her?' But as she spoke the yellow woman vanished, and the Queen knew she must be a wicked fairy.

That night the sky was dark, and the next it was yet darker, but the third night the moon shone bright and clear, and, as the clock struck the first stroke of twelve, the Queen awoke and looked at her baby asleep in its cradle. But between the strokes of the clock the proud mother heard a faint whistling outside the window, which grew louder and louder each moment, until the baby woke and began to cry. The Queen tried to quiet the little one, but all in vain. She cried more and more bitterly, and at last gave a loud scream. At the same moment the Queen saw something like a tiny bird with soft, pink feathers flutter across the room.

It flew straight out of the window. Then the whistling ceased, and when the Queen looked at her baby, it was sleeping calmly, and she tried to forget the yellow fairy and the strange whistling sound.

The nurse of the Princess Joan was a very wise old woman, and she watched the child anxiously. 'The Princess is under a charm, though what it be I cannot tell,' she said.

As she grew older, the little girl became a puzzle to others as well as her old nurse. She never shed a tear. If angry, she would stamp her foot and her eyes would flash, but she never cried. She loved nobody. When her little dog died, she laughed. When the King, her father, went to war it did not grieve her, and when he returned she was not glad. She never kissed her mother, and altogether she seemed a hard-hearted girl. But when her ladies blamed her, the old nurse would say, 'It is not her fault. The Princess is under a charm, though what it be I cannot tell.'

When Princess Joan grew up she was the loveliest woman in all the land, but she loved no one, and the suffering of others never made her grieve.

In the neighbouring country lived a King and Queen who had one son, named Michael. Every one loved the young Prince, who was as good and kind as he was handsome. So kind was he that the great lords and poor beggars alike brought their troubles to him. And Michael was sorry for them and helped them.

In the country where Michael lived was a high hill. On the top of the hill stood a round tower.

At the top of the tower lived an old wizard, hundreds and hundreds of years old. No one ever went near the old man except Michael, who did not fear him at all, but would even watch him at his work.

One bright moonlight night the Prince walked alone on the hillside. A bright light shone from the top of the tower, and Michael thought he would pay the wizard a visit. So he strolled up to the foot of the tower, and then pushed open a little door. Next he climbed the narrow, dark, winding staircase which led to the room at the top. There the wizard lived, and his room was bright as day, for it was lit by a lamp, made by the old man himself. The lamp held no oil, but the sunbeams filled it every day, and it held them fast by night.

In the middle of this bright room sat the wizard, his beard flowing to the foot of his long white gown. And as white as beard or gown was his thin white face. But his eyes were bright as two candles.

When Michael came into the room the old man was looking at a book of coloured pictures. The pictures were of little men and women about three inches high, who moved across the page as if they were alive. 'In this book,' said the wizard, 'I keep the portraits of all the men and women in the world.'

'How amusing!' said Michael, 'pray show me likenesses of Kings and Queens and Princesses,' and he knelt down by the old man and looked over his shoulder. 'Oh, who is that?' he asked, as they

came to a lovely Princess, 'I never saw any one so beautiful.'

'That is the Princess Joan, the daughter of the King and Queen who live in the neighbouring country. At her you should not look. She brings trouble to all who love her.'

'I do not care, I do not care,' cried the Prince. 'She is beautiful, beautiful.'

'Do not think of her,' said the wizard, closing the book. 'If you do, you will one day be sorry.'

But Prince Michael could think of nobody else. He left the tower and returned to the palace, but he slept only to dream of the beautiful Princess.

Next morning he went to the King, and said, 'My father, I have come to beg you to send to the King of the next country to ask if I may have his daughter, Princess Joan, for my wife. I have seen her portrait, and there is no one in the world I love so well.'

The King was delighted, and at once sent to beg for the hand of Princess Joan for his son, Prince Michael.

Joan's father was delighted too, but the Queen's heart sank, as she thought, 'When Prince Michael sees Joan and finds out that she is unlike any maid who has ever lived, he will refuse to wed her after all.'

But she said nothing of her fears, and the messenger returned to Michael's father laden with presents, and bearing a letter which said that the wedding of Prince Michael and the Princess Joan would give great joy to all.

But before the messenger returned, Michael grew impatient, and he said to himself, 'I shall wait no longer, but I shall dress myself as a peasant, and go to see my Princess. Then, too, I shall see what mean those strange words of the wizard, 'Do not think of her. If you do, you will one day be sorry!'

So, dressed as a peasant, he set out, having told no one where he was going. Day and night he travelled, until he came to the country where Joan's father was King. When at last he reached the palace gardens, he saw there a group of lovely ladies, and nearer him, most beautiful of all, sat the Princess Joan. Her hair was yellow as ripe corn, her face like a blush rose, and her eyes were blue as forget-me-nots, but when she lifted them Michael saw they were clear and hard as glass, and her voice when she spoke rang as a harsh, cold bell.

While the Prince stood aside unseen, a little serving-maid ran up to the Princess, crying bitterly. 'Alas, Princess,' she said, 'my father, the huntsman, has broken his leg. I pray you, let me go to him.'

'Why should you cry when it is your father, and not you, that is hurt? But you may go, as you have made yourself ugly, crying.'

Next a groom came from the palace. 'Your Royal Highness, the horse that you rode yesterday is dead. We fear it is because you rode so far.'

'Dead, is it?' cried Joan. 'Then get me another quickly, that I may ride to-morrow, a good, strong animal, or it may die before we reach home, and then I should have to walk.'



The Prince turned away sorrowfully. 'The wizard was right,' he said. 'No one could love Princess Joan and be happy, and yet I cannot help caring for her.'

For some days Michael stayed near the palace and watched the Princess, and listened to her as she passed, but never once did he hear her say a kind word. And yet each time he looked at her she seemed lovelier than before, and he loved her more than ever.

When at last Michael returned to his own home, he found great rejoicing throughout the land, for the messenger had brought the letter from Joan's father saying that the wedding of his daughter and Michael would give great joy to all. Preparations were being made to receive the bride.

'And now,' said the King to Michael, 'you must again journey to the Court of Joan's father, this time with servants, and horses, and presents for the bride.'

So Michael set out, but all along the way he kept saying to himself, 'I will never marry my Princess until she loves me as I love her. She seems to love nobody.'

The King and Queen sat in state to receive the Prince, and beside them was Joan, looking more beautiful than ever, in a dress as blue as her eyes.

Trumpets were blown and bells rang, as Prince Michael entered, followed by his train. He passed up the hall to the thrones on which the King and Queen sat, and kneeling on one knee kissed their hands, and then the hand of the Princess Joan.

But he did not look into her face, and his own was so sad that all at Court wondered what the matter could be.

At night, when the merrymakings were going on, the Prince begged the Queen to let him speak to her alone. The poor Queen quaked, for she thought, 'Alack, alack, I fear he no longer wishes to marry my beautiful Joan.' But she sent away every one except the old nurse.

'You look ill at ease, sad Queen, and I doubt not it is that you guess what I would ask. Tell me truly, why the Princess Joan is so unlike all other maidens?'

'That would I gladly tell you, did I but know,' moaned the Queen.

Then the old nurse spoke. Slowly and solemnly she said, 'The Princess Joan is under a charm. The charm was wrought when she was a babe. Until it be broken, the Princess will be as she now is.'

'And what is the charm?' anxiously asked the Prince.

'That I know not,' said the old nurse. But she told him of the yellow fairy and of the strange whistling the Queen had heard that dark night long ago, as she sat by the cradle of the baby Joan.

The Prince sighed deeply. Then he said, 'O Queen, there must be no wedding until the yellow fairy be found, and the charm be broken. To-morrow at break of day will I wander forth, and to the world's end will I journey, ere I lose hope of freeing my fair Princess. One boon only do I ask. For seven years let Joan await my return, and until

these seven years be past, remember she is still mine.'

But the Queen cried violently, 'Marry her now, I implore of you, or return to your own country and forget her for ever.'

'I have sworn that I will not marry your daughter until she loves me as I love her,' replied Michael. 'To forget her were not possible. Bid her, therefore, be ready at dawn to bid me farewell. And I pray you, let it be told my father and mother why I do not return.'

The Queen was too much distressed to reply, but the old nurse smiled to Michael, and said, 'That which you seek I am fain you should find, for you are a noble Prince.'

Next morning at break of day, Michael said farewell to Joan, who looked lovelier than ever in the faint grey light.

'Good-bye, and for seven years, Joan, forget me not. I may within that time return to marry you.'

'But why do you go?' asked Joan. 'Do you not see that now I shall have no wedding gifts?'

Michael sighed as he mounted his horse and bade her farewell. When he looked back, the Queen and Joan still stood at the door. The Queen sobbed as if her heart would break, but the Princess laughed.

Prince Michael rode on and on until he reached his own home. Then he walked to the round tower on the hillside. He climbed to the room at the top. There he found the old wizard looking very grave.

'I know why you are come, my son,' he said in

slow and solemn tones. 'You want to know where to seek her who has charmed the Princess Joan. You would learn how the spell may be broken. But I tell you, you would do better far to forget the cold Princess and return to your own home.'

'I shall never forget her,' answered Michael, 'and all my life long will I seek to break the charm.'

When the old man saw how much in earnest the Prince was, and how bent he seemed on setting Joan free, he again spoke solemnly. 'My son, I can tell you why the Princess cares for no one, and why she feels no sorrow. It is because she has no heart with which to love or to pity. A fairy stole it when she was a baby—a hideous, wicked, yellow fairy. She said she did this to punish the Queen for her pride. Until the heart of the Princess Joan is found and given back to her, she will remain as hard and as cold as stone.'

'Then it is her heart I must seek,' said Michael. 'Pray tell me where it may be found.'

'The yellow fairy took it to a castle in which are kept all the hearts of men and women that fairies steal, or that they themselves throw away. A spiteful old gnome guards this castle and pays no heed to those who beg to enter. My son, return rather to your home, for if you journey to this far-off castle, you may be killed or enchanted when you reach its gates.'

'Go I must, and go I shall,' said the Prince. 'Point me, I pray you, the way.'

'If it must be even so,' said the wizard, 'take this,' and he handed Michael a small round piece

of glass. 'Look through it at the stars, and you will see them of all colours, blue, green, red, yellow. The deepest, brightest red star you see, follow it. Many miles will it lead you by sea and land, but at last it will surely bring you to the castle wherein is imprisoned the heart of the Princess Joan.'

The Prince thanked the wizard, took the glass, and hurried from the dingy room, down the dark staircase, and out into the starlit night. Michael looked through the glass. So amazed was he that he nearly shouted at the sight. The stars were like jewels, green, blue, yellow, red, and in the south, the colour of a blood-red rose, hung the star he was to follow.

Then he looked back towards his father's palace. 'Farewell,' he said, 'farewell, until I return bringing with me my Princess Joan.'

So Michael set off, and journeyed and journeyed until he reached towns and villages he had never before seen. By night he wandered on, with the stars shining overhead and the deep red star as his guide. But as the stars grew pale and the sun rose in the east, he lay down and slept. Through many strange lands did he pass, till his heart sank as he thought, 'So may I wander all round the world and yet not find the heart of my Princess.'

At last he came to the seashore. Michael shrank from the cold grey waters that stretched before him, but the great red star shone over them, and he knew he must follow.

It was evening. A few fishermen rested beside their boats on the beach. 'My good men,' said the

Prince, going up to them, 'for what will you sell me one of your boats? I would cross the sea.'

'But,' said the men, 'these are but fishing boats that we sail in not far from the shore. Besides, never ship has crossed this sea, nor is it known what lies beyond.'

'Then I go to see,' said the Prince. 'Look, here is gold. Launch me your largest boat.'

So the best fishing boat was launched, and Michael set sail, and steered as the red star guided. All night long he sailed across the cold grey sea, but, when morning dawned, he dropped anchor, and rested until his guiding star again shone in the evening sky. But that night, so tired was he that he fell asleep, and when he awoke the sun had risen and his boat drifted close to a flat and lonely shore. Beyond the shore loomed a big building of grey marble. Could this be the castle, or was it a prison? The small windows were placed high, and across them stretched heavy iron bars. A wall surrounded the building, and beyond this was a moat, but it was crossed by no bridge.

Michael steered to the grey coast, and, stepping ashore, saw, not far off, a little hut. In it lay an old man fast asleep—a little, wrinkled, wizened old man. Close beside him was a big snake, asleep too. In a moment the old man opened his eyes and fixed them on the Prince standing at the door of the hut, but he spoke never a word.

'Tell me, I beg of you,' said Michael, 'how I may enter yonder gloomy castle. Where may the key be found?'

‘I have the key,’ answered the old man. ‘What will you give me for it?’

‘Gold,’ said Michael, jingling the coins in his pocket.

‘Your gold is nought to me,’ replied the aged one. ‘Give me of your strength. Look, there I am building a wall of heavy stones. I am old and weak. You are young and strong. Work for me at yonder wall, and I will give you the key of the castle.’

‘But for how long must I work?’

‘Look at that serpent. It is sitting on its eggs. When they are hatched you shall have the key that opens the castle door. Until then, be my slave.’

‘Gladly,’ said Michael, who thought, ‘No snake can take seven years to hatch its eggs.’

Then the old man beckoned him to enter the hut, and there he fastened an iron bracelet round each of Michael’s hands, and an iron chain fastened the one bracelet to the other. And an iron ring he placed round either of Michael’s ankles, and these he fastened one to the other with a chain. And the chain between Michael’s wrists and the chain between his ankles he joined the one to the other by a third chain, so that the Prince could not raise his hands high, nor walk but with slow and careful steps.

Then the old man pointed to where, high up on the wall, hung a gleaming golden sword, whose handle shone with precious stones. ‘That,’ he said, ‘is the key of the castle. When the serpent’s eggs

are hatched, your iron rings will fall off, and then you may take the sword from its place. With its point push the doors of the castle, and they will fly open. But now to work.'

So Michael went to his task, and day by day he laboured till set of sun. Then the old man called him to the hut and gave him supper, and afterward the tired Prince lay down in a corner to sleep soundly and to dream of Joan. But except to call him from his work, and again at daybreak to bid him go forth, the old man spoke never a word. And each day Michael looked anxiously at the serpent, but a year passed and it had never once moved from its eggs. And each evening the Prince gazed longingly at the sparkling sword, until once, in despair, he raised his arms to try to reach it. But the cruel chains held him down, and a stern voice said, 'Have I not bid you serve me until the serpent's eggs are hatched? Not until then may the sword be yours.'

And so time passed, and Michael well-nigh despaired. Often at night he would take his magic glass, and, looking through it, ask sadly, 'Why have you led me here, cruel star?'

The seven years were all but spent, when, one day, bending over a pool, the Prince beheld his own furrowed face and bent figure in the water. 'Alack, alack!' he cried, 'no one would ever know me although I returned to my own land. I will kill the snake, and slay the old man who has caused my misery.'

So first he went to the snake with hand out-

stretched to grasp its throat, but as his hot tears dropped upon the serpent's head, it first writhed, and then glided away so quickly that Michael knew not whither it had gone.

The eggs lay in a heap beneath his hand. 'If the snake has escaped me, I can still destroy his eggs,' said the Prince, as he brought his heel down heavily upon them. But the eggs might have been made of iron and each one nailed to the ground, for Michael could neither break nor move them.

Again the Prince burst into tears. 'Yet why should I be angry with the snake?' he asked himself. 'Perhaps it, like me, is enchanted,' and he bent his head until his tears fell upon the eggs. At once the shells broke, and from each crept a tiny—what?

Michael did not know. All he cared about was that the eggs were hatched. With one scream of joy, he woke the old man who was sleeping close by. 'Look!' cried the Prince, 'look!'

And together they looked at the broken shells, and, behold! from one crept a foot, from another a tail, from another a head, each looking as if it belonged to a different beast. Yet all joined together so well that the join was not seen, and they made a hideous monster of many colours. And as they looked, the iron rings around Michael's wrists and ankles broke, and his chains fell to the ground.

The old man chuckled with joy, and the Prince rushed into the hut and seized the shining sword. Raising it high, he vowed a vow that if it would

unlock for him the doors of the castle, he would speak not one word for good or for ill to any one, save to ask for that he came to seek, nor would he taste food, until he found the heart of the Princess Joan.

Then, passing the old man who still sat chuckling with delight, he went straight to the moat. No, there was no bridge, but Michael plunged into the water and swam across. Then he scrambled up the steep bank, and reached a heavy gate. But one touch of the magic sword, and it flew wide open. Facing him was a door in the castle wall. Again a touch of the sword, and it, too, opened wide.

Michael entered. The hall was carpeted with velvet, and decked with flowers. The Prince passed through, and opened another door. Through hall after hall, each more beautiful than the last he strode, until he found himself in a room such as he had never seen before. The ceiling was set with precious stones, the furniture was of gold, and from the ground sprang sweet-smelling flowers. On the walls hung no pictures, but row upon row of cages filled with singing-birds. A feast was spread on a table in the middle of the room.

Michael was standing, lost in wonder at such grandeur, when a curtain was drawn aside, and a stately lady dressed in black velvet came smiling towards him.

‘Feast with me first, I beg you, and afterwards let me hear whence you come and what you seek. I am mistress of this castle, and you are a welcome guest.’

‘I seek the heart of the Princess Joan,’ replied Michael.

‘And you shall find it,’ said the grand lady, ‘but first let us feast.’ And she sat down at one end of the table, signing to the Prince to sit at the other.

Michael sat down, but he did not forget his vow to taste no food until he had found the heart of his Princess. Silent he sat, and tasted nought; then, suddenly, he drew from his bosom the magic glass. Seizing a moment when the grand lady was not looking, he put it to his eye. What did he see? A fierce-looking woman dressed in yellow from top to toe. Her hair was quite covered by a yellow cap, and her eyes were as yellow as her dress. All this Michael saw in a glance. The next moment the magic glass was hidden in his bosom, and he sat as still as stone.

The grand lady opposite grew white with rage, as the Prince neither spoke nor ate. Then suddenly she vanished, the lights went out, and Michael was alone in the darkness. He felt his way around the gorgeous room, but no door could he find, so there he had to remain alone with the singing-birds.

‘Lose not heart,’ quoth he to himself cheerily. And again he vowed, ‘No word will I speak for good or for ill, save to ask for the heart of the Princess Joan; nor will I taste food until I find that I come to seek.’ And he sat down in the darkness, and there he rested the live-long night, listening to the songs of the little birds.

When day dawned, Michael sought the door of the room, but it had disappeared. The feast, too,

had vanished from the table. The day dragged slowly on until darkness fell, and then, suddenly, the room was lit as if by magic, and the curtain, through which the grand lady had entered the day before, was drawn aside. A little child came in. In one hand she carried a goblet, in the other a plate.

‘My mistress bids you eat and drink,’ said the little girl.

‘I seek the heart of the Princess Joan,’ said Michael, pushing aside the tempting fare the child offered.

But the bright-eyed, golden-haired little girl said, ‘You must be hungry indeed. I pray you, eat.’

Then Michael drew from his bosom the magic glass, and looked through it at the child. And, lo! he beheld a fierce-looking woman dressed in yellow, her hair quite covered by a yellow cap, and her eyes as yellow as her dress. And as he looked, with a cry of rage, she vanished.

Then two days and two nights passed, and Michael well-nigh despaired.

‘Oh, why, why have I ventured thus far, but to be starved to death? And my Princess will never know how I have toiled for her sake.’

‘But why should you starve to death?’ asked a voice from behind the curtain, and into the room stepped the figure of the Princess Joan, dressed in white and gold, and bearing in her hand a golden goblet, filled with ruby wine.

With one cry of joy Michael rushed forward, but suddenly he remembered his vow. He had not yet

found the heart of his Princess, and, until then, he must speak no word.

‘Let me look at my love through my magic glass,’ thought the Prince, ‘that I may now be sure indeed that what I see, I see in truth.’ And he held the glass to his eye.

Then did Michael tremble in every limb, for no Joan did he discover, but a fierce-looking woman dressed in yellow, her hair quite covered by a yellow cap, and her eyes as yellow as her dress.

Michael seized the goblet from the old hag, and dashed it to the ground. The ruby wine ran along the floor, and, at the same moment, the brilliant room was changed into a little, dimly-lit chamber, and in it he and the yellow old hag were alone together. Her yellow eyes shone, and she laughed an ugly laugh as she held out to Michael her right hand. In its shrivelled palm lay a soft, pink, feathery thing, shaped like a heart. It had wings, and it quivered as it lay in her hand.

‘Take it,’ cried the yellow hag, ‘for well have you earned it. Take it, and tell the proud Queen how many years of toil her boasting has cost you. Take it, and when you see her to whom it belongs, let it fly to her side.’

Michael seized the heart, and rushed, as if for dear life, from the castle. He swam the moat, and again ran until he reached the flat, lonely shore where he had moored his boat nearly seven years before. And in it he sailed away back to the coast where he had bought it of the fishermen. Then he journeyed by land, on and on until he reached Joan’s

country, and at last came in sight of her father's castle.

Poor Michael! His hair was thin and grey, and his shoulders bent. He had no money, and his clothes were in rags. His food he had to beg, or he would have starved by the way. And yet he was happy, for did he not carry with him the little, soft heart that he had gone so far to seek?

The seven years were almost gone, but, yes, there was the palace at last. As he drew near, Michael noticed flags flying, and heard a hum of excitement among the people.

'What means this stir?' he asked an old woman who stood by her cottage door.

'Have you not heard? To-morrow the Princess Joan is to be married to old King Lambert. It will be a grand wedding, but the country-folk are sore distressed that the beautiful Princess should marry a man so ugly and so old. For seven years the Queen has said it must not be, but at last she has yielded, and to-morrow will be the wedding day. Already the guests arrive, and each brings a splendid gift.'

'I, too, will be a guest, and my present will be the best of all,' said Michael.

The old woman laughed, but Michael hurried on towards the palace. At last he reached it. Flags and flowers decorated its walls and windows. Through an arch of roses the guests arrived.

Michael ventured as near as he dared, but was afraid that if the servants saw him, he should be mistaken for a beggar and driven away. At length

he summoned courage to speak to a little page. 'Tell me, I pray you, where is the Princess Joan.'

'She sits in the state-room with the King and Queen and King Lambert, to receive the guests, and to accept the presents they bring.'

'I am a guest, and I bring her a present. How may I reach the Princess and give it to her?' asked Michael.

The page, hearing this, burst into a loud laugh and told the other servants. Then they all laughed together, and puzzled how they might best punish the beggar-man for his boldness.

'Meantime, let us lock him up in the stone tower,' they said. So they carried the poor Prince to a tower outside the garden gates, and in it was only one window, barred across with bars of iron. From it Michael could see the palace and the gardens. Left quite alone, the door locked and the window barred, he gave himself up to despair. Of what use had been these seven long years of toil? To-morrow he would look out from his prison and see the Princess Joan pass to her wedding with the old and ugly King Lambert. How could he bear it?

Night fell and Michael lay on the cold stone floor. He had not slept when the early sunbeams pierced the dingy panes of his prison window. He rose and looked out from between the iron bars. And there, in the palace garden, he saw the old nurse moving to and fro, looking sad at heart.

'Come, come,' cried Michael. 'Do you not know me?'

And the old nurse looked up and said, 'My eyes

have become old, and deaf have grown my ears, and yet the voice is not the voice of a stranger.'

'Seven years ago,' said Michael, 'did I come to wed the Princess Joan, and for seven long years have I toiled to find for her the heart she had lost. Go, ask the Queen why she has broken her promise to wait until the end of seven years for the return of Prince Michael!'

'Prince Michael! Prince Michael!' cried the old nurse joyfully. 'Ah, still you are in time, for our Princess is not yet married. Call to her as she passes by on her way to church. Call to her, speak to her, and she shall yet be yours.'

Presently all the castle was astir. Banners fluttered gaily, and to the sound of trumpets came the tramping of horses. Then the old nurse beneath the window cried gently, 'She comes.'

Through the bars of his prison window Michael thrust his head. And there, in the midst of a grand procession, seated on a white pony, white flowers decking her golden hair, was the Princess Joan, looking as beautiful as when he had left her, seven long years before. On one side of her rode her father and mother. The Queen looked as if she had been crying. Her eyes were red and her face was sad. On the other side rode an ugly, wicked-looking old man, who smiled and bowed to the people. 'This,' thought Michael, 'is King Lambert.'

As the procession drew near, Michael took from his bosom the little soft, pink heart and stroked it gently. At once it spread its wings and fluttered through the bars of the prison, over the heads of the

people. Then it flew straight to the side of the Princess, and disappeared.

Joan gave one scream, and cried, 'Michael! it is Michael,' and in a moment she had turned her pony's head towards the prison, and in another her white arms stretched through the rusty iron bars of the window.

'Michael, Michael,' she cried, 'how worn and grey you look! But I will care for you now all my life long,' and she tried to break the prison bars.

When the people heard her, they knew that the Prince had indeed returned, and they shouted for joy, and the King and Queen wept aloud.

It was vain for King Lambert to cry that the Princess must marry him.

'Nay,' said the Queen, 'she has been pledged to Prince Michael for seven years, and him only may she wed.'

Then the people burst into the prison, and carried out the poor Prince, and when Joan saw how tired and ill he looked, she said they must be married at once.

So a fine white horse was brought, with a golden saddle and jewelled bridle, and upon it Michael rode to church beside the Princess, and there he married her. And the bells rang, and trumpets sounded, and all was gay and glad.

After the wedding Michael was dressed in purple and gold, and his father and mother were brought, and the old wizard too, that all might learn how nobly he had toiled, and how at last he had won the heart of the Princess Joan.

THE TWELVE HUNSMEN

HUNDREDS of thousands of years ago, a Prince met a fair maiden as he travelled through the Enchanted Land. The Prince loved the maiden dearly, and she loved him as much as he loved her.

‘Will you marry me?’ asked the Prince one day.

‘Indeed I will,’ said the maiden, ‘for there is no one in all the world I love so well.’

Then all was as merry as merry could be. The maiden danced and sang, and the Prince laughed aloud for joy.

But one day as they were together, a messenger arrived hot and breathless. He came from the Prince’s father, who was King of a neighbouring kingdom.

‘His Majesty is dying,’ said the messenger, ‘and he would speak with you, my lord.’

‘Alas,’ said the Prince to the maiden, ‘I must leave you, and remain with my father until his death. Then I shall be King and I will come for you and you shall be my Queen. Till then, good-bye. This ring I give you as a keepsake. Once more, farewell.’

The maiden drew the ring on her finger, and with a sad heart, watched the Prince ride off.

The King had but a short time to live when his

son arrived at the palace. 'Ah,' said the dying man, 'how glad I am that you are come. There is one promise I wish you to make ere I die. Then I shall close my eyes in peace.'

'Surely, dear father, I will promise what you ask. There is nothing I would not do to let you rest at ease.'

Then said the dying King, 'Promise that you will marry the bride whom I have chosen for you,' and he named a Princess well known to the Prince.

Without thinking of anything but to ease his father's mind, the Prince said, 'I promise.' The King smiled gladly as he heard the words, and closed his eyes in peace.

The Prince was now proclaimed King, and the time soon came when he must go to the bride his father had chosen for him, and ask, 'Will you marry me?' This he did, and the Princess answered, 'Indeed I will.'

Now the maiden who had first promised to marry the Prince heard of this, and it nearly broke her heart. Each day she grew paler and thinner, until her father at last said, 'Wherefore, my child, do you look so sad? Ask what you will, and I shall do my utmost to give it you.'

For a moment his daughter thought. Then she said, 'Dear father, find for me eleven maidens exactly like myself. Let them be fair, and tall, and slim, with curly golden hair.'

'I shall do my best,' said her father, and he had a search made far and wide throughout the Enchanted Land until the eleven maidens were found. Each

was fair, and tall, and slim, and there was not one whose golden hair did not curl.

The maiden was pleased indeed, and she next ordered twelve huntsmen's dresses to be made of green cloth, trimmed with beaver fur; also twelve green caps each with a pheasant's feather. Then to each of the maidens she gave a dress and hat, commanding her to wear them, while the twelfth she wore herself.

The Twelve Huntsmen then set out on horseback to the court of the King, who, when a Prince, had promised to marry their leader.

So well was the maiden disguised by the hunting-dress, that the King did not recognise her. She asked if he were in need of huntsmen, and if he would take her and her companions into his service.

Never had a finer troop been seen, and the King said he would gladly engage them. So they entered his service, and lived at the palace, and were treated with all kindness and respect.

Now among the King's favourites at Court was a Lion. To possess this Lion was as good as to have a magician, for he knew all secret things.

One evening the Lion said to the King, 'You imagine you engaged twelve young huntsmen not long ago, do you not?'

'I did,' said the King.

'Pray excuse me, if I contradict you,' said the Lion, 'but I assure you, you are mistaken. They were not huntsmen whom you engaged, but twelve maidens.'

'Nonsense,' said the King, 'absurd, ridiculous.'

‘Again I would crave forgiveness if I offend,’ said the Lion, ‘but those whom you believe to be huntsmen are, in truth, twelve fair maidens.’

‘Prove what you say, if you would have me believe it,’ said the King.

‘To-morrow, then, summon the twelve to the royal chamber. On the floor let peas be scattered. Then as the huntsmen advance towards you, you will see them trip and slide as maidens. If they are men they will walk with a firm tread.’

‘Most wise Lion!’ said the King, and he ordered it to be done as the royal beast had said.

But in the palace was a servant who already loved the fair young huntsmen, and when he heard of the trap that was to be laid, he went straight to them and said, ‘The Lion is going to prove to the King that you are maidens.’ Then he told them how he would seek to do this, and said, ‘Do your best to walk with a firm tread.’

Next morning the King ordered the twelve huntsmen to be called, and as they walked across the royal chamber, it was with so firm a tread that not a single pea moved.

After they had left, the King turned to the Lion and said, ‘You have spoken falsely. They walked as other men.’

But the Lion said, ‘They must have been warned, or they would have tripped and slidden as maidens. I will yet prove to you that I speak the truth. To-morrow, summon the twelve to the royal chamber. Let twelve spinning-wheels be placed there. Then, as the huntsmen advance towards you, you will see

each cast longing looks at the spinning-wheels, which, if they were men, you must grant they would not do.'

The King was pleased that the huntsmen should again be put to the test, for the Lion was a wise beast and had never before been proved wrong.

But again the kind servant warned the disguised maidens, and they resolved not even to glance in the direction of the spinning-wheels.

Next morning the King ordered the twelve huntsmen to be called, and as they walked across the royal chamber there was not one of them but looked straight into the eyes of the King. It seemed as though they had not known that the spinning-wheels were there.

After they had gone, the King turned to the Lion, and again he said, 'You have spoken falsely.' Then he told the royal beast that the twelve huntsmen had not even glanced in the direction of the spinning-wheels.

'They must have been warned,' repeated the Lion, but the King believed him no longer.

So the huntsmen stayed with the King and went out a-hunting with him, and the more he saw of them the more he liked them.

One day, while they were in the forest, news was brought that the Princess whom the King was to marry was on her way to meet the hunting-party.

When the true bride heard it, she grew white as a lily, and, staggering, fell backward. Fortunately, the trunk of a tree supported her until the King, wondering what had happened to his dear huntsman, ran to the spot and pulled off her glove.



THE
TRUE
BRIDE
HEARD IT.

K. CAMERON

Looking at the white hand, what was his surprise to see upon the middle finger the ring he had given to the maiden he loved. Then he looked into her face and recognised her, and in a flash he understood that she had come to Court as a huntsman, only to be near him. The King was so touched, that he kissed her white cheeks till they grew rosy, and her blue eyes opened in wonder. 'You shall be my Queen,' he said, 'and none in all the wide world shall separate us.'

Then he sent a messenger to the Princess who was coming to meet him, saying he was sorry he must ask her to return home, as the maiden that he loved and was going to marry was with him in the forest.

And the next day the bells pealed loud and far, and at the royal wedding the Lion was an honoured guest, because it had at last been proved that he spoke the truth.

THE RED SHOES

THE fair, fluffy-haired Karen was the prettiest little girl in the village, but she was very poor. So poor was she that she had to go without any shoes or stockings. Still, that was only in summer, when running about on her little bare feet did not matter. But in winter all she had to wear were heavy wooden shoes that hurt her little ankles and made them rough and red.

Now the mother of the village shoemaker often watched Karen as she stumbled along, and she took pity on the little girl, and out of some strips of red cloth made her a pair of warm shoes. They were clumsy, it is true, but so soft and cosy.

Soon after this Karen's mother died, and she was left alone in the wide world. A good-hearted old lady, who was sorry for the little orphan, said, 'Come with me, and I will take care of you and be kind to you all your life long.' So Karen went with her, thinking, 'She must have seen my red shoes.'

Karen, you will be sorry to know, was a vain little girl. The old lady had not noticed the red shoes, and when she did see them, she disliked them so much that she ordered them to be burned.

Karen was now neatly dressed, and, like other little girls, learned to read and sew. People called

her pretty, but when she looked in the mirror, it seemed to say, 'You are more than pretty. You are beautiful.'

One summer the Queen passed through the country, and with her was the little Princess. They stayed at a palace close by the village where Karen lived.

The people crowded round the palace to try to catch a glimpse of the Queen, and when the little Princess came to a window they cheered and cheered.

'How simply she is dressed,' thought Karen, as she looked at her. A plain little white frock, a white sash, and white socks! And to the dress no train! On her head no crown!' But Karen's eyes sparkled as her eyes fell upon the daintiest little red morocco shoes. Never in all her life had she seen anything so beautiful.

When Karen was old enough to be confirmed, the old lady said she must have a new white dress, and when it was chosen they drove to the best shoemaker in the village, for Karen must have new shoes. And there, in the case among the others, was a red pair, exactly like those worn by the little Princess. How Karen longed to wear them! The shoemaker explained they had been made for an Earl's daughter, but did not fit. Karen tried them on. They were as if they had been made for her.

When the old lady heard that the shoes fitted the little girl, she bought them, but as she did not see very well, it was without any idea that they were red.

Sunday came, and Karen put on her new white dress and the red shoes to go to the church. She was to be confirmed.

But all along the way, every one she met looked at her red shoes. When she walked up the aisle to the chancel, all eyes in the pews seemed fastened upon them. When she knelt and the good bishop laid his hands upon her head, her thoughts, I grieve to say, were of her red shoes. And when the solemn notes of the organ pealed forth and the sweet voices of children rang through the church, still Karen could only think that no shoes were so bright and shiny as hers.

In the afternoon the old lady heard that Karen had gone to church in red shoes, and she was very much shocked. Never again, she said, was the little girl to wear any shoes but black, even if they were old.

The next Sunday Karen was to receive Holy Communion for the first time. She must get ready to go to church. Her eyes fell upon her red shoes. No, she was never to wear them again. She began to put on the black pair. Again her eyes fell on the red shiny morocco. Should she? Should she not? The temptation was too great. Karen drew off her black shoes, put on the red, and started for church with the old lady.

They went by the path through the cornfield, for it was bright, beautiful summer. The path, though, was dusty, and when they reached the church door, an old red-bearded soldier with a crutch, who stood there, bent down and asked if he might dust the old lady's shoes. Karen put out her little foot too.

‘What beautiful dancing-shoes!’ whispered the soldier, striking the soles with his hand.

The old lady gave the soldier a copper, and they went into church. Again every one looked at Karen’s red shoes, even the carved figures on the wall. And when the little girl knelt at the altar, and put the Communion cup to her lips, it grieves me to say that all her thoughts were of her red shoes. They seemed to float before her eyes, and, watching them, she forgot to say the Lord’s Prayer.

The carriage came to drive the old lady and Karen home. The old lady had stepped in, and Karen had lifted one foot to follow, when the old red-bearded soldier with the crutch, who still stood at the church door, again whispered, ‘What pretty dancing-shoes.’

Then Karen could not help it. Dance she must. And dance she did right round the church. She could not stop. She was in the power of the red shoes. On and on they carried her, out and in among the grave-stones, and once more round the grey church. At last the coachman gave chase. He was panting before he caught the little girl, and as she still would dance, he lifted her up and carried her kicking to the carriage. But her feet would not keep still, and it was not until she took off her shoes that they were at rest.

When they reached home the red shoes were put away in a cupboard, but from time to time Karen would open the door to peep at them.

The old lady now grew very ill, so ill that the doctor said she could not live long. Of course you

would expect that Karen, to whom she had been so kind, would nurse her tenderly.

But no! the little girl's mind was filled with vain and selfish thoughts. And why? Because there was to be a grand ball in the town and Karen was invited.

The vain girl looked at the old lady. 'She will die whether I stay or not,' she muttered. Then she looked at her red shoes. This was indeed a chance to wear them. Her first ball! She would at any rate dress and try them on. So Karen went to her pretty little room and put on her white frock with its dainty pink trimming. On her fluffy hair she wore a wreath of pink flowers, around her neck hung a string of blue beads, and in her hand she carried a gaily-coloured fan. There, in her white silk stockings she stood, looking at her red shoes. Should she try them on? She must.

No sooner had Karen done this than she danced to the ball. But when she got there she was altogether at the mercy of the shoes. They drew her to the right when she wished to dance to the left, they drew her to the left when she would go to the right, up the room when she wanted to go down, and down when she wanted to go up. At last they led her downstairs, out into the cool night. Through street after street she danced until she came to the town gate. Through it she whirled, and on and on by fields and lanes towards a big looming forest. Through the dark wood she danced, attended by little gnomes, who pulled her fluffy hair and made strange faces at the vain girl. Through

the trees overhead she fancied she saw the moon, and out of it looked the face of the red-bearded soldier. He seemed to nod, and did she not hear him say, 'What pretty dancing-shoes'?

Karen was now as frightened as frightened could be. She tried to pull off the red shoes, but they would not come. Had her foot grown, or how was it? Karen could not tell. She only knew that on and on she must dance by day and by night, over sunlit meadows, through dripping woods, be it scorching sun or drenching rain, on, on, on.

One day Karen danced into a churchyard and up the gravel path to the open door of the church. Within she saw an angel with a long white robe, and wings which fell from his shoulders to the ground. Very grave was his face, and in his hand he held a shining sword.

'Dance you must and dance you shall,' he said, 'until you are pale and cold. In your red shoes shall you dance from door to door, and where vain children dwell shall you knock loud, that they may come out, and see and tremble. Yea, dance you shall until——'

'Mercy, have mercy,' shrieked the child, but, before the angel could reply, Karen had danced down the gravel walk and was whirling along the white road.

One morning she saw, not far off, the home of the old lady who had been so kind to her. Ah, if she might return there now. Would the red shoes let her dance through the gate? No, they carried her past. She saw that the blinds were down, and, as

she whirled along, she heard the words of a hymn coming from the house. It was the hymn they had sung when her mother died. The old lady must be dead too. Then little Karen felt forsaken indeed. There was no one left on earth to care for her, and God's great angel from Heaven was without mercy.

On and on she danced. Her shoes were now torn, and often the briars would scratch her feet till they bled. She danced over the heath and came at last to a lonely little cottage. She knew that in it lived the executioner. Karen tapped with her fingers on the window-pane, and called, 'Come out, come out, for I may not come in.'

The executioner came out, holding his axe in his hand. 'Do you know,' he said, 'who I am? Do you know my work? It is to chop off bad people's heads. Look, here is my axe.'

'I know who you are,' said Karen, 'and I know your work. But pray do not chop off my head, for then I could not be sorry for having been such a vain girl. Rather chop off my feet with the red shoes, and then I shall be at peace to repent.' And Karen told him all her story.

Then the executioner chopped off her little feet with the red shoes, and they danced away, deep into the dark forest. And he made for her a little pair of crutches, and taught her a hymn. Then she kissed his hand and went away slowly, slowly, over the heath.

When Karen saw the church where she had been confirmed, she thought she would go in. 'I have suffered enough,' she said, feeling afraid. 'When

the people look they will understand how much those red shoes have cost me.' But as she reached the door of the church, the red shoes danced in front of her, so she turned again, out on to the winding white road. She was not yet really sorry.

All the week Karen was very sad, but when Sunday came and she saw her old friends walking happily to church, she said, 'I am quite as good as any of them. I shall go too.' But she had gone no further than the gate, when there were the red shoes dancing before her. Terrified, she again turned back, and this time she buried her head in sorrow, as she thought of her vain, selfish life.

Now Karen went to the pastor's house and begged for work. She would work hard, she said. She did not want to be paid, only to be allowed to live with kind people.

So they took her in, and she was busy all day, and in the evening when the pastor read from the Good Book she listened quietly.

All the children were fond of her, but when they talked of fine clothes, or of being as beautiful as a queen, Karen would shake her head and whisper, 'Hush.'

When Sunday came, the pastor asked if she would come with them to church, but she pointed to her crutches and said she would stay at home.

So, all alone, she sat in her little room. It was so tiny that it held only a bed and a chair. Alone she read from the Good Book. And as she read, visions of her vain life floated before her, and when the soft wind wafted to her the deep notes of the organ,

her tears overflowed and she cried aloud, 'O God, help me.'

In a moment the room was flooded with sunshine, and there, close to her, stood the great angel of God. To-day he bore no shining sword. In his hand was a long green branch, covered with deep red roses. With it he touched the ceiling and it rose higher and yet more high, and wherever the branch had touched it, there gleamed a golden star. Then with the rose-covered branch the great angel of God touched the walls. And they spread wider and yet more wide, until, instead of enclosing a tiny room, from within them now pealed forth the organ, and Karen was sitting in a pew beside the children, singing a morning hymn.

When the hymn ended, the children nodded to her, and said, 'You did well to come, Karen.'

'The great angel of God brought me,' she answered. 'I am truly sorry, and God has forgiven me.'

Again the organ pealed forth and the children's voices burst into praise. Again the sunshine streamed through the eastern window. It bathed in gold the pew where the little cripple stood singing praise to the Good God. It so flooded her heart with happiness that it broke, and through the sunlit air the soul of Karen winged its flight to Heaven.

And there was no one there who asked her about the red shoes.



ALONE SHE ·
READ FROM THE ·
GOOD BOOK ·

THE STAR-EYED DEIRDRE

IN olden days, when many Kings reigned throughout the Green Island of Erin, none was greater than the great Concobar. So fair was his realm that poets sang its beauty, and such the wonder of his palace that the sweetest songs of Erin were of its loveliness.

In a castle of this fair realm dwelt Felim, a warrior and harper dear unto the King. And it was told him that the King with his chief lords would visit the castle.

Then Felim made a feast, and there was great rejoicing, and all men were glad.

But in the midst of the feast an old magician, who was of those that had come with the King, stood up before the great gathering. Long and white was the hair that fell upon his bent shoulders, black were the eyes that gazed into space from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

‘Speak,’ said the King to the old man, ‘speak, and tell us that thou seest, for well we know thou piercest the veil that hideth from us the secrets of the morrow.’

Silently and with great awe did all the company look at the wise old man, for those things that he had already foretold had they not come to pass?

The magician, also silent, looked from the face of one to the face of another, but when his eyes fell on Concobar, the King, long did they dwell there, and when he lifted them, on Felim did they rest.

Then the Wise Man spake :

‘This night, O Felim the Harper, shall a girl-babe be born to thee within these castle walls. Loveliest among the lovely shall thy star-eyed daughter be ; no harp-strings shall yield such music as her voice, no fairy strains pour forth such wonder-stirring sound. Yet, O Felim, in days to come because of this fair child shall great sorrow come, upon our King Concobar and upon all his realm. In those days shall Erin’s chief glory perish, for if the House of the Red Branch fall, who shall stand ?’

Then did a cry of fear burst from those gathered to the feast, and leaping to their feet, each man laid his hand upon his sword, for the word that the Wise Man had spoken would it not come to pass ?

‘Let our swords be in readiness,’ they cried, ‘to kill the babe that shall be born this night, for better far is it that one child perish than that the blood of a nation be spilt.’

And Felim spake : ‘Great sorrow is mine that fear of the child who shall be born this night should be upon you. Therefore, if it please the King, let my daughter die, and so may peace yet reign in the realm. For dear as would be a child to my wife and to me, dearer yet is the common weal.’

But the answer of King Concobar came not for a time. His soul was filled with desire to see the star-

eyed maiden and to hear the wonder of her voice. Still was the hand of each upon his sword when the King spake.

‘Put far from thee, O Felim, the will to do this thing. Bend not thy mind to the death of thine own child. And ye, my people, sheathe your swords. Let the babe live. I, Concobar, will be her guardian, and if ill befall, let it be upon me, your King.’

At these words arose a Prince.

‘It would be well, O King, but for the word spoken by the Wise Man, for hath he not said, “Because of this fair child shall great sorrow come upon the King Concobar”? If we let the babe live, then must thy people see thee in sore distress, for the word that the Wise Man speaketh, shall it not come to pass?’

‘Of that am I not unmindful. Deep within the forest, beyond the Moor of Loneliness, shall her childish days be spent. Gently tended shall she be, but the eye of man shall not behold her, and solitary shall she live as some unmated bird in distant wilderness.’

Then with one accord did the people cry, ‘Wilt thou indeed be guardian to this child, knowing the ill that the Wise Man hath foretold?’

‘Yea, truly will I be the guardian of the child, and when she be a woman then shall she be my wedded wife. And if with the maiden come sorrow, then be that sorrow upon me, and not upon the land.’

‘What sayest thou O Felim the Harper?’ cried the people.

‘It were better to slay the child than to let that come which hath been foretold.’

‘And what sayest thou, O Wise Man?’

‘That which shall come, shall come.’

At the same moment there entered the hall a servant of Felim the Harper, and loudly did he proclaim that the girl-babe, who had been foretold, was born, and nestling, lay in the arms of her mother, the wife of Felim. ‘Right beautiful and strong is the child, most fair to look upon.’

‘And Deirdre shall her name be,’ said the Wise Man, ‘Deirdre the Star-eyed.’

And because of the words that the King Concobar had spoken, the life of the babe was spared, and when the days of feasting were past, Concobar returned to his palace, and with him he took the infant child and her mother. But when a month was passed he bade the mother return to Felim her husband, but the babe Deirdre he kept.

And deep within the forest, beyond the Moor of Loneliness, did the King command that a cottage be built, and when Deirdre was one year, thither was she sent with a trusted nurse. But on the trees of the forest and throughout the land was proclaimed the order of the King Concobar, that whosoever should hunt, or for other purpose enter the wood, death should be his portion.

Once each week did the King visit the fair babe, and daily were stores of food and milk brought to the lone dwelling. And Deirdre each year grew more fair, but none beheld her beauty, save her nurse, her tutor, and Lavarcam.

This Lavarcam was a woman well trusted of the King, and she alone went to and fro between the palace and the cottage. It was she who told to Deirdre the old tales of knights and ladies, of dragons and of fairies that dwelt in the Enchanted Land.

When Deirdre was seven years old the King no longer came every week to the forest, but twice in the year only, and that as the Spring put forth her first green shoots, and again when Autumn gleaned her harvest of gold.

And when another seven years had sped, then came not the King thither, either when the earth was green or golden, nor in the blue summer nor the hoary winter, but from Lavarcam he heard that it was well with the maid.

One white winter's morning Deirdre looked from her window, and saw lying in the snow a calf. It had been killed by her nurse to provide food for the little household, and its bright red blood dyed the thick-lying snow. As Deirdre watched the flow of the scarlet stream, a raven, black as night, flew down and drank of the warm blood. Then Deirdre smiled.

'Where are thy thoughts, fair child?' asked Lavarcam, entering the room.

'Only did I think,' said Deirdre, 'that if a youth could be found whose skin was white as snow, his cheek crimson as that pool of blood, and his hair black as the raven's wing, him could I love right gladly.'

Then Lavarcam spake: 'Such a man have I seen, and one only.'

‘His name, Lavarcam, his name?’ cried Deirdre. ‘Whence comes he, and where may he be found?’

‘The fairest of three fair brothers is this Nathos, the son of Usna, and now is he with Concobar the King.’

And Deirdre would thereafter think of none but Nathos, and Lavarcam was much troubled because of the words that she had spoken. And when Deirdre longed grievously by day and night to see this Nathos of whom she had heard, Lavarcam thought of a plan whereby she might end the maiden’s dream.

One day, as she came from the palace of the King, she met on the Moor of Loneliness a swineherd and two shepherd lads. And well though she knew that none might enter the forest, she led them to a well in its leafy depths. Then said this woman trusted of the King, ‘Wait here by this well until the jay cry and the hill-fox bark. Then move slowly on your way, but speak to none whom ye may meet, and when ye leave the wood let not your lips tell those things ye shall have seen and heard.’

With these words Lavarcam left the three men, and entered the cottage.

‘Come, Deirdre,’ she cried, ‘the crisp snow glistens in the sunshine. Let us wander forth.’

And Deirdre came, and dreamily she trod where Lavarcam led. Of a sudden the older woman left her side, and bent as though she would gather a woodland flower. At the same moment was heard the cry of the jay and the bark of the hill-fox. Then came Lavarcam to the maiden’s side.

‘Passing strange is it,’ said Deirdre, ‘to hear the jay cry and the hill-fox bark while yet the snow lies thick.’

‘Heed not strange sounds, fair Deirdre, but cast thine eyes toward yonder well.’

And as Deirdre gazed she saw, as in a dream, the forms of three men come slowly through the forest.

‘These, Deirdre, are men,’ said Lavarcam.

‘Yet seem they not as the men I have seen ride by across the Moor of Loneliness, for they were fair to look upon, but mine eyes have no pleasure in beholding these strange forms.’

‘Yet you look upon Nathos, for these men are none other than the three sons of Usna.’

Deirdre started. ‘Idle are your words, false Lavarcam. Yonder walks not a man with skin white as snow, with cheek crimson as blood, nor with hair black as the raven’s wing. You lie!’ And the maid made haste, and she reached the men, and stood before them.

Amazed at her exceeding beauty, they gazed in silence. ‘Tell me if ye be the sons of Usna. Speak!’

But in wonder at the loveliness of the maiden, and in fear of the anger of Lavarcam, the men were dumb.

‘Speak!’ she again cried. ‘If indeed ye be Nathos and his brothers, then truly hath Concobar the King my pity.’

At these words the swineherd could no longer keep silence.

‘It is thy exceeding beauty that telleth us that thou art that Deirdre whom the King hideth in this

forest. Why mock us by asking if we are the fairest of Concobar's nobles? Clearly canst thou see we are but men of the hills, I a poor swineherd, and these men shepherds.'

'Then wilt thou, swineherd, for truly do I believe thy words, get thee to the sons of Usna, and say to Nathos the eldest, that in the forest beyond the Moor of Loneliness, Deirdre awaits his coming. Tell him that to-morrow, an hour before the setting of the sun, he will find her by this well.'

'If it be known that I so break the law of the King, I die, yet will I go right gladly.'

Then Deirdre left the men, and walked slowly after Lavarcam. And Lavarcam would fain have known what Deirdre had told the swineherd, but the girl told her nought, and was in a dream all that day and all the morrow.

It was in the wane of the morrow that Lavarcam went forth to take counsel of the King. And Deirdre ran with great speed to the well, but no man was there, and she waited long, but none came.

While Deirdre waited by the well, Lavarcam came near to the King's palace. And lo! there, on the ground before her, lay the dead body of the swineherd. Thus was it made known to Lavarcam that in some wise Concobar the King had heard that the swineherd had spoken with Deirdre.

Therefore Lavarcam went not to the palace, but turned aside to the camp of the sons of Usna. And Nathos came out to her, and she told him of the loneliness of the fair Deirdre and of her longing to see him.

Then said Nathos, 'But it may not be yet awhile, for Concobar found that the fair Deirdre had spoken with the swineherd, and for that cause lies he yonder, a dead man.'

'Yet tarry not long, for if thou wouldst hunt in the forest, beyond the well, then surely wouldst thou see Deirdre the Star-eyed, and none should know.'

Seven days passed, and Deirdre roamed in the wood dreaming her dream, when of a sudden, there came an unknown sound. Ah, could it be the hunting-horn of which Lavarcam had spoken in her tales of chase? The maiden paused. The horn ceased. Nathos had left the hunt and wandered through the glade. There, against a background of blue haze, encircled by a network of blossoming blackthorn, shone forth the fairest vision mortal eye had beheld.

Speech tarried as Nathos gazed spell-bound.

At length the maiden questioned, 'Nathos, son of Usna, what wouldst thou?'

'Strange is it that thou shouldst know my name, most fair. No mortal art thou. Fain would I enter yonder cottage, did I but dare, and speak with the daughter of Felim the Harper. Yet is it death should the King know of my desire.'

'I am that Deirdre whom ye seek, and if I be fair in thine eyes, it pleaseth me well. It is for thee I have watched long, for is not thy skin white as snow, thy cheek crimson as blood, and thy hair black as the raven's wing? Lonely are my days in this place, where none dwell save my nurse, my tutor, and Lavarcam.'

Never did harp-strings yield such music as her voice, never did fairy strains pour forth such wonder-stirring sound.

‘Art thou indeed Deirdre the Star-eyed, and is it that King Concobar keepeth thee here like some caged bird?’

‘I am Deirdre, and it is the King’s will that I wander not forth from yonder cottage, but by the side of Lavarcam. Ill would it please him that I should thus roam the forest alone.’

‘I love thee, Deirdre, and I would serve thee ever.’

‘I love thee, Nathos, and I would that I might be ever by thy side. Let me flee with thee from this place.’

Nathos knit his brows in thought. ‘Fair one, if we are seen as we leave the forest, then is it death to us both; and if we are not seen, still is it death, for when it is known of the King that Deirdre is fled, then will the land be searched until she be found, and then shall we die.’

‘But, Nathos, Concobar is not King in the land of Alba. Let us flee from Erin, and there in thine own land shall we surely find safety.’

‘Thou speakest well, brave Deirdre. If a host be sent from Concobar to Alba, then shall it be met by a host of mine own land. And a fair land it is. Scented with pine and seaweed are its shores, blue as thine eyes are its waters, and of its setting sun the glory cannot be told.’

‘Let us go forth,’ said Deirdre.

‘Then let it be now and without delay, or it may



never be,' and as Nathos uttered these words Deirdre saw a strange look in his eyes, and in a moment he had flung his javelin among the bracken but a few paces apart.

'What beast wouldst thou slay?' cried Deirdre, affrighted.

'It was no beast,' said Nathos, 'but yonder among the bracken lieth a dead man, if my javelin missed not its mark.'

In fear and wonder Deirdre ran to the spot. No man lay there, but she saw on the bracken the form of a crouching man. She saw, too, the tracks that marked his escape.

Nathos followed her, and stooped to take his javelin from the ground. And there, beside it, lay a wooden-hilted knife.

'It is as I thought,' he said. 'This knife is used but by the hillmen who are in bondage to Concoabar. The King seeketh my life. Go thou, then, back to thy lonely cottage, and await that day when he shall make thee his Queen.'

'Ask me not to turn from following thee, O Nathos, for thy way must be mine, this day and ever.'

'Come, then,' and Nathos took her by the hand.

Through the shadowy forest they walked swiftly, until of a sudden he bade her rest among the bracken. Then went he forward and told his waiting huntsmen to return by a long and winding path to the castle of the sons of Usna.

Three days would it thus take them to reach it, and Nathos with Deirdre would be there on the

morrow, if, tarrying not, they walked on through the dark night. But Concobar's messengers would follow the hounds, thinking so to capture Nathos.

'By dawn, Deirdre, shall we reach the castle, and there may we rest in safety one day and one night. Then must we set out for the hills and lochs of Alba, and with us Ailne and Ardan, for if the King cometh and findeth me fled, then would he slay my brothers.'

On and on they sped, through the forest, across the Moor of Loneliness, up the glens and gorges, and over the hills. Above glimmered the pale stars, around them was the screech and the moan of wakeful bird and beast.

It was not till the dawn broke that they rested on the mountain-side. There they stayed till the pink stole through the grey, and the sky gleamed mother-o'-pearl. Then they rose and followed the stream that trickled to the valley below. And now Nathos was glad.

'Look, Deirdre, yonder stands the castle of the sons of Usna.' And with that he gave a cry known by the brothers each of the other, and Ailne and Ardan came forth gladly. But when they stood before Deirdre, so great was their wonder at her exceeding beauty, that they stood spell-bound and uttered no word.

Then Nathos spake: 'The fair maiden whom ye behold is none other than Deirdre, the daughter of Felim the Harper. From this day I hold her as my wedded wife, and to you she cometh as a sister.'

But when the brothers heard, they were filled

with fear, for had not the King Concobar vowed that this same fair maid should be his Queen? And had not the Wise Man foretold the sorrow that the daughter of Felim should bring upon the land?

‘I ask none to share the sorrow that may come,’ said Nathos. ‘To-morrow Deirdre and I set forth for the bay where our galley is harboured, and if so be that we gain the shores of Alba, before Concobar overtake us, there, if he come thither, shall he be met by a host of our own land. Yet, lest the King should follow me hither, and, finding me not, seek to slay you, were it not well that ye leave this place?’

Ardan spake: ‘Not for fear of that which might come upon us, but for the love we bear you and our fair sister Deirdre will we never leave thee. If sorrow come upon thee, let it be upon us also. Are we not the children of one mother, and if death come, let us face it together like men. Are we not under a bond that we will stand each by each even unto death?’

Then said Ailne, ‘As Ardan hath spoken, so let it be, for although the words of the Wise Man come to pass, and sorrow be upon us, yet will we not henceforth leave thee.’

But when Deirdre heard how the sons of Usna would thus face death for her sake, she sighed aloud.

‘Alas! it is not for me to bring sorrow upon the land. Let me even now return to the cottage in the forest, and there with Lavarcam will I live and die, unless it be that Concobar take me thence.’

But Ardan answered: 'For fear of what may befall us, the sons of Usna, shalt thou never leave us, nor shalt thou go forth from us, but of thine own free will.'

Early next morning one hundred and fifty men rode with the three sons of Usna and Deirdre, the wife of Nathos, toward the bay where their black galley was harboured. It was not till night, when on the high ridge of a hill, that they looked backward, and there in the far valley below, where stood the castle of the sons of Usna, there arose a column of flame.

And Nathos' brow grew dark. 'The fire that ye see in the valley below devours the castle of the sons of Usna. The hand that lit the fire is none other than the hand of Concobar the King.'

Then they rode on and rested not until they reached the black galley in the golden bay. The scent of the sea and the gleam of its blue waters and dancing waves made them strong and glad and free.

As for Deirdre, who had never beheld the sea and its great wonders, she laughed with joy and sang a song of the ocean which Lavarcam had taught her long since and when its meaning was dark.

At sundown the galley came to the shores of Mull, and because the wind fell they put into a bay, and as they gazed across the waters to the rocky headlands of Alba, they talked long as to whither they should sail on the morrow. Should it be to crave protection of the King, or should it

be to where their father's castle had stood before it had been destroyed?

But that night there came a galley from the long island to the north. In it sailed twenty men with their chief. And with the chief came a richly-clad stranger, but so hooded that none might look upon his face.

Steadfastly did the stranger gaze upon Deirdre, as the chief urged the sons of Usna to cross the sea to Alba, and journey inland to the palace of the King.

'But first come, Nathos, to my high-walled castle,' said the stranger, 'and bring with thee thy wife and thy brothers.'

'It were not well to come to a man's castle and know not the man's name,' said Nathos.

'My name is Angus,' answered the stranger.

'Then, Angus, let me behold thy face, for it were not well to come to a man's castle, having not looked upon the man's face.'

Then Angus threw back his hood, and Nathos saw that Deirdre's lips grew wondrous white, as she said, 'Not to-morrow, Angus; but on the morn that follows, if thou wilt come again, then shalt thou lead us to thy high-walled castle. This day have we travelled far and would fain rest.'

But Angus turned him again to the sons of Usna and pleaded that they should linger no longer in the isle. 'To-night may this island be tempest-swept, to-night may the host of Concobar be upon you, and then what shall befall this fair one? Bring her rather to my castle, and there let her rest in safety with my wife and her maidens.'

But as Nathos glanced at Deirdre, he saw that her purpose was firm, and he said once again the words she had spoken, 'Not to-morrow, Angus; but on the morn that follows, if thou wilt come again, then shall we come with thee to thy high-walled castle.'

Then Angus, frowning, went with the chief and his men to their galley. And as they set sail he asked how many men the sons of Usna had with them. But when it was told him that they numbered one hundred and fifty, he said no more, for there were but thirty that sailed with the chief, and what could one man do against five?

It was not until the strangers had gone that Nathos asked of Deirdre wherefore she delayed to visit so great a lord as Angus.

'Ye shall hear wherefore I went not this day, nor shall go on any day to come to the castle of him who calleth himself Angus. So he calleth himself, but in truth he is none other than the King of Alba. In a dream was it so revealed to me, when I saw him stand victorious over your dead body. Nathos, that man would fain steal me from you, and deliver you into the hands of Concobar.'

'Deirdre hath wisdom,' said Ardan. 'By the morn after to-morrow we must be far hence, for ere the sun shall rise may not yonder chief be upon us with thrice the number of our men?'

And Nathos, though he was sore grieved for the weariness of Deirdre, bowed his head. So they set sail, and through the thick mist of a starless night their galley silently breasted the unseen

waves. But when they came north of the long island, they bent to their oars, and as they rowed yet northward Deirdre laughed again for joy, as she listened to the music of the rowers' strokes.

When dawn glimmered they came to a sea-loch, its waters o'ershadowed by the sleeping hills. And there they were told that the King of Alba, who had called himself Angus, had no castle in the west, and had already left for Dunedin. They heard, too, that the chief who sailed with him to Mull was no longer a great lord, and that they had nought to fear.

Greatly did the sons of Usna rejoice, for now might they sail south to the land upon which their father's castle had stood in their boyhood.

But for eight days they lingered by the shores of the sea-loch, and as its salt breath touched Deirdre's cheeks, she grew yet more fair, and as her eyes drank in the glory of Western Alba, they shone with a radiance that dazzled the beholder.

Then when the eighth day was come, they sailed forth and settled close by the ground on which had stood their boyhood's home. And it was with great joy that those who dwelt on hill and shore heard of the return of the sons of Usna, and many gathered around them, doing homage.

Then the hundred and fifty men whom Nathos had brought with him, sent he back to their own Green Isle.

'And thou, Ailne, and thou, Ardan, will ye not also return? Here may Deirdre and I, with a few followers, dwell alone in safety.'

But his brothers would not leave Nathos, for were they not under a bond that they would stand each by each, even unto death?

All through the winter they dwelt in peace and content. By day they would hunt and fish, and when night fell Deirdre let fall from her lips such wonder-stirring sounds that their heroic bosoms swelled with dreams of noble deeds and high endeavour.

But when spring burst upon the land with her blossom and her singing-birds, it was told the sons of Usna that the King of Alba had sworn to burn to the ground every stone that stood on the land that had been their father's, and to slay Nathos, and wed the Star-eyed Deirdre.

So in their great galley they set forth, taking with them fifty men. Northward they sailed, through narrow sea-lochs, until they reached the mountains that had been the childhood's home of their dead mother.

On the summit of a high hill stood the castle where she had once dwelt. Now it was forsaken of all save wandering shepherds and nesting birds, and here, in all the glory of spring, did the sons of Usna make their home. Nor was it long before the chiefs of the mountain-lands swore allegiance to Nathos, and did him homage, and he was as a king among the people of his mother's land.

And while yet the wild thyme bloomed, word was brought to the sons of Usna that the King of Alba was dead, and that the King who now reigned would fain sign a bond of friendship with Nathos and his brothers.

And the bond was signed, and for three years the sons of Usna dwelt in peace and great joy. In the north they rested while yet the mountain-sides were aglow with the purple and gold of heather and bracken, but ever before the first frosts came would they sail south to the land that the brave Usna had ruled, where now they could dwell in safety and in peace.

Thence ofttimes in the young summer would they sail southward. No bluer blue, no greener green, had it been given mortal eye to behold. And throughout the far land of Alba was it told of the fame of the sons of Usna, and no poet or bard had a song so fair as that which sang of the wondrous beauty of Deirdre.

In his dazzling palace in the Green Isle of Erin, Concobar dwelt with gloomy thoughts of vengeance. This Nathos, who had stolen Deirdre from the forest beyond the Moor of Loneliness, should no longer be suffered to live in peace. He should surely die, and Deirdre the Star-eyed should yet be Concobar's Queen.

And the King made a feast so magnificent that such had never been seen in the Green Isle. And to it were called all the princes and nobles of the land over which Concobar held sway.

It was in the midst of the feast, as they sat around the board, that a hush fell on the great company, while Concobar spoke to them of his discontent. 'It is not meet that these three heroes of the realm, Nathos, Ardan, and Ailne should be exiled from our

isle for the sake of a woman, be she fair as May. Should dark days befall, sore would be our need, therefore let the sons of Usna be brought hither from their northern mountain home.'

At these words great was the joy of all, for there was not one but knew that it was for fear of the pitiless anger of Concobar that Nathos had fled from the Green Isle.

'Go forth,' said Concobar, when he saw the gladness of the people, 'go hence to Alba and come not again until ye bring with you the three sons of Usna.'

Then spake one among them, 'Right gladly we go, but who can bring to thee Nathos, if it be not his will?'

'He who loves me most,' answered the King, 'he it is that will fail not to bring with him the exiled heroes.'

And after the feast the King drew aside a warrior prince, and spake thus: 'Were I to send thee to Alba to the sons of Usna, and if at my command thou didst see them slain before thee, what then wouldst thou do?'

'Then, O King, would I slay those who did the monstrous deed, even were it at thy command.'

Again the King called to him a warrior prince. To him he spake as to the first. And this prince made answer, 'If by thy command I saw the sons of Usna lie dead before me, then woe be upon thee, for with mine own hand should I take thy life.'

Then spake the King likewise to Fergus, and

Fergus answered, 'Let what may befall the sons of Usna, never shall my hand be lifted against the King.'

'To thee, good Fergus, do I intrust this thing. Go thou to Alba and bring hither with thee Nathos, and Ailne, and Ardan. And when thou art come again to Erin, keep thou thy bond to feast at the house of Borrach, but the three sons of Usna send thou straightway hither.'

So it was that on the morrow Fergus set sail in a black barge for Alba, taking with him but his two sons and a steersman.

The bloom of early summer made bright the earth, and Nathos and his brothers had not yet left their father's home for the castle in the north. But the days were hot, and they had pitched three tents on the seashore, one for Nathos and Deirdre, one for Ailne and Ardan, and one in which to eat and to drink. It was on a bright noon that Nathos and Deirdre sat before the tents, playing chess.

The chess-board was of ivory, and the chessmen were of wrought gold, and they had belonged to Concobar, for on the day before the sons of Usna fled from Alba, the King had been hunting by their castle, and there had he left the board and men.

As Nathos and Deirdre played, of a sudden was a cry heard from adown the shore.

'Yonder is the voice of a man of Erin,' said Nathos, as they paused in their game.

Again a loud cry, and the sons of Usna were called by name.

'Yea, most truly is that the cry of a man of Erin.'

But Deirdre said, 'Nay, thou dreamest, Nathos. Let us play on.'

Then nearer and clearer came a third cry, and there was none but knew that it was indeed the voice of a man of Erin.

'Go, Ardan,' said Nathos, 'go to the harbour, and there welcome Fergus from the Green Isle, for he indeed it is and none other.'

But when Ardan went, Nathos saw that Deirdre's lips grew pale and a great fear looked out from her eyes.

'What terror is it that hath hold of thee?' he asked.

'Hath it not been revealed to me in a dream, O Nathos, that this Fergus who should come with honey-sweet words hath in his mind the shedding of our blood?'

Even as she spake Ardan led Fergus to where the two sat on either side of the chess-board.

Eagerly did the exiled sons of Usna beg for tidings of their friends in the Green Isle.

'I come to you,' said Fergus, 'with greetings from Concobar the King. Fain would he see once more in Erin the fairest and bravest heroes of his realm. Peace he would pledge with you, and great shall be thy welcome, if thou wilt come back with me.'

But before the brothers could answer, Deirdre spake. 'Here in Alba is Nathos now lord over lands wider than the realm of Concobar. Wherefore then should he seek forgiveness of the King?'

'Yet,' replied Fergus, 'Erin is the land of his

adoption. Since his boyhood's days Nathos has been a hero in the Green Isle, and it were well that he should yet rejoice in the land, and, if need be, defend it still.'

'We have two lands,' said Ardan, 'and both are dear unto us. Yet, if Nathos will go with thee to Erin, so also will Ailne and I, myself.'

'I will go,' said Nathos, but he looked not at his star-eyed wife as he spake the words.

That night all rejoiced save Deirdre. Heavy was her heart as she thought she would never again, in shadow or in sunlight, rest in the land of Alba of the lochs.

On the morrow they set sail, and swiftly the galley bore them to the shores of the Green Isle. And when Deirdre stood once more on the soil of her own land, then was her heart glad, and for a brief space she remembered not her fears or her dreams.

In three days they came to the castle of Borrach, and there had Fergus to keep his bond to feast with Borrach. 'For,' he said, turning to those with him, 'my feast-bond I must keep, yet send I with you my two sons.'

'Of a surety, Fergus, must thou keep thy feast-bond,' answered Nathos, 'but as for thy sons, I need not their protection, yet in the company each of the other will we fare southward together.'

But as they went, Deirdre urged that they should tarry, and when they had gone further, Nathos found that his wife had vanished from his side. Going back he found her in deep sleep by the wayside.

Gently waking her, Nathos read terror in her starry eyes.

‘What aileth thee, my Queen?’

‘Again have I dreamed, O Nathos, and in my dream I saw our little company, but as I looked, on the younger son of Fergus alone, was the head left upon his body. Turn aside, and let us go not to Conobar, or that thing which I saw in my dream, it shall come to pass.’

But Nathos feared not, for had not Fergus come to them with the bond of peace from the King?

And on the morrow they came to the great palace.

When it was told Conobar that the three sons of Usna and Deirdre the Star-eyed, and the two sons of Fergus were without, he ordered that they should be taken into the House of the Red Branch. And he ordered, too, that there should be given unto them of pleasant foods, and that all that dwelt in the castle should do them honour.

But when evening was come, and all the company was merry, Deirdre was wearied with journeying, and she lay upon a couch draped with deerskins, and played with Nathos upon the gold and ivory chess-board.

And as Deirdre rested, the door opened, and there entered a messenger from the King. And this messenger was none other than Lavarcam, who had been sent to discover if Deirdre were still as fair as in days of old. And when Lavarcam beheld Deirdre, her eyes filled with tears. ‘You do not well, O Nathos, thus to play upon the chess-board which Conobar holds dearer than aught else save Deirdre,

thy wife. Both have ye taken from him, and here, within these walls, are ye now in his power.'

Of a sudden Deirdre spake, her gaze fixed as if on some strange thing. 'I see as in a dream. As in a dream I see three torches. The three torches are this night put out. The names on the torches are Nathos, Ailne, Ardan. Alas! it is but for the beauty of a woman that these brave ones perish.'

The sons of Usna awhile were silent, and the sons of Fergus spake not. Then said Nathos, 'It were better, Deirdre, to be a torch quenched for thy sake than to live for aught but thee. That which shall come, shall come.'

'Now must I get me hence,' said Lavarcam, 'for Concobar awaiteth my coming. But, sons of Usna, see ye well to it, that the doors and windows be this night barred.'

Then Lavarcam hastened to the King and told him how that the sons of Usna had come to Erin to live peaceably, but how that the beauty of Deirdre had faded until she was no longer fairest among women.

Then was Concobar wroth, and he sent yet another messenger.

To this man he said, 'Who was it that slew thy father and thy brother?'

'Nathos, son of Usna, O King!'

'Then go thou to the House of the Red Branch, and bring me word hither if Deirdre be still the fairest among women.'

And the man went. But when he found that bar and bolt were drawn across door and window,

he knew well that the sons of Usna were warned of the wrath of the King. But espying one open window, he put his eye near to the lower corner that he might glance within. And Deirdre saw the man's eye, and told Nathos, and he, with the ivory bishop that was in his hand, took aim as if with a javelin, and the chessman pierced the spy's eye, and it became blind.

Then the man returned to King Concobar and said, 'Of a surety Deirdre, the wife of Nathos, is yet of all fair women the most fair.'

Then could not Concobar contain his wrath, but burst forth. 'Arise, ye Ultonians; the fort that surroundeth the House of the Red Branch set ye it in flames.'

And the Ultonians set it in flames.

Then came out the younger of the sons of Fergus from the burning fort, and he rushed upon the Ultonians and killed three hundred men. And when King Concobar beheld the onslaught, he cried aloud, 'Who hath done this thing?'

And when it was told him that it was the son of Fergus, he said, 'To such a hero will I give the choice of lands, and he will be to me as a son, if he will but forsake the sons of Usna.'

And the son of Fergus made answer, 'I swear to abide by thee and to return not to the House of the Red Branch.'

And when he returned not, Deirdre said, 'Even as Fergus hath deceived us, even so hath his son.'

Then went forth the elder son of Fergus, and he fell upon the Ultonians, and there perished by his

hand three hundred men. And when Concobar saw who it was that had done this thing, he called his own son, who had been born the same night as this son of Fergus. 'Take these, my magic arms,' he cried, 'and fall upon the foe.'

Then did the son of Concobar strike with his enchanted weapons, and all the waves of Erin thundered at the stroke. And a great warrior, hearing the thunder, came riding across the plain, and in his hand he held a magic sword with blade of blue. Coming upon the fighting men, he rushed at the son of Fergus from behind, and thrust the blue blade through his heart. 'I would that mine enemy had fought me fair,' said the dying man.

'Who art thou?' asked the stranger.

And the son of Fergus told his name, and of that which had come to pass in the House of the Red Branch.

Then answered the stranger, 'I shall not depart hence, no, not until the son of Concobar be slain in the dust'; and thereupon he rushed upon the King's son, and with one stroke of the blue blade severed his head from his body. So he departed, and soon the son of Fergus also lay dead.

And now the Ulstermen surrounded the House and set fire to its walls. But Ardan came forth, and put out the fires, and slew three hundred men, and after he had gone in, then came Ailne forth, and slew a countless multitude beside.

A glimmering ray of dim grey light now broke, and spread over the forms of dead and dying men.

It was at that hour that Nathos kissed Deirdre

and went forth from the House. And there was not a man but quailed as the hero rushed upon the Ultonians and slew a thousand men.

And when Concobar heard this, he sent for that Wise Man who in the house of Felim the Harper had foretold the sorrow that would come upon his realm.

When the old man had come, Concobar said, 'I swear that I mean no harm unto the sons of Usna, yet will they slay every Ultonian in the land. Therefore I would that thou wouldst help me by thy magic power.'

And the Wise Man believed the words of Concobar, and he caused a hedge of spears to encircle the burning House. And as the flames rose higher the sons of Usna came forth with Deirdre the Star-eyed. And around her they placed their shields, and they cleft a way through the Hedge of Spears and came safely to the plain beyond.

But when the Wise Man saw that his magic availed nought, he laid upon the land yet another enchantment, for the plain upon which Deirdre stood with the sons of Usna, he caused to be covered with tempestuous water.

And the magic sea rose higher and yet more high, so that Nathos raised Deirdre on his shoulder, and there she rested, her white arms around the hero's neck.

But now the waters grew calm, and it was seen that drowning was not their doom.

Then, as the waters withdrew from the plain, soldiers came to bind Nathos, Ailne, and Ardan.

and to take them before the King. And Concobar commanded that they should be slain before his eyes.

‘If such be our doom, then slay me first,’ said Ardan, ‘for I am the youngest of Usna’s sons!’

‘Nay,’ said Ailne, ‘but let the first blow fall upon me.’

Then Nathos spake: ‘It were not meet that we three, the sons of one mother, should be divided in death. Hand-in-hand have we sowed the seeds in the springtime, side by side have we plucked the fruits of summer; autumn is still afar, yet must we be cut down as ripe corn. But let us together fall, that there may not be left the one to mourn the other. With this sword that was given me by a hero of the land may our heads at one stroke be severed from our bodies.’

With that they laid their heads upon the block. A flash of the steel, and Alba was bereft of the fairest and noblest of her sons. And the air was rent with cries of lamentation.

Then did a great champion ride across the plain, and to him did Deirdre tell of the fate of the Sons of Usna. And under his care the star-eyed maiden came where the heroes lay dead.

And Deirdre kneeled, and she bent low over the head of Nathos, and kissed his dead lips.

Then, at the bidding of the champion, three graves were digged, and in them, standing upright, were buried Nathos and Ailne and Ardan, and upon the shoulders of each was his head placed.

And as Deirdre gazed into the grave of Nathos, she moaned a lay which told of the brave deeds

of the sons of Usna. It told, too, of her love for Nathos, and as she ended the mournful strain, her heartstrings broke, and she fell at the feet of her husband, and there did she die, and by his side was she buried.

In that same hour died the Wise Man; and as he died, he cried aloud, 'That which shall come, shall come.'

And so it was, for on the morrow Concobar's host was scattered as autumn leaves, and the House of the Red Branch perished, and ere long Concobar died in a madness of despair, and throughout the Green Isle was mourning and desolation.

But through the ages has the tale of the wondrous beauty of Deirdre been sung, and yet shall it be told again, for when shall the world tire of the sorrowfullest of 'The Three Sorrows of Story-telling,'—the Fate of the Sons of Usna and of Deirdre the Star-eyed?

THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

ONCE upon a time there was a King who had twelve daughters, each more beautiful than the other. The twelve Princesses slept in a large hall, each in a little bed of her own. After they were snugly settled for the night, their father, the King, used to bolt the door on the outside. He then felt sure that his daughters would be safe until he withdrew the bolt next morning.

But one day when the King unbolted the hall door, and peeped in as usual, he saw twelve worn-out pairs of little slippers lying about the floor.

‘What! shoes wanted again,’ he exclaimed, and after breakfast a messenger was sent to order a new pair for each of the Princesses.

But the next morning the new shoes were worn out, how no one knew.

This went on and on until the King made up his mind to put an end to the mystery. The shoes, he felt sure, were danced to pieces, and he sent a herald to offer a reward to any one who should discover where the Princesses held their night-frolic.

‘He who succeeds, shall choose one of my

daughters to be his wife,' said the King, 'and he shall reign after my death: but he who fails, after three nights' trial, shall be put to death.'

Soon a Prince arrived at the palace, and said he was willing to risk his life in the attempt to win one of the beautiful Princesses.

When night came, he was given a bedroom next the hall in which the royal sisters slept. His door was left ajar and his bed placed so that from it he could watch the door of the hall. The escape of the Princesses he would also watch, and he would follow them in their flight, discover their secret haunt, and marry the fairest.

This is what the Prince meant to do, but before long he was fast asleep. And while he slept, the Princesses danced and danced, for, in the morning, the soles of their slippers were once more riddled with holes.

The next night the Prince made up his mind that stay awake he would, but again he must have fallen fast asleep, for in the morning twelve pairs of little worn-out slippers lay scattered about the floor of the hall.

The third night, in fear and trembling, the Prince began his night watch. But try as he might, he could not keep his eyes open, and when in the morning the little slippers were as usual found riddled with holes, the King had no mercy on the Prince who could not keep awake, and his head was at once cut off.

After his death, many Princes came from far and near, each willing to risk everything in the attempt

to win the fairest of these fair Princesses. But each failed, and each in his turn was beheaded.

Now a poor soldier, who had been wounded in the wars, was on his way home to the town where the twelve Princesses lived. One morning he met an old witch.

‘You can no longer serve your country,’ she said. ‘What will you do?’

‘With your help, good mother, I mean to rule it,’ replied the soldier; for he had heard of the mystery at the palace, and of the reward the King offered to him who should solve it.

‘That need not be difficult,’ said the witch. ‘Listen to me. Go straightway to the palace. There you will be led before the throne. Tell the King that you would win the fairest of his fair daughters for your wife. His Majesty will welcome you gladly, and when night falls, you will be shown to a little bedroom. From the time you enter it, remember these three things. Firstly, refuse to drink the wine which will be offered you; secondly, pretend to fall fast asleep; thirdly, wear this when you wish to be invisible.’ So saying, the old dame gave him a cloak and disappeared.

Straightway, the soldier went to the palace, and was led before the throne. ‘I would win the fairest of your fair daughters for my wife,’ said he, bowing low before the King.

So anxious was His Majesty to discover the secret haunt of his daughters, that he gladly welcomed the poor soldier, and ordered that he should be dressed in scarlet and gold.

180 TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

When bedtime came, the soldier was shown his little room, from which he could see the door of the sleeping-hall. No sooner had he been left alone than in glided a fair Princess bearing in her hand a silver goblet.

‘I bring you sweet wine. Drink,’ she said.

The soldier took the cup and pretended to swallow, but he really let the wine trickle down into a sponge which he had fastened beneath his chin.

The Princess then left him, and he went to bed and pretended to fall asleep. So well did he pretend, that before long his snores were heard by the Princesses in their sleeping-hall.

‘Listen,’ said the eldest, and they all sat up in bed and laughed and laughed till the room shook.

‘If ever we were safe, we are safe to-night,’ they thought, as they sprang from their little white beds, and ran to and fro, opening cupboards, boxes, and cases, and taking from them dainty dresses, and ribbons, and laces and jewels.

Gaily they decked themselves before the mirror, bubbling over with mischief and merriment at the thought that once more they should enjoy their night-frolic. Only the youngest sister was quiet.

‘I don’t know why,’ she said, ‘but I feel so strange—as if something were going to happen.’

‘You are a little goose,’ answered the eldest, ‘you are always afraid. Why! I need not have put a sleeping powder in the soldier’s wine. He would have slept without it. Now, are you all ready?’

The twelve Princesses then stood on tiptoe at the hall door, and peered into the little room where



the soldier lay, seemingly sound asleep. Yes, they were quite safe once more.

Back they went into the hall. The eldest Princess tapped upon her bed. Immediately it sank into the earth, and, through the opening it had made, the Princesses went down one by one.

The soldier who, peeping, had seen twelve little heads peer out of the hall door, at once threw his invisible cloak around him, and followed the Princesses into the hall, unseen. He was just in time to reach the youngest, as she disappeared through the opening in the floor. Half-way down he trod upon her frock.

‘Oh, what was that?’ screamed the little Princess, terrified. ‘Some one is tramping on my dress.’

‘Nonsense, be quiet,’ said the eldest, ‘it must have caught on a hook.’ Then they all went down, down, until they reached a beautiful avenue of silver trees.

Thought the soldier, ‘I must take away a remembrance of the place to show the King,’ and he broke off a twig.

‘Oh, did you hear that crackling sound?’ cried the youngest Princess. ‘I told you something was going to happen.’

‘Baby!’ replied the eldest. ‘The sound was a salute.’

Next they came to an avenue where the trees were golden. Here the soldier again broke off a twig, and again was heard the crackling sound.

‘A salute, I told you,’ said the eldest Princess to her terrified little sister.

Further on they reached an avenue of trees that

glittered with diamonds. When the soldier once more broke off a twig, the youngest Princess screamed with fright, but her sisters only went on faster and faster, and she had to follow in fear and trembling.

At last they came to a great lake. Close to the shore lay twelve little boats, and in each boat stood a handsome Prince, one hand upon an oar, the other outstretched to welcome a Princess.

Soon the little boats rowed off, a Prince and a Princess in each, the soldier, still wearing his invisible cloak, sitting by the youngest sister.

‘I wonder,’ said the Prince who rowed her, ‘why the boat is so heavy to-day. I have to pull with all my strength, and yet can hardly get along.’

‘I am sure I do not know,’ answered the Princess. ‘I dare say it is the hot weather.’

On the opposite shore of the lake stood a castle. Its bright lights beckoned to the twelve little boats that rowed towards it. Drums beat, and trumpets sounded a welcome. Very merrily did the sisters reach the little pier. They sprang from the boats, and ran up the castle steps and into the gay ball-room. And there they danced and danced, but never saw or guessed that the soldier with the invisible cloak danced among them. When a Princess lifted a wine-cup to her lips and found it empty, she felt frightened, but she little thought that the unseen soldier had drained it. On and on they danced until three o’clock, but then the sisters had to stop, for all their little slippers were riddled with holes. And in the early grey morning

the Princes rowed them back across the lake, while the soldier seated himself this time beside the eldest Princess.

When they reached the bank, the sisters wandered up the sloping shore, while the Princes called after them, 'Good-bye, fair daughters of the King, to-night once more shall we await you here.'

And all the Princesses turned, and, waving their white hands, cried sleepily, 'Farewell, Farewell.'

Little did the sisters dream as they loitered homeward, that the soldier ran past them, reached the castle, and climbed the staircase that led to his little bedroom. When, slowly and wearily, they reached the door of the hall where they slept, they heard loud snores coming from his room. 'Ah, safe once more,' they exclaimed, and they undid their silk gowns, and their ribbons and jewels, and kicked off their little worn-out shoes. Then each went to her white bed, and in less than a minute was sound asleep.

The next morning the soldier told nothing of his wonderful adventure, for he thought he would like again to follow the Princesses in their wanderings. And this he did a second and a third time, and each night the twelve sisters danced until their slippers were riddled with holes. The third night the soldier carried off a wine-cup, as a sign that he had visited the castle across the lake.

When next day he was brought before the King, to tell where the twelve dancing Princesses held their night-frolic, the soldier took with him the twig with its silver leaves, the twig with its leaves

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of gold, and the twig whose leaves were of diamonds. He took, too, the wine-cup.

‘If you would live, young man,’ said the King, ‘answer me this. How comes it that my daughters’ slippers morning after morning are danced into holes? Tell me, where have the Princesses spent the three last nights?’

‘With twelve Princes in an underground castle,’ was the unexpected reply.

And when the soldier told his story, and held up the three twigs and the wine-cup to prove the truth of what he said, the King sent for his daughters.

In the twelve sisters tripped, with no pity in their hearts for ‘the old snorer,’ as they called the soldier: but when their eyes fell upon the twigs and the wine-cup they all turned white as lilies, for they knew that their secret night-frolics were now at an end for ever.

‘Tell your tale,’ said the King to the soldier. But before he could speak, the Princesses wrung their hands, crying, ‘Alack! alack!’ and their father knew that at last he had discovered their secret.

Then turning to the soldier, the King said, ‘You have indeed won your prize. Which of my daughters do you choose as your wife?’

‘I am no longer young,’ replied the soldier. ‘Let me marry the eldest Princess.’

So that very day the wedding-bells pealed loud and far, and a few years later the old soldier and his bride were proclaimed King and Queen.

THE PEDLAR'S PACK

ONCE upon a time there lived a pedlar who wandered from village to village, bending beneath the weight of the pack he carried upon his back.

One fine summer morning he toiled along a dusty road. A donkey grazed by the wayside.

'Good day, friend,' said the pedlar. 'If you have nothing better to do, perhaps you will carry my load?'

'If I carry your load, what will you give me?' asked the donkey.

'I will give you two pieces of gold,' promised the pedlar. But he did not speak the truth, for he knew that he had no gold to give.

'Agreed,' said the donkey, and they journeyed on together, the donkey carrying the pedlar's pack, and the pedlar walking by his side.

By and by they saw a raven looking for worms at the roadside.

'Good day,' brayed the donkey, 'if you are going our way, perhaps you will sit upon my back and drive away the flies?'

'If I sit upon your back and drive away the flies, what will you give me?' asked the raven.

'I will give you three pieces of gold,' promised

the donkey. But he too knew he was not telling the truth, for he had no gold to give.

‘Agreed,’ said the raven, and they journeyed on together, the donkey carrying the pedlar’s pack, and the pedlar walking by his side, while the raven sat on the donkey’s back to drive away the flies.

Further on they met a hedge-sparrow.

‘Good day,’ croaked the raven, ‘perhaps you will bring me some worms from the bank as we go along, for I have had no breakfast and am very hungry.’

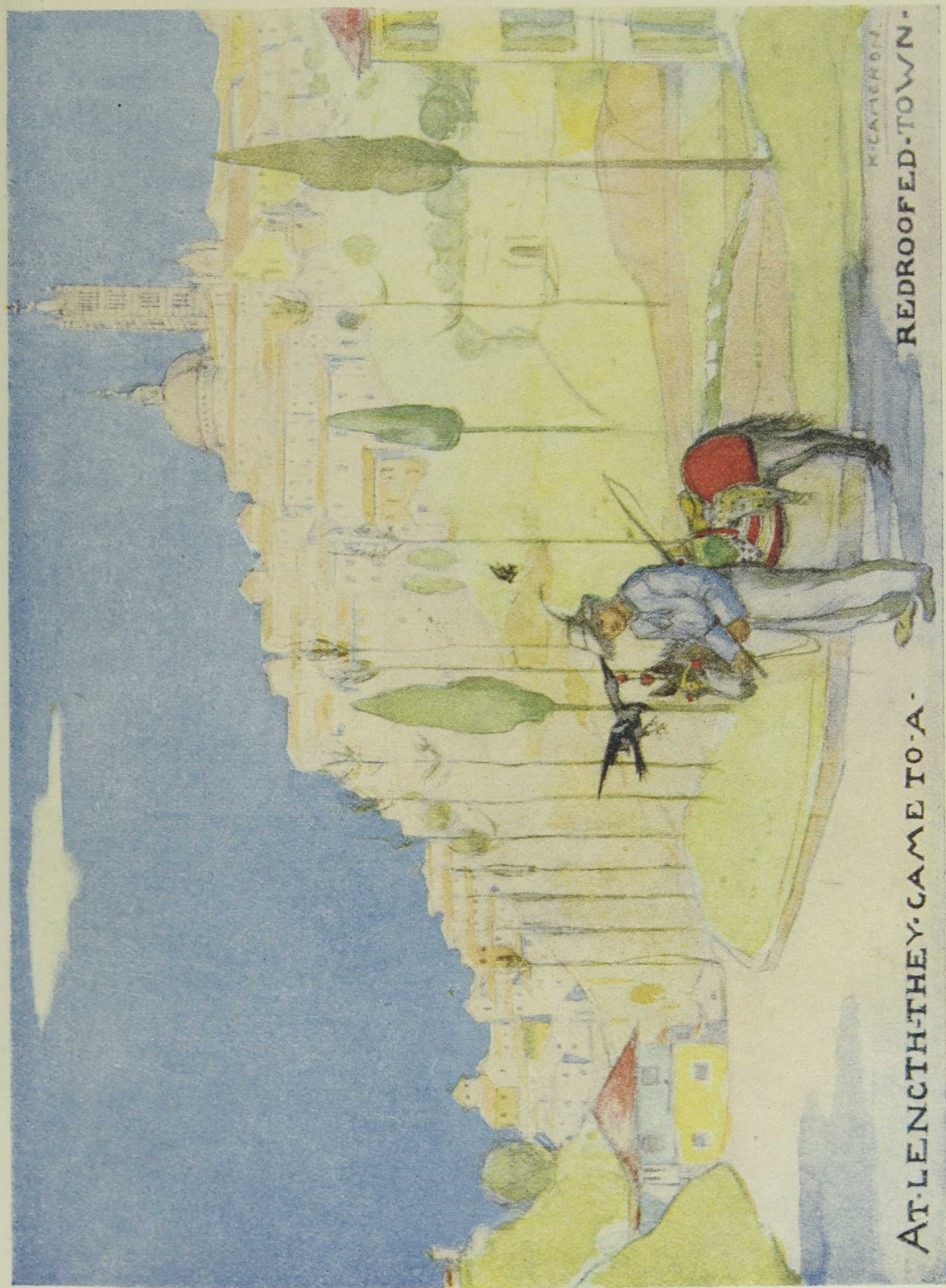
‘If I bring you worms from the bank as you go along, what will you give me?’ asked the hedge-sparrow.

‘I will give you four pieces of gold,’ promised the raven; but he, too, knew he was not telling the truth, for he had no gold to give.

‘Agreed,’ said the hedge-sparrow, and they journeyed on together, the donkey carrying the pedlar’s pack, the pedlar walking by his side, and the raven sitting on the donkey’s back to drive away the flies, while the hedge-sparrow brought worms to the raven.

At length they came to a red-roofed town. Then the little company stood still. The pedlar took his pack from the donkey’s back and the raven flew to the ground. Next the pedlar drew his wares from the pack and hung them over the donkey’s back, so that passers-by might see them, and perhaps buy. On the top of his goods lay a small scarlet blanket.

When the hedge-sparrow saw this small scarlet



M. CAMERON

AT LENCH THEY CAME TO A

REDROOFED TOWN

blanket, he asked the pedlar its price. 'No matter what it costs,' chirped the little bird, 'I must have it, for I am badly in need of a blanket.' But as the hedge-sparrow had not a penny in the world, he knew he could not pay for it.

'The price of the blanket is five pieces of gold,' said the pedlar.

'Five!' exclaimed the hedge-sparrow. 'That seems to me exceedingly dear; but I will give you four pieces of gold for it.'

'Agreed,' said the pedlar, and he chuckled as he thought to himself, 'Now I shall be able to pay the donkey the two pieces of gold I promised him.'

The hedge-sparrow flew to the raven's side, and whispered in his ear, 'Please pay me the four pieces of gold you owe me. I want them at once.'

'Four! Did I promise you four pieces of gold for bringing a few worms? A most ridiculous price! But I will give you three pieces!'

And the raven flew to the donkey's ear and whispered, 'Please pay me the three pieces of gold you owe me. I want them at once.'

'Three! An absurd price for driving away a few flies! But two pieces of gold you shall have.'

And the donkey turned to the pedlar, and said, 'Please pay me the two pieces of gold you owe me. I want them at once.'

'Immediately,' answered the pedlar, and turning to the hedge-sparrow, he said, 'I must have the money for the blanket this moment.'

'Certainly,' said the hedge-sparrow, and he chirped to the raven, 'Give me my money at once.'

'I will,' quoth the raven, and whispered to the donkey, 'I tell you I must have my money this instant.'

'Instantly,' said the donkey, and turned to the pedlar. 'I must have my money now,' he said.

Then the pedlar said to the hedge-sparrow, 'Pay me for my blanket or I shall wring your neck.'

And the hedge-sparrow cried to the raven, 'Give me my money or I shall peck out your eyes.'

And the raven croaked to the donkey, 'If you do not pay me, I shall bite off your tail.'

And the donkey cried to the pedlar, 'Let me have my money, or I'll kick you soundly.'

Such an uproar did they make, that the beadle came from the distant town to see what it was all about.

The pedlar shouted, 'It's the hedge-sparrow,' and the hedge-sparrow cried, 'It's the raven,' and the raven croaked, 'It's the donkey,' and the donkey brayed, 'It's the pedlar.' Each told his tale of how the other was to blame.

'You are a set of rogues,' said the beadle, 'and you must come to the town and go before the Mayor. He will settle your quarrels pretty quickly.'

Then they all pleaded to be allowed to turn back, each saying he did not mind if he were not paid at all. But the beadle would not listen to them, and led them before the Mayor, who sat judging the people in the market-place.

'Well, I declare! Whom have we here?' he asked. 'A pedlar, a donkey, a raven, and a hedge-sparrow. Let us hear what they have to say for themselves.'

The pedlar then began to complain of the hedge-sparrow, and the hedge-sparrow of the raven, and the raven of the donkey, and the donkey of the pedlar.

The Mayor listened to their grievances and then said, 'Well, I cannot see that one of you is a whit better than the other. You have each promised what was not yours to give, and you must each be punished. Then turning to the beadle, he said, 'Lock up the pedlar in prison, soundly thrash the donkey, pull the tail-feathers out of the raven and the hedge-sparrow and turn them out of the town. As for the scarlet blanket, I will keep it myself.'

So the beadle did as he was told, and the pedlar was locked up in prison for many days. All alone in his cell, the prisoner sighed, as he thought of his misery. 'Never again, in all my life, shall I trust a hedge-sparrow,' he said. 'If that deceitful bird had paid me as he ought, I should not have been here now.'

Meantime the donkey was being soundly thrashed, and after each blow, he cried, 'Alas! what comes of trusting a human being. I shall never do such a thing again. If the pedlar had paid me as he promised, I should not have been beaten now.'

The raven and the hedge-sparrow hopped out of the town by different roads. Both had lost all their tail-feathers, for the beadle had pulled them out.

'Alas, alas,' croaked the raven, 'I am indeed in a sad plight, but it all comes of trusting a four-footed animal. Never again will I believe a creature without a beak.'

The hedge-sparrow hung its head, and could hardly keep back the tears, as it said, 'If I had never trusted that big, black raven, I should have been a happy little bird to-day. Never again will I make a bargain with one bigger and stronger than myself.'

THE LEGEND OF THE DAISY

LITTLE Elspeth sat alone in the sunlit field threading daisy-chains. She had made a wreath of daisies for her hair, a necklace of daisies for her plump sunburnt neck, and bracelets of daisies for her podgy little wrists. Then Elspeth grew tired. 'I wish Hans would come,' she said to herself, 'but I do not believe he loves me any longer. Does he? I wonder. Or does he not?' And Elspeth picked a daisy and pulled off its tiny crimson-tipped petals one by one. As she threw them away, this is what she said. 'He loves me; he loves me a little; he loves me much; he loves me with all his might; he loves me not at all.' Five petals lay on the grass. Elspeth tore off the sixth, 'He loves me'; the seventh, 'He loves me a little'; the eighth, 'He loves me much'; the ninth, 'He loves me with all his might'; the tenth, 'He loves me not at all.' And so on and on she went, her words coming more and more slowly as the remaining petals grew fewer and fewer. At last one only was left. 'He loves me with all his might,' she cried, jumping up and clapping her hands with glee. At the same moment Hans appeared in the daisy-field, and little Elspeth ran to meet him, and they played together until sundown.

Now where did the daisy get this magic power? How could the little crimson-tipped flower tell Elspeth that Hans loved her 'with all his might'? You will find that out at the end of the story I am going to tell you, so listen.

Good children, when they die, go to heaven and become angels. But you must not think they do nothing the livelong day but fly about and play hide-and-go-seek among the clouds. No, angel children are not idle. Like the boys and girls upon earth, they have to go to school for three hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. But in heaven the children write with golden pencils upon silver slates, and instead of A B C books, they read fairy-tales with coloured pictures. They do not study geography, for why in heaven should they learn about the earth? And of the multiplication table they know nothing.

The teacher of the angel school is one who had been a schoolmaster on earth. His holidays may not begin until he has taught the little angels for three thousand years. But on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons he gives his little pupils a half-holiday and takes them to play on the Milky Way.

On Sunday the angel children are allowed to play in the Meadow in front of the Heavenly Gate. To this they look forward all the week long. The Meadow is not green, but blue, and it is spangled with thousands and thousands of flowers. These flowers, silver and gold, shine through the floor of

the Heavenly Meadow, and the people upon earth call them stars.

The schoolmaster is not in charge of the little angels on Sunday. That is his day of rest. But Saint Peter, who guards the Gate of Heaven, keeps his eye upon them and sees that they play as angel-children should. He watches that they do not run too far, or fly too high, and if one should wander far from the Heavenly Gate, Saint Peter whistles to him upon his golden key. At the sound of that whistle, there is not an angel-child but spreads his wings and flutters homeward.

One Sunday it was so very hot in Heaven that Saint Peter fell asleep. No sooner did the little angels notice this, than they swarmed out over the Meadow. Some bolder than the others ran on and on to see what they might discover, nor did they stop until they came to a high fence. In vain did they look for a chink through which to peep, so they flew to the top. And perched there, they looked down on the other side.

What did they see?

A black wilderness with never a flower. And running hither and thither were little imps as black as coal, with horns upon their heads. They were playing leap-frog, and although they screamed and fought, the little angels were only sorry to see them in so gloomy and sunless a home.

Suddenly an imp looked up, and, beholding the angels, prayed that he and his companions might have a glimpse of the Heavenly Meadow.

This touched the angels. They were sorry for the

imps, and they thought, too, what good games they might have together. So three angel-children, knowing where Jacob's ladder was kept, ran for it, and they lifted it over the fence and planted it in the black wilderness.

Then the little imps climbed the ladder like monkeys, and, as they came near the top, the angels stretched out helping hands and flew with them, down from the fence, into the Heavenly Meadow.

At first the imps behaved with great propriety. But soon they grew wild. They put out their long, red tongues, and made faces at the little angels; they tugged their hair and tried to knock off their halos. They teased the beautiful moon, who was gazing peacefully from the Heavenly Windows, and at last they pulled up the flowers of silver and gold that grew in the Meadow, and flung them down to earth.

The little angels now repented bitterly of having let the naughty little creatures enter Heaven, and begged them to stop their wicked pranks. But the imps grew wilder and wilder.

Then the angels, in fear and penitence, woke Saint Peter, and confessed what they had done.

The Saint with his golden key unlocked the Gate of Heaven. 'March in,' he thundered. And the little angels, with drooping wings, passed through the Gate.

Then two big strong angels came at Saint Peter's bidding, and caught up the wicked little imps in their arms, and carried them back to their own place.



The little angels did not escape punishment. For three Sundays they were not allowed to play in the Heavenly Meadow, and for three weeks, when they went out to walk, they had to lay aside their halos and take off their wings, and it is a great disgrace for an angel to be seen without wings and halo.

But this strange adventure of the imps in the Heavenly Meadow was not altogether without good, for the flowers of silver and gold that they tore up and flung down to earth, took root and blossomed there as daisies. And it is because they are blooms from the Heavenly Meadow that the star-eyed daisies possess their magic power, and so it was that a little crimson-tipped flower told Elspeth that Hans loved her 'with all his might.'

THE MAGIC CANDLES

LONG ago and long ago, in a country far over the sea, stood a little white village. Through this village flowed a broad swift river, and over the river was a bridge. At one end of the bridge were great iron gates, and these had to be opened and shut each time horses or carriages passed across. Every one who went over, whether driving, riding, or walking, had to pay for leave to use the bridge.

Now who opened and shut the gates, and who collected the money? Two little girls, and it is their story that I am going to tell you.

Zaire and Blanchelys lived with their grandmother in a little cottage close beside the gates of the bridge. The little girls were not sisters, but cousins. Both their fathers were dead. They had been the sons of the old grandmother with whom the little girls now lived.

The cousins were the same age, but they were not at all alike.

Blanchelys had golden hair, and eyes as blue as cornflowers, and she laughed and sang from morning till night.

Zaire's hair was black as the raven's wing, and she had eyes like large sloes. She was thought the prettiest girl in the village, but no one loved her as they loved the blue-eyed Blanchelys.

The old grandmother did nothing but sit and knit by the fire, so one or other of the girls was always in waiting beside the big iron gates at the end of the bridge.

Zaire grumbled at the work, but Blanchelys did it cheerfully, and had always a bright smile for the passers-by.

One winter the old grandmother grew feebler and feebler, until she had to stay in bed all day long. On Christmas Eve, after the gates were locked for the night, she called the two girls to her. 'My dear children,' she said, 'I shall not be with you long, and I have something to say to you before I die. Be good always, and then there is no fear but you will be happy. I leave you my blessing. Beyond that I have little to bequeath, but here, under my pillow, is a small remembrance for each of you,—a little magic candle. When set alight, a fairy will appear and grant you the wish of your heart. If the wish be a good wish, a good fairy will come, but beware of her who will appear if the wish be evil. Not unless the night be dark and there be neither moon nor stars in the sky, must the candles be lit, and then only one wish can you have, for when that is granted the candle will burn out. 'But,' went on the grandmother solemnly, 'if you take my advice, you will never light them at all. Many, many years ago, they were brought over the sea from a strange land, where animals spoke and men and women had wings, by a sailor who gave them to my grandmother, who gave them to my mother, who gave them to me. To each of

us, as to you, has been made known the magic power of these candles. But none of us has lit them, for we have thought that if we lived honestly and did our duty, we were better without the aid of fairy folk.' So saying, the old grandmother drew from under her pillow the two candles, and gave one to each of the wondering girls. Then, as Blanchelys stooped down to kiss her, the old woman died.

Blanchelys sorrowed sorely, for she had loved her grandmother, but Zaire found no time to grieve, so busy were her thoughts with her magic candle. 'I shall keep it until I wish something very much indeed,' she said to herself, as she put it safely away.

Blanchelys put hers away too, meaning to take her grandmother's advice and never to light it.

The cousins still continued to live in the same little cottage, collecting the money and opening the gates of the bridge to the passers-by.

On the other side of the broad river stood an old castle. It belonged to the King of that country, but he had not lived in it for many years. So there was great excitement in the little village when news was brought that the King's son was coming to the castle to hunt.

Every cottage was decorated, and very gay did the village look to welcome the Prince.

Zaire and Blanchelys knew that the first day he rode through it on the way to the hunt, he must cross the bridge.

They both dressed themselves in their best to

open the gates, and Zaire said to Blanchelys, 'Stand back, I am the prettiest girl in the village; it is right I should be seen.' So Blanchelys stood behind and looked over Zaire's shoulder.

At last they came, the gay company of huntsmen, dressed in green velvet; and in the midst of them, riding on a snow-white horse, was the King's son, clad in a suit of gold, that gleamed in the sunlight. His hair, as golden as his dress, hung over his shoulders, and on his head he wore a velvet cap, from which hung a long white feather fastened with a diamond clasp. Before them rode the trumpeters, and behind followed the pages with hounds and hawks.

Such a sight the cousins had never before beheld, and as the procession passed through the gates and Blanchelys saw the Prince smile and talk to those around him, she thought no one in all the world could look so beautiful. But when the horse's feet raised a cloud of dust, Zaire flew into a passion. 'If that is all one gets for opening the gates for the King's son, I will never do it again,' and she went into the cottage and slammed the door.

Blanchelys watched the Prince until she could see him no longer, and when the hunting-party passed back in the evening, she opened the gates, and, as she looked at the King's son, she loved him best in all the world.

One night when Zaire was sound asleep, Blanchelys got up out of her little bed, stepped softly to the window, and peeped out. The night

was dark, and there was neither moon nor star in the sky. She dressed quickly, and went noiselessly to a cupboard and took out her magic candle. Hiding it in her bosom, the girl crept along the passage and out into the little garden. In the middle stood a great yew-tree, whose branches nearly reached to the ground. Under these dark branches Blanchelys crept until she felt the trunk of the tree. Then she knelt down, and drawing the candle from her bosom, planted it firmly in the ground, and lit it.

Immediately there was heard through the tree a sound as of the flapping of dove's wings, and then, there before her, she saw by the light of the candle a beautiful boy, from whose shoulders sprang soft pink wings. His golden hair encircled his head like a halo, and upon it he wore a wreath of pink roses. His robe was pink, his girdle golden. And golden, too, were the sandals upon his feet. In his hand he held a branch of roses.

'I am Love,' said the boy. 'What want you with me?' But Blanchelys only trembled and looked at him in silence.

'Speak, and quickly. Tell me your heart's wish, for as soon as the candle burns out, I vanish.'

Then Blanchelys, still kneeling, clasped her hands and said in a low, trembling voice, 'Give me the love of the King's son.'

Love looked at the girl, and smiled, then he gently shook the branch of roses he carried in his right hand. Into his left fell some tiny seeds from the hearts of the flowers. 'Take them,' he said to



Blanchelys, 'take them and plant them in the earth as the sun is rising, but ere you cover them, whisper the name of him whose love you desire. From the seeds will spring a rose-tree. While it lives, the Prince will love you more than all the world beside, but should it wither and die, then will his love for you die also. One thing only could revive that love. Of that I need not tell you now. But of this beware. Prick not yourself with a thorn of the rose-tree, for as surely as you do, the wound, be it ever so little, will not heal. And now, farewell. See that you guard well your tree.'

'Stay one moment,' cried Blanchelys. 'Tell me, I pray you, where you may be found.'

'I am to be found in many places, often where I am not sought, and seldom where men seek. Farewell.'

Again was heard a rustling sound through the branches overhead, and Love had vanished. The candle went out and Blanchelys was alone in the black night.

Clasping her seeds firmly in one hand, the girl stole home and crept into bed. Zaire moved in her sleep, but did not wake.

Blanchelys did not once close her blue eyes, but lay waiting for the first rays of sunlight. Then she again rose from her little bed and stole out to the garden. Now, for the first time, she looked at the seeds. They were red as rubies, and each was in the shape of a heart.

Taking a flower-pot, Blanchelys filled it with earth, and laid in it the seeds, but, before covering

them, she whispered the name of the King's son. Then she carried the flower-pot to the window-sill of her room. 'Here I can watch it night and day,' she said, 'and see that no harm befalls it.'

That morning, as the King's son rode past to the hunt, he stopped at the cottage door and asked Blanchelys for a glass of water. It was the first time he had spoken to her.

At night when she looked at the flower-pot a tiny sprout had sprung from the earth.

The next day and the next and the next again the Prince stopped at the cottage, and spoke to Blanchelys, and each time he stayed longer than the last. And so on it went, and meantime the sprout in the flower-pot had grown, until now it was a rose-tree covered with tiny buds.

One evening, on his way home from the hunt, the Prince came into the cottage, and asked Blanchelys if she would be his wife. 'And when I am King, you will be Queen,' he said.

Blanchelys cried for joy, and when she looked at her rose-tree, behold, it bore a full-blown white rose, which scented every room in the little cottage.

So Blanchelys married the King's son, and there were merrymakings all over the country, for every one liked the blue-eyed girl with the kind smile.

But although now she was a Princess, with ladies to wait on her and fine laces and jewels to wear, Blanchelys still prized more highly than aught else her white rose-tree which bore a fresh rose every day.

But what of the black-eyed Zaire? Ah, Zaire was bitterly jealous of the happiness that had befallen her cousin, although Blanchelys had been kind to her, and given her beautiful things, and taken her to live at the palace. Still Zaire hated Blanchelys, and planned night and day how she might work her harm.

Time passed, and the rose-tree, now too big for the flower-pot, was planted in the garden, just outside the bedroom window of the Princess. By night the scent of its roses was wafted into her room, and by day the tree was her first care. She watered it herself, and would carefully brush off all insects and cut off the withered leaves. And sometimes, when alone, she would kiss a white rose, feeling that in some strange way she had the rose-tree to thank for her great happiness.

But Zaire watched Blanchelys secretly, and longed to know why her cousin loved the tree so well.

After a time, Blanchelys had a baby-boy, and when the people heard of the little heir to the throne, the bells pealed joyfully, and there was great gladness throughout the land. And Blanchelys, who was the happiest of all, went out with her son in her arms to sit by the rose-tree. But lo! it had so grown that now she could stand under the shade of its branches.

‘You are a happy woman, cousin Blanchelys,’ said Zaire, coming up to her from behind, as she stood beneath the tree.

‘Indeed I am,’ said Blanchelys, looking at her babe, ‘and I hope you will some day be as happy.’

‘That is impossible, for you will one day be Queen, and that I can never be,’ answered Zaire.

‘But it is not because I shall be a Queen that I am happy. It is because I love my husband and child so dearly.’

‘And next to them, what do you love best?’ asked Zaire.

‘Oh ! my rose-tree,’ said Blanchelys, as she leaned against its trunk.

‘Then, if the tree were to die, you would be very unhappy?’ and Zaire’s black eyes glittered as she spoke.

‘If my tree were to die, I think I should die too,’ said Blanchelys, and she grew pale at the thought.

From that day the wicked Zaire thought of nothing but how she might kill the rose-tree. And she tried first one way and then another, but in vain. If she pulled off the leaves, fresh ones grew ; if she cut off its branches, they would sprout anew ; if she peeled the bark from the trunk, the wound quickly healed. Try as she might, Zaire could not injure the tree.

Soon after the baby prince was born, the old King died, and Blanchelys and her husband were crowned King and Queen. Again the bells pealed joyfully, and there was great gladness throughout the land. The golden crowns were placed on the heads of the new King and Queen, as they sat on a golden throne, with their baby in a golden cradle at their feet. Queen Blanchelys was dressed in white and gold, and wore roses from her own rose-tree. And when the people saw her smile as kindly as of old,

they cheered and shouted till the palace walls echoed their joy.

But Zaire, when she saw her cousin seated on the golden throne, was filled with jealousy and wept with rage; and at the great ball which was given at night, she did not dance, but stood in a corner planning how she might best hurt the Queen. All at once a thought flashed across her mind. Ah! at last she had found a way.

Out she ran into the dark night. It was windy and wet. The moon was hidden, and never a star shone in the black sky. Around the palace she groped her way until she stood by the white rose-tree beneath the royal bedroom window. In one hand Zaire held firmly her magic candle. Stooping down, she planted it firmly in the ground and lit it.

Suddenly was heard a long, loud hiss, and then, there before her, she saw an ugly hag, clothed in black. About her head was twisted a crown of hissing snakes, and round her staff twined a serpent with seven heads, and all the heads hissed with rage.

‘What want you with me?’ asked the hag, in a voice that made Zaire tremble. ‘Speak; what is your wish?’

‘That I may kill it,’ and Zaire pointed to the white rose-tree. The hag laughed a hideous laugh, drew from her bosom a tiny snake, and held it out to Zaire. ‘Take that,’ she croaked, ‘and lay it at the root of the rose-tree. Soon it will twist around the trunk, and the tree will die.’

Zaire, frightened, took the cold snake in her hand. 'Who are you, and what is your name?' she asked the hag.

'I am Envy,' was the answer, and again Zaire heard a long, low hiss, and the hag had vanished. The candle went out, and Zaire was alone in the black night.

At once the jealous girl went back to the palace, holding in her hand the cold, shiny snake. It was bright, glittering green, with scarlet eyes, and from its mouth ran a long forked tongue. But although it hissed angrily, it did not try to hurt Zaire. She kissed it, and, putting it in her bosom, entered the ball-room.

Next morning, Queen Blanchelys went, as usual, to the rose-tree, carrying the babe in her arms.

'You are a happy woman, cousin,' said Zaire, coming up to the Queen from behind, as she stood beneath the tree.

'Indeed I am,' said Blanchelys, looking at her babe.

'See, I now have a pet too,' said Zaire, and she drew from her bosom the snake, and let it twine around her neck.

'Oh, hideous!' cried the Queen, hiding her eyes.

'If you have a pet, why should not I?' asked Zaire, and she kissed the snake's glittering head.

'But not that, not that,' cried Blanchelys. 'Throw it away, and I will give you a dove, or a gazelle, or a rose-tree.'

'I would not change my snake for anything in

the world,' said Zaire, as she walked away, still fondling it. But Blanchelys shuddered and felt very sad, although she knew not why.

That night, when it was dark, Zaire dug to the root of the rose-tree, and there she laid the glittering snake. 'Do your work well, my pet, do your work well,' and she filled the hole with earth, and smoothed the top so that no one should see traces of her wicked deed.

Next day, when the Queen came to look at the rose-tree, lo! its branches were drooping, and though she tended it with the utmost care, and gardeners from far and near did all they could, still each day the tree drooped more and more, and the white flowers faded and fell.

Then Queen Blanchelys was sick at heart, for it was as the boy Love had foretold. The King's love dwindled as the rose-tree drooped, until at last he spent his days in the hunting-field with the black-eyed Zaire.

When the last leaf fell from the tree, the Queen said, 'I will stay here no longer. I will go to seek Love. Perchance he may help me.' So, in the night, Blanchelys rose, and, wrapped in a large cloak, set out alone.

On she wandered, until she came to the little house by the bridge,—her old home. She went into the garden, and by the yew-tree she looked for Love, but he was not there. And when she asked the villagers if they had seen him,—'a boy with pink wings'—they stared at her as though she had been mad. So on she trudged night and day, well-

nigh spent with weariness and disappointment, for she could not find Love.

At last she came to a big church. The villagers were pouring in to see a wedding, she was told. 'Ah, here must Love be found,' and she hastened up the steps, and sat down in a pew among the people. She waited until the wedding was over, and watched the bridal party come down the aisle. The bride was grandly dressed, every one was smart and gay, but Love was not there.

With a heavy heart Blanchelys turned from the church and wandered on until she came to a village green. Here children danced and sang, and were bright as the summer day. 'Surely here I shall find Love,' murmured the tired Queen. But alas! she sought in vain.

On and on she toiled, weary and sad at heart, until, able to go no further, she sank down in front of a little cottage on a bleak moor. Near by were an old church and churchyard, and beyond, the roaring sea.

Within the cottage two women sat spinning. The window was open, and Blanchelys could hear them speak. 'She worked for him from morning till night, and he never spoke a kind word to her,' said one. 'And she loved him through it all,' said the other. 'See, there she is weeping for him now.'

Blanchelys looked up and saw, not far off, a girl sitting on the grass, her face hidden in her hands. 'Ah, she is lonely too, perchance I may comfort her,' and Blanchelys rose to go to the girl. And lo! as she came near, behold Love was bending over the maid. And the words he spoke must have been of

good cheer, for she passed on towards the old church, her tears dried.

‘Help me, sweet Love,’ cried Blanchelys, as with clasped hands she sank weeping to the ground.

‘Poor Queen, is your rose-tree indeed dead?’

‘My rose-tree is indeed dead, and the King no longer loves me. Who, who has killed my tree?’

‘Your cousin Zaire. Envy helped her. Envy gave her a snake and she laid it at the root of the tree.’

‘But how, tell me how I may bring it to life again?’

‘Only one thing in the world can do that,’ said Love.

‘And what is that?’

‘The blood from your own heart. Pierce it with a thorn from the rose-tree, and let the blood run to its roots. There it will kill the snake, and the tree will bloom afresh.’

When Queen Blanchelys heard this, she rose slowly and turned homeward. On she toiled for many days until at last she saw the palace.

But why were the flags flying? She stopped to ask a villager.

‘You must indeed be a stranger,’ said the woman, ‘for all who live here know well that to-morrow the King marries the Princess Zaire. She is a cousin of the Queen who has long been dead.’

‘Did not the Queen leave a little son?’ asked Blanchelys.

‘Yes, and he is always with the King. The King is so fond of the boy that some say the Princess

Zaire is jealous, and would fain get rid of the child.'

Queen Blanchelys thanked the woman, and sat down by the roadside. There she stayed until night fell.

Then quietly she stole to the palace and wrote a letter to the King. In it she told how she had left home because he no longer loved her, and how Love had said to her that Zaire had killed her rose-tree, and stolen his love.

'Be good,' she ended, 'to our little son, and bury me beneath the white rose-tree.'

Then she slipped quietly from one bedroom to another. All were sound asleep. To Zaire she whispered, 'Cruel cousin, why did you hate me so? I never hurt you. But you shall never be Queen in my place, although you dream so now.'

To her little son she murmured, 'Ah, little son, farewell. Had I not come to-day, the cruel Zaire would to-morrow have been your step-mother. Now you will be ever your father's joy. Little one, farewell.'

To her husband she said, laying her letter on his pillow, 'Alas, to-night I look at you, and you behold me not. To-morrow you will look at me, but I,—I shall not see you. Adieu.'

Then noiselessly Queen Blanchelys stole out into the palace garden. She reached the bare black stump which was once her rose-tree, and tore off a long sharp thorn. With it she pierced her heart; then, clasping the trunk of the tree with both arms, she died. At the same moment the drops of blood

from her breast reached the roots of the tree, and it burst into bud.

Next morning the King found the Queen's letter on his pillow, and who could utter his grief? When he was able to speak he told his courtiers of the fate of his dear Queen, and they all went together to the rose-tree. It was covered with leaves and buds, and beneath it, dead, lay the blue-eyed Blanchelys.

The King kissed his dead Queen, and ordered that under the rose-tree she should be buried, and each day he sat long by her grave. But the wicked Zaire, stripped of her fine dresses and jewels, was banished from the kingdom, and had to beg her bread from door to door in a strange land.

The magic rose-tree thenceforth bore a thousand blossoms, but the roses, which had been white before, were now red,—as red as the blood that had flowed from the good Queen's heart.

