

The Faery Tales of Weir

Anna McClure Sholl

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The Faery Tales of Weir

By Anna McClure Sholl

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CONTENTS

THE FAERY TALES OF WEIR

THE TALE OF THE BLUE GLOVE

THE INVISIBLE WALL

THE TREE IN THE DARK WOOD

THE CAT THAT WINKED

THE MAGIC TEARS

THE GOLDEN ARCHER

[Illustration: THE TOWN OF WEIR]

THE FAERY TALES OF WEIR

Only in far-away towns are the real faery tales told in shadowy nurseries whose windows in summer open upon shimmering gardens and on whose walls in winter the fire-goblins dance. Weir is one of these towns--a sweet, hushed place, lying where the hills spread broadly to the south sun, and the trees are thick as in a painting.

There are shops, too, with bulging windows through which you can scarcely see the toys or the flowers or the sweetmeats, because Time has finger-marked the glass with violet and crimson stains that shift and merge so that the contents of the windows are seen as through wavering sea-water. Beyond the shops are the houses asleep beneath great trees, their warm red bricks showing where the ivy has thinned. Their stacked chimneys send out faint blue spirals of smoke, to let you know that the fires are on the hearths and about the hearths the children are gathered.

The little old churches placed where Weir drowns out into the country, have hoarse, sweet bells like the voices of old women who whisper of the Christ Child at Christmas time; and in the churches are windows as full of color as the gardens of Weir.

The sleepy, forgotten town was famous for nothing but its faery tales told long ago to children whose bright eyes have looked by now on wider

scenes, and whose voices have died away on that wind upon which all voices sink from hearing at last. I sometimes wonder whether in imagination they all troop back at the twilight hour: Hubert to cuddle up in the wing-chair; James to stretch out on the hearth-rug; Veronica and little Eve to nurse their dolls and gaze through the nursery window half fearfully at the striding dusk, or to listen to the tap upon the panes of flying leaves when the great winds rise. Where is Richard who always wanted "a tale never told before," and small Spencer with his dreaming eyes and baby mouth? Where is quaint Matilda with her plaid dress and her straight black hair; where is Ruth?

Wherever they are, I like to think that to them Weir is always their true home; and their hearts really live in that broad shadowy house where the steps of the staircase were so wide and shallow that each was a little landing in itself; and where the candles flamed at night in high sconces; and in the halls was a rustling of silk; and in the air the smell of flowers and burning wood. The nursery was high up under the eaves, so that the rest of the house seemed far-away--a wonderful region where music might sound, or where, by stealing down, one might see fair ladies like the princesses of the tales smiling at gallant gentlemen. One's own mother might turn, indeed, into a princess just before it was time to go to bed, with white arms and jewels upon her neck.

Then one fell asleep knowing that no day in Weir could be without its enchantment, whether the clouds seemed caught in the tree-tops, or the snow flew and made the red roofs white; or whether the sun danced on the green lawns, for each day ended with a faery tale, and these are the tales of Weir.

THE TALE OF THE BLUE GLOVE

The King of the South country was not as happy as a king ought to be whose subjects are both peaceful and industrious. Every night when the moths were flying and the tall candles were lit in the hall, when the soft air was musical with the strumming of harps, and the sweet complaint of violins, he would walk out on the great parapet with one hand under his chin and his head drooping; then the courtiers would say, "The King is sad."

If he looked out he could see town after town, like strings of pearls and corals, with blue smoke coming from the chimneys of red-roofed houses, and beyond the towns the sea like a green bowl. If he looked straight down he could see a rush of color, as if the flowers were coming up to him in billowy waves.

But the King was not happy, for the reason that he wanted to marry his three sons, and he didn't know of any princesses who would, so to speak, fill the bill. He had journeyed over the mountains to inspect several little ladies who were brought to him, in their stiff satin gowns to make their curtsy and smile their prettiest, but none of them seemed desirable for a daughter. The King knew, indeed, very much what he wanted. She mustn't chatter and she mustn't be too fond of chocolates in gold and enameled boxes; and she mustn't have likes and dislikes; and she must be patient, for all really royal people know how to wait; and she must possess the beautiful art of smiling. The King had seen her in

the frames of old paintings, still and sweet and jeweled, but never alive and lovely.

On the evening when this tale begins the King was watching the three princes play at ball. The ball was of scented Spanish leather covered with crimson silk on which was stamped the sporting dolphin of the royal house. Sometimes it would drop to the green turf where the parrots would peck at it, thinking it a gorgeous apple. The hooded falcon on the jester's arm knew better, for the jester fed him real apples.

Prince Hugh, Prince Merlin, and Prince Richard were as supple as willows, as straight as pines, as graceful as silver birches. Their blond hair hung thick and straight against their necks and was cut square above their level brows. Their manners were so good that their father didn't quite know their characters; and that made the problem of their marriages more difficult.

All at once, as on a stage, they stopped playing ball and began to look at something or someone. The King followed their eyes, and saw a strange sight. A young girl with a great dog at her side was coming slowly over the grass, her hands clasped above her breast, her long golden hair hanging nearly to the hem of her gown which was of coarse brown wool. She had no stockings, and on her feet she wore wooden shoes.

That a peasant girl should walk across the royal gardens was enough to make the princes stare. Then the King saw that they were looking at the girl's hands, of which one was bare. On the other was a glove of blue cut-velvet, heavily embroidered with a design of flowers which circled themselves about a tiny mirror set exactly on the wrist; no glove for a peasant!

She came slowly up the great stairs of the terrace as if she were expected. By this time the court-lackeys had rushed out, full of officiousness, to stop the outrage; but the King, at the end of a puzzled day, was in no mood to hinder the least diversion. He advanced to meet the visitor, who raised to him a pair of beautiful blue eyes and smiled.

"Where did she learn to smile?" thought the King, conscious that the gaze of the three princes was still upon the girl.

She held out the gloved hand. "King Cuthbert, I am sent to your court by King Luke. Will you be pleased to look in my mirror?"

Her wrist was raised to the level of his eyes. "What do you see?" she asked in a soft, solicitous voice.

"Myself, maiden," he replied.

She sighed, and the tears came in her eyes.

"Who else could I see?" he exclaimed.

She smiled and shook her head, then she nodded towards the three straight boys on the lawn. "Those are your sons?"

"Mine, indeed, maiden."

"I am sent to make their acquaintance. I am the niece of King Luke, the Princess Myrtle."

King Cuthbert could not believe his ears, nor trust his eyes, for the Princess Myrtle had great vaults of gold under the thousand-year-old turrets of her castle; and pearls like pigeon eggs in the renowned diadem with which the generations of her royal race were crowned kings or queens.

"My uncle sends me as a beggar-maid so that I can make a true marriage. I desire to be loved for myself alone. Speak not of me to the court, but deal with me as I appear to be."

King Cuthbert gazed in admiration at her, for she had the voice of one who thinks more than she speaks and feels more than she thinks, which is the proper order for great and little ladies. "Here," thought he, "is the child I have been seeking. I will not tell the three straight-limbed lads so beautifully mannered who or what she is, but I will say that a friend hath sent an orphaned girl to be protected by me; then I will watch how they treat her, and learn at last what my sons are."

"Princess Myrtle," he said, "I will henceforth treat you as an orphaned and poor girl. Is that to your liking?"

"It is my wish, Sir," she answered, and suddenly a rising wind blew all the strands of her hair into a cloud of gold, so that her coarse wool dress appeared brocaded; and while she was thus sumptuously clothed a great peacock in iridescent array strutted by her, and she placed her gloved hand for a moment on his shining feathers, looking, indeed, a princess. Back of her the courtiers stared and rubbed their eyes. The three slim boys on the lawn were smiling.

Prince Hugh tossed the scarlet ball to her and she caught it lightly as if she were making a curtsy.

"Take the ball back to him," said the King, "and tell him I sent you."

As she went down through the parterres of flowers she was as straight as a delphinium and fresh-colored as a rose. Where the great trees clouded into the sky she looked as little as a floating petal; but when she stepped upon the sward, she seemed to grow tall like an upward soaring flame.

Though she walked with such courage towards the three slim lads her heart was beating fast, because she was afraid they would not be as noble as they looked. For at court nearly everyone looks noble, and the Princess Myrtle had learned how easy it is to keep your eyes level, and your head high, and your bearing proud; and how hard it is to preserve a sweet heart like a rose, within the shadow of this grandeur.

So she went to meet the princes with a shy, hopeful manner, the scarlet ball in her hand, and her blue eyes addressed to theirs.

"I am commanded by your royal father to return to you this ball," she said.

"I pray you tell me," said Prince Hugh, "how you, being a beggar-maid, walk as if possessed of wealth?"

She smiled. "All people are rich. Some know it. Some do not."

The princeling gave a royal whistle, and smiled at his brother Richard, who picked a white carnation and began to pull its petals. "Tell me, maid, why you wear the blue glove?" he asked.

"To cover a hand still my own," she returned proudly.

Merlin said nothing at all. He took the scarlet ball, bowed, and turned from her. She raised her eyes to the heights where the turrets cut the sky, black against gold, and the whirling sea-birds beat down the seaward rushing wind. Then stepping softly, she followed Merlin, who walked on to a place where the arching trees made a green cave, and in the depths of the cave was a fountain of marble sunk into a round of ferns. At the edge the prince paused, then he dropped the ball into the water, and it sank, for it was solid and heavy.

[Illustration: MERLIN DROPS THE BALL INTO THE FOUNTAIN]

"Why did you do that?" cried the Princess.

He wheeled about, and looked upon her coldly. "Why have you followed me?" he asked.

"To pick up the ball, should you drop it."

"The ball is drowned," he said.

"Why did you put it in the water?" she asked.

"Because you touched it," he replied.

She was very sad then. "You scorn to touch what a beggar-maid has handled?" she asked.

To this he made no reply, but strolled away into the green wood, while wearily she turned back. The stag-hounds, with their collars of jade, came to meet her, and the three enormous Persian cats whose tails were like long plumes. She stooped to caress them, and to hide her tears, for Prince Hugh and Prince Richard were coming towards her, and she did not wish them to know she was sad.

They stood like twin trees regarding her, then Prince Richard spoke. "Will you sell your glove, beggar-maid?" and he drew a piece of gold from his purse.

She replied: "I have more need of my glove than of your gold."

"If you were a court lady," said Prince Hugh, "you would know that one glove is of no use to anyone."

"If you were a beggar, Sir," she replied, "you would be glad to have one hand warm."

"I shall never be a beggar," returned the Prince proudly.

"Yet you begged your father for a cloth-of-silver falcon hood this morning."

Prince Richard laughed and his brother stared. "Are you a witch?" asked the latter.

"No, I am not a witch. I lost my way in the gardens before I found the right path. You were talking in the arbor by the edge of the lake, and you implored your father, the King, like a beggar on the street corner."

Prince Hugh's cheeks were red as peonies. "Your words are too bold, beggar-maid. If you will not sell your glove, I will take it."

She stretched out her arm. "You will not be able to take what is not yours!"

"Will I not!" and he rushed at her and began to tug at the glove. His face grew redder and redder, but he could not strip off the glove, which seemed to have grown to the maid's arm. Suddenly he caught sight of his fiery countenance in the little round mirror, and he left off pulling at the glove, but his failure aroused emulation in the heart of Prince Richard, who now began to tug at the glove as if it were heavy armor.

The Princess Myrtle grew as white as a snow-drop in pale wintry sunshine, for it seemed to her that all three of the princes were of base metal beneath their noble bearing. "Look in the mirror," she said pitifully, "and tell me what you see!"

"His own red face, I warrant, as I saw mine," cried Prince Hugh; then Prince Richard seeing how flushed his face was, drew away sulkily; and the Princess walked from them up and up through the parterres of flowers to the terrace where the King stood in the evening light, his cloak blown out, so that the satin lining showed like a great magnolia petal. His long fingers rested on the marble balustrade, and the royal rings winked wickedly at the Princess.

The King said to her, "What did my sons say and do to you?"

Then she related everything.

The King frowned. "But how do I know whether you are really the Princess Myrtle? You may for all that be but a goose-girl or a beggar-maid."

She replied, "Let me remain in your court three days as a beggar-maid. If at the end of that time you are not sure, turn me out. I, too, will be sure of something at the end of three days."

"Of what will you be sure?" asked the King.

"Which of you is the real king here."

Then King Cuthbert grew red like old leather, and laughed and sighed and frowned. "God knows, I should myself like that knowledge." Then he signed to a court lady, who was looking on with proud eyes. "Come, Dame Caecilia, take this beggar-maid to one of the suites in the palace, and put fair clothes on her, and conduct her to the dining-hall when the hour strikes."

The court lady smiled to hide her anger, for she dared not disobey, and she beckoned the Princess Myrtle to follow her. They went through a vast door into a corridor that ran beneath heavy arches, and the walls of this passage moved as if alive, but it was only the draught swaying the tapestries with their gray trees and knights who rode among the trees like heavy shadows, and long-haired women who watched the knights ride

while they wove flower-wreaths.

Then the proud court lady took the Princess up a winding stair, like the twisted ways of life, down more corridors, then into a room, through whose windows high cypresses looked, and upon whose ceiling little cupids flew about.

"Now, beggar," she said angrily, throwing open the door of a wardrobe where hung silken things, "make the most of your luck. What will you wear? Here is mallow satin sewn with pearls, and with a running border of jasmine flowers done in sweet embroidery silks. Will it please you? Here is a silver cloth, studded with little coral beads over a petticoat of ancient lace. Here is black velvet softly lined with apricot brocade!"

"Nay, none of these will I wear, but my gown of good wool, and in my bundle are changes of linen, for I want no lace on my limbs. Send me fresh flowers for my hair, I entreat you, and I will bathe and so prepare myself for the court dinner."

Dame Caecilia stared at her, and moved the golden combs and mirrors about angrily on the dressing-table. "You will lose me my place at court," she cried.

"Perhaps it is already lost," answered the Princess.

"You speak not at all like a beggar."

"You never took the trouble to learn what a beggar really says," the Princess replied as she stripped the blue glove from her hand.

Curiosity got the better of the court lady's anger. "What person gave you that glove in place of alms?" she asked.

"My godmother out of faery land!"

"Nonsense!" cried the Dame, and she departed for the flowers with a face like a withered leaf.

The little Princess leaned against the sill of the window and sighed, and looked into the blue sphere of the night and wondered on what altar the high stars were lit. She thought of Merlin who had drowned his ball because her touch was on it, and her heart throbbed as if a hand were drawing it from her breast to place it out of her reach. She had seen little maids among the golden shadows of her own court with their white hands outstretched towards a heart someone had taken. Now the thrilling touch of that theft was upon her own spirit. Her thoughts followed Merlin as if her substance had been changed into his shadow.

All the court had assembled for dinner, when she entered the banquet hall behind the shame-faced Dame Caecilia, who made a curtsy to the floor as she explained to the King that the beggar-maid, being lacking in art, refused the silken clothes. "She would wear only this crown of wood violets."

Then the Princess curtsied, and all the courtiers laughed, but the King gravely bowed to her; and called, "Prince Hugh."

Prince Hugh came forward, looking noble as was his wont in the presence of his father. "What is your will, Sire?"

"I desire you to lead this maiden to the banquet."

"Sire, I have already asked the Lady Diana," he said and blushed a little, for he was lying.

The King then asked a lackey to summon Prince Richard, who came looking noble as was his custom, also, in the presence of his father.

"I desire you to lead this maiden to the banquet."

Prince Richard still endeavored to look noble. "Sire," he replied, "I am not dining to-night. I have a headache."

Then King Cuthbert sent for Prince Merlin. Now when the Princess Myrtle heard his name, it seemed to her as if musicians had begun to play in a far-off room. She drooped her head a little lest she should show tears in her eyes when he, too, refused her. He came up white and grave with a look that was not patient. When his father made the request of him that he made of his other sons, Prince Merlin bowed and extended his arm to the beggar-girl, but he was as silent as a wood before a storm. Only the Princess quivered like a leaf that expects a great wind to pass.

"Did you obey your father because you are sorry for me?" she whispered.

"No, I obeyed him because he is the King, not I. I am sorry for myself rather than you."

Then the Princess felt her soul sink into a gulf, but she smiled and ate the food that was offered her, and made no attempt to speak to Prince Merlin.

All the next day she wandered in the rose-alleys, through marvelous terraces, and under the great trees, but no one spoke to her, nor could she see anything but vanishing forms; and so it was until evening, when wearied, she sat down on a bench and gazed into her mirror and gave a cry of joy. "Now," said she, "I love truly. By this sign I know I love truly, for I see Merlin's face in the mirror and not my own."

Then she went alone to her rooms through the vast corridors, and stood before the long mirrors which were not magic, but only meant to reflect earthly vanities; and from the shining marble floor came up a kind of radiance about her. She opened the cedar doors of the wardrobes, and there issued a scent as of costly silk that has been perfumed with iris root.

The temptation was heavy upon her to clothe herself delicately that she might please Merlin; and never before had beautiful clothes seemed so wonderful to her. She ran her long white fingers through the folds of silk, and let the laces cascade over her arms; but in the end she changed only her wooden shoes for little dancing slippers of violet velvet, and again she put fresh violets in her hair.

When she entered the banquet hall, she found the King on the dais, and on one side of him stood Prince Hugh in a rose-satin dancing dress; and on the other Prince Richard in a garb of yellow velvet. Both wore jeweled girdles to which were attached little shining swords with opals in the hilts. About the throne were grouped the courtiers; and beyond the courtiers were the knights and ladies of the frescoed walls which bore

the history of King Cuthbert's ancestors; girls like drifting blossoms, matrons like sweet fruit, and knights like strong trees.

The white velvet curtains before the tall casements shut out the stars, but all the heavens seemed recorded by the glowing wax-candles. Down the center of the room ran the banquet-table with dishes of gold; and plumage of rare birds nesting strange viands; and the sweet cheeks of summer fruits showing through the heaped blossoms of rose, gardenia, and honeysuckle. There were sweetmeats on dishes of pierced silver and between these played into broad glass bowls jets of scented water, making a lake where tiny swans swam.

But all this beauty was nothing to Princess Myrtle, because she did not see Prince Merlin in the room; nor at the banquet did he appear. So she could eat but a little fruit, and that was without taste to her.

After the banquet the court repaired to the dancing-hall, where already the musicians were strumming upon their instruments, so that everyone's feet began to move rhythmically. Then King Cuthbert beckoned the Princess Myrtle to him and said: "I see that you have put on dancing-slippers. With whom will you dance?"

"With myself, Sire, should I have no partner," she replied smiling.

At that moment Prince Merlin approached the throne clothed all in black silk, more appropriate for a scene of mourning than of festivity; and the King said to him: "Wilt thou lead this beggar-maid in the dance?"

The Prince's face grew as white for a moment as the lace of his collar, but he replied proudly, "At a ball a man chooses his own partners."

Then the Princess Myrtle's heart felt as weary as feet on a long road; but she awaited patiently the King's next word, which was spoken to Prince Richard and Prince Hugh, inviting them to dance with the beggar-maid. Each made an excuse. Then King Cuthbert addressed her. "Dance with yourself, beggar-girl," and he had the heralds proclaim that this stranger who wore brown wool in court would go on the floor alone. Everyone laughed and clapped their hands, only Prince Merlin bit his lip and looked prouder than ever, which, when she saw, the Princess Myrtle thought, "I will dance so beautifully that he will ask me to be his partner."

Then she let down her hair from beneath her crown of flowers, and went into the center of the circle that the court had formed, and began to sway a little like a flower in the breeze. Soon the court found itself swaying with her, so that it was like a garden when the wind rises. But when all were moving, the Princess saw that Prince Merlin stood like a pine-tree that will not bend its head unless the tempest comes out of the North. So she changed from a flower to a butterfly and began a fluttering, glancing motion, and threw back her golden locks like wings. Everyone watching her became very still, only Prince Merlin moved restlessly, and once he put his hand across his eyes as if the sun were in them.

When she had finished the King cried "Bravo," and then the court crowded about her, and Prince Hugh and Prince Richard asked her to dance with them; but Prince Merlin did not ask her, though he led out many ladies; and because of that it was as if she were dancing in the snow and rain, or on sharp stones.

The pain in her heart grew violent, and drove her at last to the orange-tree near which he stood. On the edge of its marble tub she sat down to rest, and all at once a golden orange dropped in her lap. She held it out to him. "You have drowned your scarlet ball, take this."

"Nay, for it is perishable," he said.

Then tears like pearls came slowly from her eyes and she was driven to say: "You alone have not asked me to dance. Did not my dancing please you?"

He replied, "I am not like my brothers," and he bowed and left her.

That night she lay on her broad bed beneath silken covers and sobbed bitterly because her heart told her that Prince Merlin was noble; yet her memory stung her with his cold words and averted eyes. Soon the third day would be over, and she would have to leave the court; for even if King Cuthbert acknowledged that she was a princess, what did that matter if Merlin did not know that she was his queen?

All next day she sat on the terrace which looks seaward and counted the sails coming up over the horizon like white petals blown from an invisible garden; and she would say, "If five come within a space of half an hour there will be hope for me"; but she always lost count, in thinking of his face.

That night she took off her woolen dress and she clothed herself in laces and over the laces she put on a cream silk gown all woven with apple blossoms, and she placed flowers upon her hair; then flashed before the mirror and smiled to see herself so beautiful. "Surely," she thought, "he will not turn from me to-night."

Then she put on her dancing-slippers; and went down. When she entered the banquet hall there was a stir and a murmur; and even King Cuthbert was silent with amazement over her beauty. Prince Hugh and Prince Richard came forward to meet her, and they bowed low, and looked very noble, indeed.

"Our father has played a merry jest upon us," they said. "You are, indeed, a princess and no beggar-maid." Then they began to dispute which should take her in to dinner. But her eyes were all for Prince Merlin, who, when the courtiers crowded about her and proclaimed her a princess, looked straight away from her. This was as a little sword in her heart, but the grief that dimmed her eyes made her appear even more beautiful.

After the banquet all proceeded to the dancing-hall, and King Cuthbert gave his arm to her. "Now I know thou art the Princess Myrtle. Which of my sons hast thou chosen?"

"A woman is chosen; she does not choose," she replied, for her heart was heavy. "To-night I must leave your court."

"Wilt thou continue thy search, Princess Myrtle?" the King said anxiously.

"No, I will return to my Kingdom."

"And what wilt thou do there?"

"I will weep," she answered.

She danced a measure with Prince Hugh and a measure with Prince Richard; then she saw that though Prince Merlin was in white satin and gold he did not dance, but stood alone by the orange-tree.

When she was free she sent a herald to fetch him, for now she desired no longer to play a part, but to be herself. He came slowly to where she stood, and bowed before her in silence.

"Tell me, Prince Merlin," she said, "if you agree with these courtiers that to-night I am become a princess?"

"I do not agree with them," he answered. "Clothes do not make a princess."

Then they looked at each other. "Will you meet me," she said, "on the edge of the wild forest in half an hour's time?"

"I am your servant," he replied.

She stole away to her rooms, where the moonlight lay athwart the tessellated marble floor, and opened the casement and placed the lamp there, which was to be the signal for her attendants to have her horses ready on the edge of the wild forest. Then she put on the gown she had worn as a beggar-girl, and her wooden shoes, and let her hair down over her shoulders.

The way to the wild forest was haunted with shadows and little fleeing things; and the night-owls called, but she remembered the look in Merlin's eyes, and conquered her fears.

And there he was waiting, with the moonlight gleaming on his white satin; and his face turned to the path up which she came.

She held out her hand to him with the blue velvet glove upon it, and she said softly, "Will you look into my mirror, Prince Merlin?"

"I am your servant," he said again, then looked.

His eyes became full of light. "I see your face," he cried; and sank upon one knee. She gave him both her hands.

"What am I to you?" she asked. "A princess?"

"No," he whispered.

"A beggar-girl?"

"No," he whispered.

"What then?"

"Thou art my love."

Then all the birds in all the world sang in her heart. "Tell me," she said, "why, then, didst thou sink thy ball?"

"That no hands should ever touch it after thine."

"And why didst thou say when thou didst lead me in to dinner, that thou wast sorry not for me, but for thyself?"

"I feared that thou wouldst never love me."

Then she laughed joyfully and asked, "Why didst thou say 'I am not like my brothers' when I asked thee to dance?"

"I wanted thee for thyself, not for thy dancing."

And now the stars moved all to nuptial music. "One question more," she cried. "Why didst thou say 'Clothes do not make a princess'?"

"Because I knew thou wast a princess the first hour I saw thee."

"Rise up, my Prince," she said. "We have a long journey before us."

"I hear the neighing of horses," he said, "and the moving of feet."

"My attendants," she replied. "My foster-mother rides with them. She gave me the blue glove, and told me he should be my husband who should see not his own face in the mirror, but mine."

"I see thy face everywhere," cried Prince Merlin.

So he kissed her, and they rode away with all her train through the sighing night-wind and beneath the summer stars to the land of their joy.

THE INVISIBLE WALL

On the edge of the Dark Wood dwelt for a time a Wizard, whose life had been spent in the acquirement of many wonderful arts. As a young man he had wandered over Europe from university to university, until one day he became aware of the true secret of education and burnt his books.

Then he dwelt for many years in the mountains, gazing into the dark mirror of his heart, plumbing the blue ocean of the sky until the hour for which he longed arrived, bringing Wisdom, who appeared to him as a young, fair being in the twilight.

Leaving his hut he came forth to meet her. "I had thought to greet you at noonday," said he.

"That is because you live in an age which thinks that to know is to be wise; but only those see who shut their eyes. Not in the glare of noon, but at twilight will you find me."

"You are a beautiful maid, Wisdom," said he who was on his way to be a wizard. "But why do you wear coarse linen who should be clothed in satins?"

"To travel light," she replied.

"And why do you smile who should look sad?"

"To be wise is to be happy."

"And what will you have me do?"

"Remove from here to the village that is near the Dark Wood. Go through all the countryside proclaiming that King Theophile will shortly make war upon the inhabitants, but bid them feel no terror; only they are to build an invisible wall."

"By the books that I burned, that is a strange command!" cried the Wizard. "Of what materials is this wonderful wall to be built?"

"Of their sacrifices, their renouncements, their good deeds," replied Wisdom.

"But they will call me mad," cried the Wizard.

Wisdom smiled. "Did you expect to be really wise, and yet thought sane?" she made answer. "Have the courage of all great follies and you will yet save The Kingdom of the Dark Wood, which is the fairland of the Princess Myrtle."

Upon which the Wizard took heart, for he knew that to be fearless is to be in the class of masters, and to be fearful is to be in the class of slaves; and the whole world is divided into these two classes, nor is there other aristocracy, or dependency.

"Sweet Wisdom, I will play the fool for your sake," he answered.

Then she smiled and blessed him and vanished into the shadows of the forest. The Wizard was not of those who say, "To-morrow I will do thus and thus"; but being truly wise he put all his power into the present moment. So he took his flask of water and his loaf of bread, for like Wisdom, he would travel light, and he set forth for The Kingdom of the Dark Wood.

There he rented a little cottage in the village near the wood, and set up a shoemaker's bench, for he knew how to make shoes--and good ones, too. Being a Wizard he knew that if he showed people he could do one thing well, they would be the more ready to listen to his words. A fine, comfortable shoe is a wonderful argument, so the Wizard set to work. The dewy dawns found him at his bench, and when the air at evening was full of heliotrope mists and homeward flying birds his little candle burned yellow to light his labors.

Soon all the inhabitants had comfortable foot-wear, which put them all in fine humor. Then the Wizard began to proclaim a great war and the coming of King Theophile. He stood on the green, near the town-pump, and at first only the geese listened to him, stretching out their long necks and opening their red bills. But this did not discourage the Wizard, for he knew that after geese come men.

[Illustration: THE WIZARD'S FIRST AUDIENCE]

"What's this! What's this!" cried the tailor who was the first to get the message, "A war? I must run right home and polish up my old gun."

"Nay," said the Wizard. "But go home and kiss your wife--for you haven't kissed her in five years."

"If she would comb her hair and look attractive I might kiss her," growled the tailor.

"If you'd buy her a ribbon occasionally," advised the Wizard, "she might have the desire to make herself look pretty."

"What has all this to do with war?" inquired the tailor.

"Your kiss will make a stone in the invisible wall which is to keep out the enemy," the Wizard answered. "And if you stop your everlasting work and take your poor wife on an outing, that will be another stone. Every sacrifice you make, every good deed you do, will be a guarding stone in the wall."

The tailor rubbed his ear. "Am I crazy, or are you?"

"Am I asking you to do much for your country?" demanded the Wizard. "Think how mean you would feel if the invisible wall got built without one stone of your donating."

"I'll go right home and kiss Matilda," said the tailor with a skip; and off he ran. In a few minutes he was back again. "She blushed so and looked so pretty and pleased that I kissed her three times, and to-morrow we are going to see her mother. Put me down for four stones."

"Good!" said the Wizard.

By this time quite a crowd had collected, all anxious to hear about the war. A rich miller took the news very seriously, because his mills lay to the eastward, from which horizon King Theophile would appear. He sent to the bank for bags of gold and laid them at the feet of the Wizard. "These will buy much gunpowder," he said.

"The wall will never be built of gold," replied the Wizard. "There is no gold minted that will overcome an enemy, or keep him out if he wants to get in, or put mercy into his heart when vengeance is flaming there. The real weapons are unseen. If you wish to help build the invisible wall, stop grinding the faces of the poor and charging famine prices for your grain."

Then the miller grew red in the face, and took up his bags of gold and went away. But next day everyone bought wheat at a lower price than it had been for many a long year, so that people knew the Wizard's words had taken effect. This made him very popular, and when he again proclaimed the danger of war and the necessity of building an invisible wall nearly all the village came forward to ask him what they could do to insure a stone in that guarding structure. Some of them whispered in his ear, because they hated to have their secret faults proclaimed to their neighbors.

Old Peter was among those who made inquiry as to what sacrifice they should offer to avert the threatening danger. "I have," said he, "a pet bird that pines in his cage. If I give him his liberty will that help build up the wall?"

"Yes, Peter," said the Wizard. "For no good man keeps anything captive that has the desire for freedom."

Some people paid their debts to help build the wall. Others began to go to church after staying away for years and years. Others made up long-standing quarrels with their relatives and old-time friends, and these stones of reconciliation were, the Wizard proclaimed, the strongest of all, since unity and love are the only impregnable fortresses.

Of course, there was some doubt about the wall, since nobody could prove that it really existed. But the Wizard declared he saw it to the eastward growing ever stronger and wider; and he traveled up and down the land prophesying war and the necessity of making the invisible wall strong and high by good works. He met with greatest success in the villages and towns, but when he entered the region of the high castles, where the knights and ladies dwelt, he was much laughed at and some would have had him locked up at once.

Now, being a Wizard, he knew how powerful fashion is in this world, and how a wandering breath may bring it into being, so he said to himself: "I will go direct to the court of the Princess Myrtle, who has married the Prince Merlin, and will gain her ear. When she knows the invisible wall is to protect her kingdom, she will be gracious and set the fashion of providing stones."

So he journeyed all day and all night and came at last to the grim city of green stones with towers like aged fingers of gnarled wood in the midst of which the Princess Myrtle held her court in an old red castle set about with small, stiff trees. Now the Princess had not long been married to the Prince Merlin. So full of love were they for each other that for them many days had drifted away like the dreams of a night; and so sweet was their converse, and so softly the minstrels sang that all the court lived in a kind of trance.

The day the Wizard reached the castle it was drowsy noon; and the golden-woven curtains were softly swaying in the breeze; while upon the dim walls the greenish tapestries looked like mysterious forests. The Prince and Princess sat upon their thrones like painted figures, and all around them sat their courtiers in their golden dreams while the minstrels sang:

"The waves are beating on the yellow sands,
The moon in a black vault rides white and high.
Let us go forth, from these most desolate lands,
Led by the spirit's cry."

"You are quite right," said the Wizard. "Your lands will be desolate unless you help build the invisible wall."

At that all the courtiers whose eyelids had been drooping with the summer heat and with dreams of romance, looked up, and the Princess Myrtle withdrew her gaze from Prince Merlin, and fastened her sweet eyes upon the Wizard. "You must not care what the minstrels sing," she said. "We are all so happy here, that we love songs of sorrow."

"Sweet Princess," said the Wizard, "King Theophile intends to make war upon you, and I have come to tell you that already your subjects have built a fine invisible wall of good deeds and sacrifices; but they must not perform all the labor and have all the pain while the nobles jest and

feast. For the wall must have a stone in it from every kind of man, rich or poor, high or low, else it will not endure. And you, the Princess, must put in the strongest stone of all, since the ruler of a country must be its protector."

All the courtiers smiled at this, but the Princess did not smile, because she was as wise as she was fair. She looked down at her peach-colored robe of satin and her little slippers embroidered with seed-pearls, and she drew a long-stemmed rose from the jade bowl near her throne to pass back and forth across her lips, as was her manner when thinking.

"Prince Merlin," she said at last, "if this strange tale be true, what stone wilt thou place in the invisible wall?"

"I will go for a month to the Council Chamber instead of lingering near thee while the minstrels sing," replied her husband.

"Spoken like a prince!" cried the Wizard. "And what wilt thou do, Princess?"

"I will go to the Council Chamber with milord," she answered. "And read most heavy papers of State; for if he shares my play I must share his work."

"To attend to the duties of sovereignty instead of listening to minstrels in a scented room is a fitting stone for the Princess to place in the invisible wall," commented the Wizard; then he looked around at the courtiers.

Now after the manner of courtiers they wanted to imitate their Prince and Princess, but they thought this invisible wall a great joke not worth making sacrifices for. The Wizard read their thoughts and said to them: "If the ruler works alone, he is like a bird with a crippled wing. He can only rule wisely and well if all the wisest and best help him. You are placed high that you may serve. Give me each his vow of sacrifice that the wall may be strong!"

The knights and nobles looked at each other, then at the Princess Myrtle; and she bowed her head and thus addressed them:

"If our weapons against an enemy must be our unity, our mutual love and service, instead of roaring guns and flaming cannon, surely it is easy to provide them. Nevertheless," she added, turning to the military commander, "see that the army is made ready."

The Wizard smiled. "Well and good, if you remember, dear Princess, that an army can never be greater or stronger than the nation back of it. For every gun manufactured there must be a noble desire forged, or a high ideal realized; or else the weapons will be but a mask of courage on a weak face."

The military commander shrugged his shoulders. "I'll go and see if the gunpowder is dry," he commented, "as my contribution to yon stranger's invisible wall."

Then one by one the nobles at the command of the Princess Myrtle came forward to register each his vow of sacrifice. One said that he would write no more poetry for a year; another that he would eat no truffles for a fortnight; a third proclaimed that he would sell his jeweled sword

to buy bread for the poor.

The Wizard listened and shook his head. "This layer of stones is going to be very weak," he said. "Why don't you all stop and think, while the ladies make their vows?"

The maids-of-honor crowded forward like a nose-gay of sweet-scented flowers, eager to do better than the knights in the construction of this invisible wall; for being women they were quicker than their brothers and husbands to understand what the Wizard meant. Yet they, too, were not quite clear in their minds, for one said she would wear linen instead of satin; another that she would give up perfumes for six months; another that she would read no novels for that time.

The Wizard began to look discouraged. At last a beautiful young girl came forward to register her vow. "I don't care enough about jewels and scents and satins to give them up, Sir Stranger," she said; "but I should like to win the love of the poor; so I will visit them, and be as one of them."

At this the Wizard clapped his hands. "This stone is most strong," he said. "Now, Sir Knights, return and make new vows."

Then the knights came forward. "I will be reconciled with my brother," said one. "I will build a new cottage for an aged tenant," proclaimed another; while a third, who was in love with the beautiful girl who wanted the love of the poor, said, "I will make a great supper for the hungry and will feast with them."

"Ah," cried the Wizard, "that will be, indeed, a great feast! The bread of charity chokes the receiver because the hand that gives it will not break it with him. We must have communion, not patronage; or the invisible wall will never be built."

The Princess Myrtle listened as one who hears a new gospel; and she remembered that she had never broken bread with the poor, but only bestowed benefits upon them, which is no way to become acquainted. And she sighed--a little sigh of love and regret and hope of doing better, which the Wizard said afterwards became one of the strongest stones in the invisible wall.

Such a change in the kingdom! People making up quarrels that had withered hearts for generations. Court ladies running with warm loaves to the cottages and staying to eat some of the bread. Knights helping old men with the harvest; minstrels sent to sing to the bedridden instead of to an assemblage of bored ladies and gentlemen in a tapestried gallery. Much less talk of love and many more loving deeds. People wild to serve each other instead of themselves. All the land silent and helpful, instead of chattering and selfish! Such a change in the kingdom!

The Wizard was everywhere, for the wall was beginning to be a real defense, and he spared no pains to see that every stone was strong.

Now the fame of this wall reached King Theophile--for this was in the days of his warring--and he laughed on his throne and said, "Oh, little Nation, I will make mincemeat of thee, for I have every kind of weapon that is made, and many officials who do nothing all day but spy on other people and brandish their swords. What have you to oppose to such strength? Little kingdom, you will be but a road to my glory."

So he made great preparations for war, and gathered together all the weapons that shed blood. There were many of these and he prided himself upon them, but in all his arsenal was not one instrument that could put shed blood back again into the veins of a man, which shows that ironworkers do not know everything.

One fine day the King and all his armies came across the rocking waves and drove their boats upon the shores of The Kingdom of the Dark Wood which lay fair before them like a green and purple map edged with white where the breakers drove high. The land wind brought to their senses the odors of grapes, and the scent of apples and ripe grain. And the soldiers said to each other, "We will kill, then we will feast."

They were impatient to overrun the land. Now the air-spies reported that but a small army had massed to meet the intruders, and that back of their ranks the inhabitants were peacefully at work gathering in the harvest. This seemed incredible. Then King Theophile gave his command to the army, "March forward"; and to the air-spies, "Fly on and drop burning brands on the fields."

The army immediately set out. Far away the air-spies were seen beating the air like black rooks, but strangely enough they always remained in sight and seemed to get no further. At last they went high up into the clouds and disappeared.

But the soldiers pressed on joyfully, for the sweet odors of vineyard and garden grew ever more ravishing; and now the land lay at their feet in a shimmering haze, through which the forests rose like deep cool islands with here and there a red roof, or a white church spire to tell of human habitation. And up through the haze like released spirits in paradise came with soft, steady motion, phalanxes of soldiers smiling.

"By my sword that never sleeps," cried King Theophile, "their faces shall be gray ere nightfall, and they shall smile no more."

Then all his soldiers made their swords sing and flash like waving grain of death; and they chanted together a song without joy. Suddenly the black dam of their war fury broke and, with the wild roar of an untamed cataract, they swept forward towards these still and smiling knights, with King Theophile on a high dark horse at their head.

In his rage of conquest he dug his golden spurs into his horse's side, and the beast with quivering nostrils, leaped through space, then suddenly paused, quivering; nor could cry, or whip, or spur move him. Then King Theophile leaped down and rushed forward to see what was frightening the animal; and all at once he crashed against something hard, and his broken right arm fell to his side. He grew gray, not with pain but with sheer terror, for he could see nothing, yet his arm had been broken upon a substance that felt like granite.

As he gazed wildly about him, he saw the first phalanx of his army pitch back with bleeding foreheads; and their eyes rolled in amazement, for they could see nothing, yet they had driven themselves against stones.

"On! On!" cried King Theophile, for he trusted again to his senses which revealed only a peaceful landscape and in the distance, haloed with the mists, a calm army waiting and smiling. That smile of the foe was like poison in the King's veins, and again he rushed forward, this time to

bruise and cut his head, so that the blood poured over his white mantle.

Then he grew faint with fear as he beheld his soldiers clawing the empty airs and turning horror-stricken countenances to him. "Sire," they whispered, "something is holding us back. Something is here that we do not see!"

At that moment the air-spies dropped to the ground like tired birds. "The wind holds us back," cried one. "No!" exclaimed another, "we broke our machines against a wall miles in the air! This is a bewitched country."

"We will wait and try again," said King Theophile.

So they encamped on the spot, and far off in the haze they saw the other army pitch its tents, and they heard the soldiers singing. All night their banners waved in the wind and the faint music continued.

At dawn King Theophile's army was astir, and those air-spies whose vehicles were still unbroken, began their flight violently--and were as violently pitched back. The phalanxes were ordered to advance, but some fell dead with horror as they drove their limbs against an unseen barrier. For the limpid air revealed only the placid fields; and in the distance among the golden shadows, men smiling like the still saints in paradisal meadows. "These be happy warriors," sighed the King, and for once in his life he longed to call the foe "brother" and ask how the harvest went; and to pillow his head on the same knapsack with a soldier, and so sleep sweet and brotherly.

But the wall which shut out his hate, now shut out also his love, so that he could not walk across the fields and embrace those smiling warriors waiting in the sunshine for a battle that was never to take place.

So sadly one day he turned his army back to the sea-strand, and the rocking boats, and away from the vision of calm eyes gazing at him through golden shadows, where the land lay fair and open.

Now when the last of the fleet had disappeared below the horizon the people of the Dark Wood kingdom went mad with joy; and the Wizard was escorted to the palace by all the army. The Princess Myrtle and Prince Merlin met him at the entrance to the throne-room, and pages scattered flowers beneath his feet.

"O Wise Man," cried the Princess, "how shall we reward thee for thy wisdom?"

"Only children crave rewards," replied the Wizard. "It will be pleasure enough for me to return to my little hut and to hear the woodpeckers in the eaves; and to see the white owls fly when the stars glow above the dark forest branches."

Now the Military Commander was the only person in the kingdom who was not sharing the general joy. He was grumpy because he had lost all the honor of winning a bloody battle. Even the sight of all his army alive and well could not soothe the wound to his vanity; so when the Princess and the Wizard were exchanging the last courtesies, he strode forward, bowed, and said:

"Your Highness, this invisible wall is all very well, but how will our people reach the seacoast through this perpetual barrier? Can this mighty

Wizard destroy what he has erected?"

Then all the court looked at the Wizard, who asked to be led at once to the great concourse where the people were assembled. "This is a question to be settled by the nation and not by the court," he averred.

So the knights and ladies moved like living flowers to the concourse where the people were assembled--the pure grain of the kingdom. And the Wizard called in a loud voice to them, "Men and women, is it your will that your good deeds be destroyed or remain in everlasting remembrance? For this wall will never keep any true soul from the sea, nor any honest man; but he that is a rogue will beat in vain against it!"

Then the people shouted, "We will keep this wall which we have built with our good deeds."

So the wall stood forever, but the Wizard journeyed home, and knew the joy of the tired traveler who sees his own little nook again. That night he ate his bread and drank his draught of water on his own doorstone; and watched the white owls fly, hoping that Wisdom would let him be quiet awhile in the arms of the forest before she sent him out again to teach the restless hearts of men.

THE TREE IN THE DARK WOOD

In the kingdom of the Princess Myrtle were many forests cut through with roaring streams which dashed and danced their way over immense shining black boulders that looked like ebony bears lying in the current. So high were the trees of these woods that they shut out the sun, and he who walked through them felt himself among the columns of a gigantic temple.

In the darkest wood of all people sometimes lost their way on bitter nights when the white stars hung just above the tree-tops and the frost-fairies filled the air with the little snaps and crackles of their orchestra--the queer, marred music of winter. The reddening of dawn found these poor adventurers frozen unless they had the good fortune to find what all the countryside knew as "The Tree in the Dark Wood."

The whispers of generations had established the fact of the existence of this tree since the hour when the woodcutter, Peter Garland, had wandered too far into the forest, and had been benighted on the feast of St. Stephen when the air sometimes sings with snow. He had become half paralyzed with the cold, his poor lantern had gone out, and he was about to say his last prayers thinking he would never live until morning, when suddenly, in the midst of the whirling snow, he saw extended the limbs of a most beautiful tree. It was not so tall as the others, and shining fruit of a delicious appearance hung upon its branches amidst its thick foliage.

Best of all, poor, half-frozen Peter felt a wonderful warmth glowing from its trunk, and with the warmth came a soft crimson light; so he stole up to it as if he were a little boy and this tree were his beautiful Mother; and he cuddled down in the arms of its great roots and went to sleep.

When he woke up it was morning; and the sun was turning the surface of

the snow into sheets of iridescent light. He yawned and stretched out his arms, then remembering his wonderful rescue of the evening before, he gazed upward, but saw only a tall pine tree with shining brownish cones pendant from its branches. Where was the beautiful green summer-tree hung with crimson fruit? Where was the light like the sun's rays through painted glass?

"But here am I alive and warm," thought Peter. "And the night was bitter. This tree must change its shape at the footfall of evening; and I will mark it, lest it should be lost to us."

So taking out his knife he cut three crosses in the bark of the tree; then setting his face to the sun, for his cottage lay to the east of the Dark Wood, he hacked the trees all along the way; and at last emerged in the path which led to his dwelling. His wife and all the neighbors, who had given him up for dead, came running to meet him with cries of joy; but when he told them what had happened they tapped their foreheads and glanced at each other. "Poor man," they said, "the frost-king hath stolen his wits."

"But I marked the tree with three crosses," he cried, "and I can lead you straight to it."

They laughed, but to humor him they said he might take them to his wonderful tree after dinner, when hot soup had given them all courage; so that afternoon there was a long procession of people trudging through the Dark Wood with Peter at their head. By the time he arrived at the tree he was trembling like a leaf with excitement. There, sure enough, stood a tall pine-tree marked with the three crosses, but it was otherwise in no way different from its fellows. "Yes, but wait for evening; then you will see it change," said Peter.

They laughed a little and grumbled a little; but most of them had filled their lanterns and brought bread and cheese against a hungry time, and after all, it was not so cold in the forest, for the North Wind with his blue ballooned cheeks could not blow hard down those long avenues. Peter was full of excitement, for he was sure that the tree would become magical as soon as the sun set.

When the last splashes of crimson had faded from the topmost boughs he began anxiously to watch the tree about which all the villagers had seated themselves in a circle after first scraping the snow from the dead leaves. Darker and darker grew the air, and brighter the stars, while far off in the forest the great cats began to talk to each other, and the owls hooted and flew. Suddenly Peter gave a cry of joy. "See! See! the wonderful fruit, the glowing leaves!"

"Nonsense!" said his wife. "O, poor loon, he will never be right again!" and she began to weep into her apron.

"It is true! It is true!" cried another voice, that of hard-worked Bennie Brown, who supported an old father and mother and a crippled sister by his labors.

"Yes, it is the most beautiful tree," said a young girl, who had once sold her golden hair to buy bread for a mother with a new-born child. "O the wonderful fruit! the sweet warmth."

The others stared and rubbed their eyes; and looked angry. "You lie,

Bennie!" one cried; "You are a silly girl, Elsa," shrieked another.

"They speak truth. See you not the crimson light?" spoke grave Henry Baird, who had rescued many from drowning in the mountain streams.

Those who did not see grew more and more furious. "Crazy people," they cried. "Loons! silly babblers! will you teach us?" Then some began to beat Peter; others to belabor young Elsa, at which Bennie ran to her rescue, and being as brave as he was good, laid about him with his fists, and cried "Shame on you, to hurt a woman, because your own eyes are blind." Soon everyone was fighting, but those who saw the tree felt a great strength in all their limbs, and warmth and joy; so that they soon escaped from the brawling disappointed ones and ran lightly homeward with singing hearts.

But the dispute thus started went on through many months until half the village refused to speak to the other half. Finally a good old hermit traveled over the ridges of the mountains and forded many streams to reach a place which had become famous by its quarrel. He arrived in harvest time. Those who knew that the tree glowed with life were in the fields quietly at work, for what had they to trouble them who had found the truth? but the others who could not see were leaning over each other's fences with their neglected gardens at their impatient heels; and arguing and arguing the matter.

The hermit being a wise man asked no direct questions concerning the tree, but went himself that evening into the forest and there beheld the miracle.

Next day he made friends with the villagers; and because warm words open the heart, soon the good hermit had the life histories of all the inhabitants, as well as the names of those who had seen the tree and those whose sight was blinded.

After which he retired into the wood to think upon what he had learned; and to sort out his people like little colored beads. What he discovered was this: that all those who had made sacrifices for their fellows, like Bennie Brown and young Elsa, were able to see the tree, but the selfish and the hard-hearted and the indifferent could not behold it.

When he was quite sure of this he went calmly back to the village and calling together all the inhabitants he told them exactly why some saw the tree and why it was hidden from the sight of others. These latter only laughed at his words, though some of them were cut to the heart, but they were too proud to reveal the wound.

The hermit's explanation, however, was accepted by many; and rumor carried it far beyond the borders of the village, so that after a while the nobility heard of it, and the burghers in the walled towns where beautiful tapestries were always drowsing into wonderful life on looms that could weave dreams. The result was that it grew quite fashionable to journey to the tree to make a test of one's character, as people go to physicians to have their blood examined. In the bright summer evenings long processions could be seen winding like a varicolored serpent among the gray trees. Swords flashed, banners flew, troubadours sang snatches of little lilting airs like the rise and dip of birds' wings, and beautiful ladies jingled the golden bridles of their steeds.

Few of these ladies brought their betrothed with them, lest they should

be made ashamed by not being able to see the tree; and should thereby be discovered as possessing hard hearts beneath their sweet manners. It was rumored, indeed, that people known to be selfish and cruel had proclaimed, nevertheless, that they beheld a glorious tree, so that liars were made, and hypocrites. Others said this was but the jealousy of disappointed ones whose own lives had blurred their eyesight.

Now in the realm dwelt a splendid young knight whose name was Sir Godfrey, and who took pleasure in all manner of chivalrous deeds towards the ladies of his own rank. He was tall and strong-limbed, with clear blue eyes, and a fresh skin, and when he wore his golden armor he looked like the pictures of St. George. His home was a low-set castle of aged stones held together by a vast ivy vine, and around the castle was a moat so deep that it gave back a midnight darkness to the noon sky.

Now Sir Godfrey was in love with the Lady Beatrice whose lands adjoined his. She was pale and slender as any lily, with black heavy hair that had no light in it, but in her heart was much light; and because her soul

mirrored more than her eyes, she did not love easily, which reluctance of hers was a grief to Sir Godfrey, who pressed his suit in vain.

One day when the roses were full-blown and all the little lambs were skipping in the broad green fields, Sir Godfrey rode on his great white horse towards the castle of the Lady Beatrice which was high up on a hill, and faced the dawn. And he proudly rode because he saw that she was watching him from the rose-terraces. But after a while he beheld her no more, and he thought, "She knows I know she was watching." Pride put a smile on his lips, because she had never watched for him before.

He spurred his horse to reach her the quicker while she was in this mood. Now just before he gained the gate of the castle a goose-girl with her geese blocked the road, and he cried impatiently, "Out of the way! out of the way!" and scarcely reined in his horse, so that there was danger of the girl's being hurt. She was quick on her feet, however, and sprang aside, but one poor bird was trampled under the steed's hoofs, at which the girl gave a sob and called out, "You are wicked, wicked!" Then he put his hand in his purse and drew out some gold pieces and flung them towards her; but she did not see them, for her face was buried in the down of the bird, which was a pet.

When he reached the gate, there in the shadow of the arch stood the Lady Beatrice. Her face was as white as a gardenia flower, and she did not smile when she greeted him. He wondered what he had done to offend her, and after a page had led away his horse he employed all his graceful arts to win the smile he craved as a thirsty man longs for water. Sometimes she glanced at him from beneath her lashes as if seeking to read his soul; and once he saw her lips tremble, but the smile did not come.

They were pacing up and down between the nodding roses that seemed to be saying to Sir Godfrey, "Kiss her! kiss her!" until no longer could he bear it, and he sank on one knee before her and poured out his heart.

She listened like a maiden turned to snow. Then when he was silent she spoke thus to him: "Will you go with me and my ladies to the Tree in the Dark Wood this very night? If you can behold the Tree filled with fruit and rosy flame I will marry you, if not I cannot be your bride. But you must promise me upon the cross-hilt of your sword that you will speak truthfully. You must not deceive me to gain my hand."

Then Sir Godfrey gave his word joyfully, for he was sure that he would behold the magical Tree. He thought of all his noble deeds and the beautiful ladies for whose sake he had tilted in tourney; and of all his prowess as a knight in king's courts.

So when the sun was low, he with Lady Beatrice and her train of ladies rode forth from the gates towards the Dark Wood which lay like a cloud in the distance; and Sir Godfrey was full of song and jest, for he never doubted that soon he would be the betrothed of his beautiful lady; but she was silent and looked often towards the west where the rosy clouds slept.

When the procession entered the wood it was as if the gray spaces had turned all at once into a garden. Flashes of jewels and silks threw magic colors on the twilight, and the troubadours in the train sang so sweetly that all the birds were mute. As night came on the, pretty little lanterns were lit and swung at the horses' bridles.

The Tree was nearly reached when Lady Beatrice halted her procession and bade it await her and Sir Godfrey, for she loved him too well to have him mortified before other people; and she feared that he would not behold the glowing fruit-bearing Tree. But never a doubt crossed his mind, for he remembered all his noble deeds that he had performed beneath the eyes of gallant knights and fair ladies.

So they rode on to the Tree, and he unhooked the lantern from his saddle and held it high.

"Why do you do that?" asked the Lady Beatrice.

"To find the three crosses," he said.

"But the Tree is glowing like a jewel," she cried.

Then he grew gray as the ashes of a long-spent fire, for he knew that he had failed; and his pride suffered a mortal wound, since it was greater than his love. "You are deceived, Lady Beatrice, like all the rest," he said. "There is no magic Tree."

For answer she turned her horse and rode sadly away. Her heart was too heavy for speech. As he saw her going the sense of loss cut like a knife into his spirit, and his pain was keen, for he still loved for his sake and not for hers. She, seeing that he suffered, longed to comfort him, but she was not one of those who live for the moment, and she held her peace.

When they reached the waiting procession everyone looked at Sir Godfrey, and his pride was, by the challenge of their eyes, again aroused, for he could do nothing, nor feel nothing unless he was before a mirror. So he began to be very gay; and though he would have scorned to speak a lie, he acted one that everyone might believe he had seen the magic Tree. But the Lady Beatrice remained silent and sad. When they reached her gates he asked her permission to enter; then she said: "Some day, not now."

He rode away without a jest, for she had never before refused him any courtesy, and his heart was heavy within him. That night he could not sleep, but tossed upon his bed, sometimes grieving because he had not seen the magic Tree and so had been made of no worth in the Lady

Beatrice's eyes; sometimes in anguish because she had not allowed him to enter her gates.

But in all this he loved himself, so the pain was but transitory, and next day he put on his finest doublet of leaf-green satin lined with primrose silk and edged with pale corals, and rode to her gates. There the porter brought back word that the Lady Beatrice could not see him.

Sir Godfrey was angry then, and he sought to make her jealous. Next day when at the jousts, he sat at the feet of her cousin, Lady Alladine, nor did he look towards the Lady Beatrice.

But all that only heaped fire on his own heart, and he rode home to his castle with his brow dark. The singing birds seemed to mock him, and he thought he heard the shrill laughter of the goblin-men, who live in the deep dells. That night he could not sleep; but murmured again and again that she was his own love, and not the Lady Alladine.

So full of meekness he rode next day to the castle of his heart's life, but the porter brought back to him the same message, and Sir Godfrey departed full of anguish. His pain, like a scourge, drove him on and on until he was far off in the desert amid the tangled and tripping briers and the keen-edged stones. The rain beat upon his head and upon his silken clothes, but he was unmindful of it, because he had begun to grieve not for himself, but for his sweet lost love.

The days went by and he grew thin and worn with his grieving; and because he learned how salt is the taste of tears he began to pity everything that suffered. He was well-nigh worn out with his memories, for now he never thought of his noble deeds, but of the times when he had given pain to others. Often he remembered the poor goose-girl and her birds. At first he would say, "I gave her gold"; then a voice in his heart answered, "Gold cannot pay for life."

So one day he went to the market-place and bought a fine gray goose with a bill as red as a cardinal's robe; and he tucked the bird under his arm, though the people jeered to see a noble knight carrying a goose. But Sir Godfrey cared not. He went straight to the village green where the goose-girl was leading her birds around, and bowed low before her as if she were a great lady.

"I am sorry that I killed one of your flock," he said. "Will you take this fellow for forgiveness's sake?"

Then the tears came into her eyes, and she took into her arms from his the gray goose whose bill was red as a cardinal's robe; and stroked his feathers.

"Why do you cry?" asked Sir Godfrey.

"I am glad you are a true knight," she answered.

Then Sir Godfrey wished with all his heart that he might bring tears to the eyes of the Lady Beatrice, for he felt that never more would she believe him a true knight.

The world was full of flying leaves, for it was autumn; then the winds died and the snows came. Bitter winter chained the mountain streams and laid the forests asleep. The stars shone blue, and on the windowpanes

were fairy pictures.

Now the time drew near the birth of Christ, and one day Sir Godfrey was overjoyed to receive a message from the Lady Beatrice, bidding him to a feast on Christmas Eve. It seemed to him that he could not wait for the hour to come, and all that day he thought upon the joy of beholding her again.

Towards nightfall the wind rose and the snow began to fly, but to Sir Godfrey it was as if the air were full of dainty flowers. Nor did he regard the cold nor the whistling tempest, but rode in deep joy and humility to the castlegate of the Lady Beatrice.

When he had nearly reached it he heard a feeble voice crying: "Stop, Sir Knight; for the love of heaven, stop!" and looking down he saw a bent old woman holding her hands out to him in supplication.

Every moment's delay was as the point of a sharp sword against his heart, but he had himself suffered too much to turn from the voice of pain; and leaning from his saddle he said, "What can I do for you, Mother?"

"Sir Knight," she replied, "my home lies on the farther side of the Dark Wood, and the neighbor who was to convey me thither has no doubt forgotten his promise. I have a sick son there for whose sake I made this journey. Wilt thou, for the love of heaven, take me up behind thee and convey me through the Dark Wood to my dwelling? I cannot walk through this tempest, and my son may die."

Then Sir Godfrey was as a man turned into marble by enchantment, and his heart was sore with struggle. Before him were the lights of the castle which held his love. If he carried this woman to her home, he could not see his Lady Beatrice, who, perhaps, would never forgive him for not appearing at her summons.

The thought was as death to him, and he looked broodingly down at the poor woman. "I am bidden to a feast, Mother," he said, "the porter of this castle will give you shelter for the night, and in the morning I will convey you through the Dark Wood to your home."

"The morning may be too late, Sir Knight," she said sadly.

Then without a word Sir Godfrey turned his horse, and though his heart was like lead, he bent a cheerful countenance to the stranger, and assisted her to the place behind the saddle, and off they rode together through the night and storm.

Sir Godfrey spoke but little, since his thoughts were with the Lady Beatrice and the empty chair at the feast which should have been his. He saw her face imprinted on the night's dark veil and heard her voice calling him on the whistling wind. The old woman behind him muttered of the storm while on and on they rode.

At last they entered the Dark Wood, and here they made slower progress, for the light of Sir Godfrey's little lantern was feeble and the trees cast confusing shadows. By and by the old woman began to moan that she was cold, that she felt herself dying of the cold. "O would that we could reach the Tree which sheds warmth and bears fruit even in this bitter weather," she cried. "O Knight, hasten forward to the Tree."

But Sir Godfrey made no answer, for he was now sure that he should never be holy enough to behold the Tree; and he, too, felt the sorrow and cold of death creep upon him, and a dreadful fear that never again should he leave the Dark Wood alive, but would perish there miserably. He could no longer see the path, and the arms of the old woman clinging to him were like the touch of ice. "O Mother!" he cried, "Pray for our deliverance, for I have lost the road."

At that moment his lantern went out, and he gave a cry of despair, for he had nothing wherewith to relight it.

"Fear not," cried the old woman, "but press on."

So through the dark he urged his horse, seeing nothing and feeling more dead than alive; for he now knew that both he and his passenger must perish of the cold.

But even as he was resigning his heart to the will of heaven, he saw afar off a beautiful, clear, rosy light shedding long rays over the snow, and where the light lay the snowflakes fell no more, but a delicate breeze, soft and caressing, issued like a breath of spring from that circle. The old woman cried, "The Tree! the Tree!"

Sir Godfrey's heart leaped with joy. He could not believe that he was at last worthy to behold the Tree, yet there it rose, oh, so glorious! its trunk glowing with a sweet, warm fire, its branches covered with lights and heavy with delicious fruit. He laughed with joy, while the old woman softly wept. Even the horse saw the fine sight, for he whinnied his pleasure.

Then the knight dismounted and turned to lift the old woman down, when suddenly she threw back her hood, and straightened herself; and there, smiling into his eyes, was his own love, the Lady Beatrice. "O my true Knight," she cried. "For the sake of a stranger thou didst brave death. Now with thy love shalt thou live."

Then Sir Godfrey cried out with joy and took her in his arms and kissed her many times, while from behind the Tree came running all the true-hearted nobles and peasants who had been able to see its wonders, and they all circled Sir Godfrey and the Lady Beatrice while they plighted their troth. Then all ate the fruit, and made merry in the rosy warmth until the Christmas morning dawned, when they went back in the sunshine to celebrate the marriage of Sir Godfrey and the Lady Beatrice, who lived happily ever afterwards; for how otherwise could it be with lovers that had together beheld the Tree in the Dark Wood?

THE CAT THAT WINKED

Once there was an old woman who lived on the edge of the Dark Wood in a small cottage all covered with thick thatch and over the thatch grew a honeysuckle vine; but at the gable where the chimneys clustered, the wisteria flung purple flowers in May.

On the topmost chimney was a stork's nest, and there dear grandfather stork stood on one leg, unless he was wanted to carry a little baby to

some house in the village; when he flapped his wings and flew away over the tree-tops to the Land of Little Souls.

Now the old woman loved her home, because she had lived there many years with her husband. She loved the two worn chairs on each side of the great hearth, and her pewter dishes, and her big china water-pitcher with flowers shining on it--not for themselves, but for the reason that once someone had used them and admired them with her.

Into the little latticed windows the roses peeped, and these Mother Huldah loved too, and tended carefully all through the sweet-smelling summer-time. But perhaps she liked best the long winter evenings when she spun by the fire and sang little songs like these:

"My heart as a bird has flown away,
(Princess, where? Princess, where?)
Into the land that is always gay,
Out of the land of care.

"But no bird flies alone to bliss,
(Princess, why? Princess, why?)
I have no answer but a kiss,
And then the open sky."

Nobody listened but Tommie, who was an immense black cat, held in great reverence by the villagers, for he had the greenest eyes and the longest whiskers and the heaviest fur of any cat in the kingdom. Moreover, he had hundreds of mice to his credit and no birds, for he was a good and wise grimalkin. Sometimes he talked with his tail and sometimes he opened his pink mouth and said just as plain as words that he had been stalking through the moonlight and had seen old Egbert go limping home as if he had the rheumatism.

So next day Mother Huldah with her little bag of medicines and ointments would go to old Egbert's hut, and sure enough, find him bedridden; or Tommie would tell her that Charlemagne the stork had carried a baby to a poor mother who had no clothes for it. Then Mother Huldah would go to her great cedar chest and take out linen that smelled all sweetly of lavender, and carry it with some good food to the poor woman.

Mother Huldah was so kind and generous that everybody got in the habit of taking things from her without sometimes so much as a "thank you," or an inquiry as to her own health. But the little children loved her because she made them pretty cakes; and told them the stories she used to tell her own children, her two fine sons who were soldiers. These sons sent her the money upon which she lived and out of which she made her little charities, and they wrote her fine brave letters, and every year they came home to see her, bearing beautiful presents from foreign lands, ivory toys and shining silks (which she always gave to some bride) and workboxes of sweet-scented wood richly carved--to show how much they loved her.

One dreadful year a great war broke out, and not long after Mother Huldah heard that her two sons had been killed, and she herself thought she would follow them through grief. But she lived on and as she grew more sorrowful she went less and less to the village, and people began to forget her. Even the little children stayed away since she had no longer the heart to tell them the tales she had once told her sons; and she must no longer bake the little cakes since every day saw her small hoard of

money diminishing.

At last, when the winter tempests were raging, and the sleet was beating upon the thatch, there came a day when no food remained in the cottage; and Mother Huldah felt too weak and sick to go out in quest of it. Nor did she wish to tell her neighbors that no food remained in the cottage.

So full of weary dreams and old sad thoughts she sat down in one of the armchairs before the fire, and whether she nodded from drowsiness, or whether Tommie nodded at her she never knew, but he moved his black head and opened his pink mouth, and said he, "Suppose I fetch you a bird just this once."

She was much surprised, for Tommie had never talked to her before, but she did not show how astonished she was because she was always very polite to him. So she replied, "Bless your whiskers! Tommie! but we won't break through our rule. Maybe some neighbor will fetch me a loaf!"

"Maybe they will and perhaps they won't," said Tommie, "they're an ungrateful lot."

"They think I am still rich, my dear," she answered.

"So you are, but not in the way they mean," Tommie said. "And, Mother Huldah, if they neglect you a day longer it won't be your Tommie's fault."

Then Mother Huldah shook her finger at him. "You switch your tail just as if you were going to steal something. Tommie, I brought you up better than that."

"Steal! nonsense!" cried Tommie. "Most of 'em have more than they need, anyway."

"Tommie, I believe you're hungry, or your morals wouldn't be so queer!" Mother Huldah said reprovingly.

"Hungry!" exclaimed Tommie. "I dream of lobster claws and chicken wings and blue saucers full of yellow wrinkled cream, twelve in a row. No wonder my morals are queer!"

Then what happened was that poor Mother Huldah dozed off to sleep and when she awoke there was Tommie staring into the fire, his green eyes like two lanterns and his whiskers standing out very stiff and knowing, and at Mother Huldah's feet was a wicker basket from which issued a most appetizing odor. "Why, Thomas" (she always called him Thomas in solemn moments), "what's this?"

"Your dinner," said Tommie, and yawned like a gentleman who lights a cigarette and says, "O hang it all! what a beastly bore life is."

"Thomas," questioned Mother Huldah solemnly, "where did you get this dinner?" for she had taken the cover off the basket and found a small roast chicken with vegetables and a bread pudding.

"Why, I was strolling down the gray lane when I met a woman carrying that basket and I smelled chicken; so up I stood on my hind legs, and winked at her and I said, 'Thank you, I know you are taking that to Mother Huldah; let me carry it the rest of the way.'"

But Mother Huldah cried, "Maybe the dinner wasn't for me, and you frightened her so she had to give it to you."

Tommie yawned again. "Don't you think that the best thing you can do with a good dinner is to eat it?"

So Mother Huldah ate her dinner, hoping all the while that she was making an honest meal; then, when she had fed Thomas, she asked him if Charlemagne was on the roof. "Indeed, no!" cried he. "Charlemagne has flown to the war country to fetch you a baby!"

"Alas!" cried Mother Huldah. "I pity the poor babes, but how can I bring up a baby?"

"It is your granddaughter," said Tommie. "Charlemagne told me that a year ago your son Rupert married, but he meant to bring his bride home as a surprise to you. Then the war broke out and--"

"O poor little daughter-in-law!" cried Mother Huldah. "Did she break her heart?"

"Yes, and so she followed Rupert to the Country of the Brave Souls; but Charlemagne is fetching the baby in a warm woolen napkin tied up at the four corners; and when his wings get tired from flying he puts a bit of sugar and a drop of water in the baby's mouth and leans his feathery breast against its little feet to keep them warm!"

"Yes! yes!" said Mother Huldah, "a baby's feet should be always kept warm--but, dear me, dear me, the Sweet One will need milk before long, and the grain of the whole wheat to help her grow! I have no money to buy her food."

Tommie looked very wise. "Mother Huldah," he said as he drew a black paw knowingly over one ear, "don't you know that wherever a baby comes, help comes? Open the linen chest and get your shining shears and begin to make little shirts and dresses. I think I'll take a look at the weather."

He made the last remark carelessly like a young gentleman who will stroll out and leave the women-folk to their devices.

"O Tommie!" said Mother Huldah, "you are not going to do anything impulsive?"

"Mother Huldah," replied Tommie, "did you ever know a cat to do anything impulsive unless he saw a bird, or a mouse?"

With that he left her, and she watched him walk away down the forest path with the sunlight glistening on his coat and his tail held high and straight. Sometimes he would pause and lift one foot daintily, the toes curling in. Mother Huldah always said that Tommie heard not with his ears but with his whiskers, and perhaps it was true.

Tommie himself was making his own plans as he went along. "If I tell these villagers outright that Mother Huldah is in need, each person will think, 'O well, Neighbor Jude, or Gossip Dorcas has more to spare than I. Someone else will take care of the poor old lady, I am sure.' And it will end in her getting nothing at all. I will not talk about her, but to each person I will talk about himself, for that is the way to get people

interested."

At which Tommie smiled, and because his great-grandfather was a Cheshire Cat, his smile gave him a wise and jovial look, as if the Sphinx of Egypt should suddenly see a joke. With a good heart he went daintily on his way, shaking the snow from his paws at times, until he reached the village green. Now in the middle of the green stood the pump, made of wood with a flat top. On this Tommie seated himself, put his paws neatly together, folded his tail about them, made his green eyes perfectly round, and stared straight ahead of him.

Now even a cat when he looks as if he could think for himself will draw people's attention; especially if he seems to enjoy his thoughts. And Tommie, seated on the pump in the bright winter sunshine, looked as if he had something in his mind that pleased him.

"Heigh-O," said one of the passers-by. "Here's a witch-cat!"

"You are mistaken," replied Tommie with a wink. "I belong to Mother Huldah, and she is the best woman in the village."

The man was so astonished that he dropped a parcel of eggs he was carrying, and they were all broken.

"That's what comes," said Tommie, "of imagining evil where none exists."

The man was so angry that he made some snowballs hastily and began to pelt Tommie with them; but Tommie understood the beautiful art of dodging--which some people never learn all their lives--so he didn't get hit. By this time a crowd had gathered about the angry man, and were asking him what was the matter.

"Matter!" he shrieked, "that black object on the pump gave me impudence!"

"Heigh-O!" cried little Elsa. "How could a cat give thee impudence!"

"Ask him then," said the man. "He can talk like any Christian."

At which the crowd all looked at Tommie, who winked at them and said, "Does anybody here want to ask me any questions? I'll tell him what he wants to know in perfect confidence between him and me and the pump. If my answer pleases him, he can give me a silver piece. If my reply make his heart go pit-a-pat with joy he can give me a gold piece. If he doesn't like my answers, he needn't give me anything. Now that's fair, isn't it?"

Then everybody looked at everybody else, and dropped their jaws and rubbed their eyes. Nobody stirred for a minute, then a fine young fellow stepped forward, blushing. This was Carl, the miller's son, who was straight as a birch-tree, and had blue eyes like deep lakes, and he walked right up to the pump, and bowed, then he whispered into Tommie's ear, "Does Lucia love me?"

Tommie winked his right eye and smiled. "Carl," he replied, "get up your courage and ask her to-day, for she loves you better than anyone in the world."

Then Carl felt his heart go pit-a-pat, and all the snow wreaths on the trees seemed to turn to bridal flowers. "Thanks, dear and wise Pussy," he

said, and took out his handkerchief and spread it at Tommie's feet and on it he placed not one, but three gold pieces.

When the villagers saw the gold pieces glittering in the sun and beheld the radiant face of Carl, they all began to wonder, and each person wanted to try his own luck. "After all," said each one to himself, "if I don't like what the cat says I needn't pay him anything."

The next person to go up was the village tanner, whose skin was like leather and whose eyes were little like a pig's. Tommie was already acquainted with him, having been kicked out of his tannery once when on an innocent mousing expedition.

"Say," said the tanner, "will my Uncle Jean leave me his farm?"

"No," answered Tommie, winking his left eye. "That he won't! He knows you are always wishing he would die!"

The tanner was so angry that he snarled: "Don't you ever let me catch you around the tannery again, or I'll make you into a muff for my daughter."

"Black furs are not fashionable this winter," said Tommie. "Next?"

Everybody laughed when they saw that the tanner hadn't paid money for his information, and so, presumably, didn't like it. But strangely enough, instead of discouraging this led them on to try their luck; and the next person who came to ask Tommie a question was poor, old, half-blind Henley the miser. He put his mouth close to the cat's ear, so the people behind him wouldn't catch what he said, and in a hoarse voice he asked, "Say, old whiskers, will my fine ship loaded with dates and spices reach Norway safely?"

"Yes, it will," said Tommie, "long before your withered old soul will reach a haven of peace."

Henley was so excited over the first words that he didn't even hear the last ones. He hopped about on one leg, and was rushing off at last when Tommie cried, "Heigh-O, you haven't paid me!"

The miser felt in his pockets and drew out a silver coin and laid it on the handkerchief.

"Not at all," said Tommie. "Remember the Worth of that cargo! Gold or nothing."

Henley began to whine. "I'm a poor old man, Tommie. I'll leave the cream jug on the doorstep every day and no questions will be asked!"

"I'm not a thief," answered Tommie. "Mother Huldah brought me up better than that. Come, you don't want to have any quarrel with a black cat."

Whereupon Henley reluctantly drew from his pocket a gold piece, while all the villagers opened their eyes very wide, and wondered what Tommie could have told the old gentleman to make him so liberal.

The next person to come up was a little shy girl named Clara. She had big brown eyes and fair floating hair, and under her white chin and about her little white wrists were soft furs; for her father was a wealthy moneylender. She came close to Tommie and whispered, "Tell me, beautiful

Pussy, if I shall ever win the love of Joseph Grange."

Tommie winked his right eye several times and replied, "My dear, I see it coming!"

She flushed with joy. "And what shall I do to hasten it?"

Tommie reflected a moment. "Be pleasant, but not anxious. A lady with an anxious expression has little chance of winning a lover! Don't invite him too often; don't talk too much. Now I haven't hurt your feelings, have I?"

"No, indeed," she said, for she was a young lady of good sense. "And Tommie, dear, will you take these gold pieces to Mother Huldah. She was so good to me when I was a little girl, and because I have been so absorbed in my own affairs I haven't been to see her lately."

"That's the trouble with being in love," said Tommie, "it's apt to make people selfish, and it should make them love and remember everybody. It does when it's the real thing."

Little Clara clasped her hands earnestly. "I will come to see Mother Huldah this afternoon," she said, "and bring her some cakes of my own baking."

After Clara one person and another came up. Some asked foolish questions, some wise. Some paid down money, others didn't, but the pile of gold and silver at Tommie's feet grew steadily.

Now all novelties, even talking cats, soon cease to be novelties, and towards afternoon when the villagers saw how much of their money lay at Tommie's feet, some of them began to be discontented. Of these the tanner was the ringleader, and he said to the other grumblers, "If we can get that lying cat off the pump, we can then take his money. I have three big rats in the trap at the tannery, and I know Tommie is starving hungry by this time. We'll let 'em loose on the ground in front of the pump. When he makes a spring one of you grab the money and run."

Now the tanner had guessed right. Tommie was hungry, but he was determined to keep his post until sundown. After a while no more people came, and he was just thinking he would take up the handkerchief by the four corners and go home, when he espied a group of people approaching. Suddenly, oh, me, oh, my! three dinners were scampering towards him, such rats, such big, splendid rats in fine condition. Tommie had never used such self-control in all his nine lives, but he sat tight and though his whiskers showed his agitation he never budged.

The tanner was mad clear through, and he cried out, "He's a wizard; he ought to be killed" because some people can't see others controlling themselves without thinking there's something wrong with them. Then he began to make snowballs and to pelt poor Tommie. Now Tommie, as has been said, was a good dodger, but nevertheless when it rains snowballs it's hard not to get hit. It might have fared badly with him had not some knights and ladies at that moment appeared on the scene in the train of the beautiful Princess Yolande, one of the fairest princesses in all the realm. She rode a great white horse, and she was robed in cream velvet and white furs, while about her slender waist was a girdle of gold set with sapphires which were as blue as her eyes. By her side rode Lord Mountfalcon. He was all in black armor, for he was mourning a brother who

had died in the distant war.

Love as well as grief filled his heart, for his dark eyes were continually upon the beautiful Princess, who now reined in her horse and cried out in a sweet voice, "Shame upon you men to hurt a poor cat."

"He is a wizard and he belongs to a witch," called out the tanner.

"O what a wicked lie," said Tommie. "I don't care what names you call me, but my mistress is one of the best women in the land. She has come to poverty in her old age. For her sake and to get her a little money, I've sat here all day answering truthfully all questions. Now, dear Princess Yolande, believe me, for I am a true cat."

The Princess was so astonished that she couldn't speak for a moment. At last she turned to Lord Mountfalcon and said: "Truly, we have come to wonderland. I'd rather believe the cat than the people who were pelting him, and I have a mind to test his powers. Let us alight and ask him questions."

Then they all dismounted and with the pages and the ladies and the gentlemen in armor the scene was as gay as the stage of an opera. Everybody chatted and laughed, and some of the court ladies stroked Tommie's fur with their pretty white hands; and one took off her bracelet and hung it about his neck.

But when the Princess Yolande went forward to ask her question, everyone fell back. Then with sweet dignity, as became a princess, she stood before Tommie and said, "Tell me if Lord Mountfalcon love me truly."

Tommie didn't wink, for he knew the ways of court, his grandfather having been chief mouser to old King Adelbert; but he purred a warm good purr, like a mill grinding out pure white grain.

"If the sky in heaven be blue,
Then Mountfalcon loves you true;
If the sun set in the West,
Lord Mountfalcon loves you best."

"You see," he added, "I'm not much of a poet, but those are the facts."

"Never was bad verse so sweet to me," cried the Princess and she put down a whole bag of gold at Tommie's feet.

After her came Lord Mountfalcon himself with that sad grace of his, and all his spirit shadowed with love and grief. "Sir Puss," he said, "shall I wed ever the Princess Yolande?"

"Before there are violets in the vales of the kingdom," replied Tommie.

"Two saddlebags will not hold the gold I shall give thee," exclaimed the nobleman.

"Bring them to the cottage where Mother Huldah lives," said Tommie. "And I ask this further favor: When you leave this spot will you take me up behind you and give this money to a page to convey; and so bring me safely home with the wealth, for I fear mischief from the tanner."

"Most willingly," said Mountfalcon. "I will present your request to the

Princess."

After him all the court came with questions; so when the page advanced to gather up the money the load was almost more than he could carry. Then Tommie jumped down from his perch, and another page lifted him safely on to the big warm back of Lord Mountfalcon's horse, which felt fine and comforting to poor Tommie's feet. He was so tired that he took forty winks after he had told the Princess how to reach the cottage of Mother Huldah.

When he woke they were all in the dim forest and the Princess Yolande and Lord Mountfalcon were talking in low tones like the whisper of the wind through flowers; and it seemed as if their talk were all of love and dreams and far-away griefs and tears that must fall.

At last they reined in their horses where Mother Huldah stood at her gate peering into the forest. When she saw the beautiful lady and the noble knight and Tommie on the horse's back, she cried out, "O bless you, Sir Knight, for bringing him home."

"And I've brought a fortune with me, Mother Huldah," cried Tommie.

At this Mother Huldah looked troubled. "Gracious Lady," she addressed the Princess, "I hope my cat has not been up to mischief."

"No, bless him," replied the Princess; then she told all that Tommie had done. "And fear not to take the money, Mother," she added, "for those who gave it did so of their free-will."

"Alas! I would not take it," sighed Mother Huldah, "had not my Rupert and my Hugh died in the great war; and Rupert's wife went with him to the Kingdom of the Brave Souls; and I expect Charlemagne to-night with their little baby."

"Rupert? what Rupert?" asked Lord Mountfalcon, leaning down from his horse.

"Rupert Gordon; I am Huldah Gordon, his bereaved mother!"

Then Mountfalcon removed his cap, alighted from his horse and bowed low before Mother Huldah. "He died gloriously. He died trying to remove my poor brother from danger," he said. "Now let me be as a son to you, for sweet memory's sake."

[Illustration: CHARLEMAGNE BRINGS THE BABY TO MOTHER HULDAH]

Then they all wept softly, for even to hear of those battles and those Silent Ones in the Kingdom of the Brave Souls was to behold the world through tears. And the Princess Yolande alighted and kissed Mother Huldah's hands and promised to visit her often.

So with many true words they parted at last, and Mother Huldah was left alone with Tommie and the bags of gold and silver, which she took indoors and then returned to scan the sky where now the white stars hung and a thin half-circle of a moon. Tommie romped in the snow for the joy of stretching his legs. After a while he said, "Listen, don't you hear something, Mother Huldah?"

"I would I heard wings!" she cried.

"But I hear wings," said Tommie. "Watch! watch where the North Star burns!"

So Mother Huldah watched, and soon she saw the great outspread wings of Charlemagne and saw his long bill with something hanging from the end of it.

"My word, here's the baby," called out Tommie. "Hello, Charlemagne, you old Grandpa! have you kept that precious infant warm?"

But Charlemagne alighted on his feet and walked solemnly to Mother Huldah and laid in her arms the softest, sweetest, pinkest little baby that she had ever seen. There was golden down on its head, and its little hands were folded like rosebuds beneath its tiny chin.

Mother Huldah felt its feet to know if they were warm; then she cried and sobbed and held the little thing to her breast; and trembled for love of it.

"Take it before the fire," said Tommie. "We're all tired to-night and it will be good to drowse and dream. Good-night, Charlemagne. The chimney's warm."

So the stork flew up to the roof, and Mother Huldah took her treasure and held it in her warm, ample lap before the fire; and Tommie winked and dozed and looked at the baby with his great green eyes, while Mother Huldah sang:

"The gold of the world will fade away,
Baby sleep! Baby sleep!
But thou wilt live in my heart alway,
Sleep, my darling, sleep.

"The gold of the world it comes and goes,
Baby sleep! Baby sleep!
But thou wilt bloom like a summer rose,
Cease my soul to weep."

THE MAGIC TEARS

There was once a king named Theophile who lived in a dim castle on the edge of the ocean, but so far above the water that the flying spray never reached its lowest terrace; and only the strongest-winged seagulls could circle its towers and turrets. It was a strange, melancholy, beautiful place, where the light shimmered on the walls like the ripple of water, and in the shadows of the massive walls the flowers waved all day in the sea-wind like little princesses who would dance before they died.

King Theophile had led many armies to victory, driving his golden white-sailed boats upon far-off coasts, but from each conquest he returned the sadder because he had made many people hate him, and had won no one's love. Nor could he find a woman who would wed him, because of the sorrows of his line, which were great.

When he was not at war he would labor for his kingdom until sunset, and at that hour he would leave his Council Chamber to pace the terraces and gaze seaward over the rocking blue-green waves, while his minstrels sang to him. Only music could drive away his care, so always a page with a golden harp followed him. Sometimes he would bid everyone be gone but this boy, and the two would glide like shadows through the long galleries where the bluish tapestries hung; or brood together by the roaring fire when the sleet rattled on the casements.

One spring day when it seemed as if even the ocean air wafted the fragrance of little pale flowers and the sun shone warmly on the old gray walls of the castle, the King and the boy wandered into the garden of the white lilacs; where, on a marble bench, King Theophile seated himself, and listened while the boy sang:

"My love came out of an old dream,
And took away my peace;
And now I dare not sleep again,
Until this heartache cease."

"Did he ever know slumber again, I wonder," said the King. "O boy, of what use are your love-songs!"

"To arouse love in your heart, Sire!"

"What good is that when I have no maiden to love!"

"Listen, Sire," said the boy. "You are going to war with King Mace who has a most beautiful daughter, the Princess Elene. When you have overthrown him, bring her to your kingdom and wed her."

"A strange way to win the love of a woman," said the King, "by invading her father's kingdom. Nevertheless, I will have regard to the maiden."

"I have heard," said the page, "that they who once behold her are restless ever afterwards from the wound of her beauty."

The King nodded wearily. "There are women like that--gleams from lost stars; faces seen at sunset; or where the light is lifting after a storm. I have never cast eyes on such a maid."

"When you see the Princess Elene you will behold her," said the page.

"I will set forth to war immediately," announced the King.

Soon thereafter he sailed away, and over the rocking billows went the golden boats until they drove upon the coasts of King Mace's land, where bitter battles were fought and many men laid asleep with the sword. Then came a day when all was quiet, and even King Mace pillowed his royal head on his dead horse, and woke no more.

Then King Theophile entered the little sunny palace where all was so silent, and strode through the echoing corridors to the throne room. There alone, beneath a canopy of azure satin, on the great throne sat a woman whose face was like a gleam from a lost star. She had proud lips, and hair that was like cloth of gold about her, and eyes that were wells of sorrow. When he beheld her, King Theophile's limbs became as weak as a new-born child's, and he heard the sound of a far-off wind that had traveled from the Kingdom of Lost Hope. He knew that henceforth for him

there must be either love or death.

"O Princess," he cried, "they are all asleep. But thou and I are awake."

"Nay," she replied, "they are awake. Their spirits crowd this hall to wring my heart with pity; but thou art asleep."

Her words were like a sword in his breast, and kneeling before her, he cried: "Come with me to my Kingdom. Thou art my only Love."

"Thou mayst force me to wed thee," she replied, "but the sword which can slay, can never wake love to life. Thou hast come to the end of thy conquests."

Then King Theophile tasted the bitterness of death as the men who slept from the stroke of his sword could never taste it. And because he was not a man to put his soul into the keeping of his tongue, he made no answer, but in his secret heart he resolved to win her love, though the adventure cost him years of pain.

So while he lingered in her kingdom, building costly monuments to the dead, and showering gold on the wounded, and sending into fine houses the homeless whose hearts ached for vanished humble hearths; while he worked to draw life out of death, he spared no effort to bring a smile to the lips of the Princess Elene.

But she never smiled, and though her heart was breaking, she could not weep. Often she said to her women, "Pray that I may have the gift of tears," but always her eyes remained dry, like the vision of those who have gazed too long on fire.

To King Theophile she seemed the very Beauty of the World, as in her black robes she sat in her garden at her tapestry frame, or listened with veiled eyes to the singing of his minstrels. And in his heart was a battle greater than any he had ever waged in desolated lands, for his nobler self told him he had no right to wed her. But his wild love drove like a tempest across these whispers.

[Illustration: KING THEOPHILE AND QUEEN ELENE]

So at last he married her in the dim cathedral church of her dead father's kingdom, with pomp of flowers and lights and nuptial music, and she was as pale as those who live long underground.

Then the golden boats drove home across the rocking billows, and one day the Queen Elene, as she was now titled, lifted her eyes and beheld the gaunt castle of King Theophile cutting the sky. A mist seemed to hang all its turrets with fog and vapor. Elene remembered the shining happy little castle of her vanished kingdom, and her heart was bitter with tears, but she could not shed them.

King Theophile, gazing upon her face, read her thoughts, for he had the second-sight of lovers; and his heart was as lead in his breast. He was jealous of the very years when he had not known her. Her beauty troubled him like a half remembered name, and when he was in her presence he had the trembling of illness upon him, and when away from her he was as restless as a fallen leaf that the wind blows.

Through many days and weeks he wooed her to bring the smile to her lips,

but always she grew whiter and more desolate; so that when she walked the terraces above the boiling surf, she seemed like a white flower torn of its petals and tossed up by the bitter waves.

At the end of a year there came a daughter from the Kingdom of the Little Souls, and lay like a white bud on the Queen's bosom. Then at last Elene smiled and wept, but her strength was gone; and soon afterwards she closed her eyes and went to sleep.

King Theophile's heart was broken, for the baby, and not he, himself, had made Elene smile and weep. When the days of the court mourning were over the little daughter was christened, and to her christening came all the wise women of the kingdom. Each told what this child would be. One said, "She will have the beauty of shimmering rainbows"; another, "She will be as wise as she is good." But the Wisest Woman of all said, "Every person will read his future in her tears."

Now this prophecy troubled King Theophile and awoke love in his heart for his little daughter, who was already showing how beautiful she would be some day. So he watched over her, and made one of his echoing rooms into the royal nursery.

Now the nurses knew what the Wisest Woman had said--that the tears of this Princess would be a magic mirror of the future; and one day when the child was two years old, the head nurse, who had a sweetheart and wished to know whether she would marry him, resolved to make the little girl cry.

Now she was puzzled how to do this, for the royal maid was sweet-tempered and obedient; but the nurse knew that Elene loved most dearly a beautiful doll as big as herself, so one afternoon, when the Princess was clasping this treasure to her little breast, the nurse making sure first that no one was looking, snatched it from her and threw it into the sea.

[Illustration: THE NURSE SEES HER WEDDING IN THE PRINCESS'S TEARS]

The baby-princess when she saw her darling doll falling into the water began to wail, and tears came into her eyes. Then her nurse knelt before her, and saw in those tears her own wedding. So happy was she over this sight that she jumped up and began to caper about, heeding not the sobs of the poor little Princess.

But King Theophile heard them and came out with a face of thunder. "Woman," he cried, "why do you dance when a princess weeps?"

Then the nurse came to her senses and grew gray with fear. She tried to mutter some excuse, but King Theophile dismissed her on the spot and gathering up his baby into his arms, took her into the nursery, and wiped away her tears. Yet her sobs did not cease and she was too little to tell him of her woe.

The nurse, though she left the King's service, did marry immediately; and began to whisper how she had seen her wedding in the tears of the Princess Elene, which word was to work out cruelly for the royal child. From that day on those about her, though they loved her dearly, could not refrain from trying their fortune in her tears. As she grew older and more understanding it was a difficult matter to know how to make her cry without incurring suspicion.

But even a wrong will find its way, and little Elene grew up wondering why people were so unkind to her; and why there was so much sadness in the world, for when all else failed the minstrels could make her weep by singing of "old, unhappy far-off things, and battles long-ago."

King Theophile did not know of these troubles of his little daughter, for she had learned early that her tears hurt him, so she concealed them from him. All his joy was now in her, for she was the very image of her dead mother, and beautiful as a dawn of May day. When she danced she was like the light that ripples over the flowers; when she sang the souls of all young birds seemed to float on her voice.

The fame of her beauty went through many kingdoms, and with the legend of her loveliness was told the strange tale of her magic tears.

Now three young princes from three great States, fell ardently in love with Elene from the mere breath of the rumor of her charms. The first was Prince Tristan, the second Prince Martin, the third Prince Lorenzo; and both Prince Tristan and Prince Martin were sure of winning.

But Prince Lorenzo was not at all sure, because he had lost much in his short life, and knew that love is like the wind that comes and goes; like the fire that leaps into the night and is seen no more; like the star that flashes across the dark zenith and then vanishes.

One May morning the three Princes arrived to try their fortunes and to sue for the hand of the Princess Elene. Prince Tristan, who was straight and handsome, put on his best white satin doublet and stuck a rose behind his ear. Prince Martin put on glittering armor like a knight going to battle; but Prince Lorenzo was so consumed with love that he thought not at all of what he wore.

King Theophile himself led them into the presence of the Princess Elene, who was clad in a silk robe that shimmered like a rainbow, and who looked so beautiful that for an instant Prince Lorenzo put his hand before his eyes. The two other princes gazed straight at the lady; then made grand sweeping bows.

"May I tell you," said Prince Tristan, holding out his rose, "that you are the most beautiful princess I have ever seen?"

"May I tell you," said Prince Martin, "that your eyes are like stars?"

Prince Lorenzo remained mute because his heart was too full for speech, and King Theophile looked coldly upon him; but the Princess Elene gazed at him until he blushed. Then she seated herself on her throne and bade the princes speak to her of what pleased them best.

Prince Tristan began at once to tell her of his hunting exploits, and what joy he took in the chase. But the Princess's face grew colder and colder as she listened, for she loved all living things, and could not bear to see any of them hurt. Tristan did not observe this, for like all vain people, he was thinking of his own charms, and so was unaware of the effect he was producing.

He finished with a flourish, and Prince Martin stumbled in on the last words, so eager was he to render in his turn a glowing account of all his fine deeds. These were not few, for he was a brave lad, so for an hour he discoursed upon tourneys and battles; nor did he observe that the

Princess Elene grew pale--and trembled, for her mother's sorrow over war lived again in her heart.

To her relief he came at last to the end of his recital; then with a sigh Elene turned her beautiful eyes upon Prince Lorenzo. "And what have you to tell me, my Prince?"

For answer he said to a page, "Give me thy harp"; and when it was delivered to him he struck the strings and sang:

"In the hour of the white moths flying
Beneath the great gray moon,
My sad heart was a-sighing
Lest love should come too soon.

"In the hour of the dawn-birds flying
Each to his feathery mate,
My sad heart was a-sighing
Lest love should come too late.

"Thy spirit heard my voicing,
And bade me cease from fears,
And follow thee, rejoicing,
Beyond all time and tears."

"It is a beautiful song," said the Princess. "And it would be sweet to follow someone beyond time and tears."

Then Prince Tristan and Prince Martin looked enviously at Prince Lorenzo; and Prince Martin said contemptuously, "I did not know that thou wert a minstrel."

"Thou mayst yet discover that I am a shoemaker," returned Lorenzo. "Also, if there were no carpenters in the world we should all be houseless. A carpenter may, indeed, be of more use than a princeling."

Tristan looked at Elene to see how she bore the shock of hearing such people mentioned as carpenters and shoemakers; but she was smiling as if Lorenzo's words pleased her.

The three princes stayed on at the Castle, and the court was very gay. Only King Theophile's heart was heavy, for he knew that he must lose his most beautiful daughter. She was equally kind to all her suitors, and he could not discover which prince she favored. So one evening he came to her in her octagon room, which was of white ivory and whose windows were hung with coral silk; and he found her spinning with her maidens. Her robe of lace rippled about her little feet, and the band of sapphires which held back her yellow hair were not as blue as her eyes.

King Theophile dismissed the maidens, and seating himself beside his daughter he took her hand and said:

"O ray of sunlight out of a great sorrow, tell me in the name of thy dead mother, to whom thou hast given thine heart?"

But the Princess veiled her eyes and drooped her head, for a burden was upon her soul. "My father," she said, "a prince can not easily be a lover, for love has but one object, and in the life of a prince are many objects. I would be loved, but fine words are no proof of a heart."

"Prince Tristan is a noble youth."

"He is too fond of killing," replied Elene.

King Theophile's cheeks grew pale, for he thought of the long-ago wars and men asleep in crimson meadows that had once been green.

"Prince Martin is a gallant lad."

"He would rather contend with others than with himself," said the Princess.

"As for Prince Lorenzo, he dreams too much."

"Dreamers oft know more than those who are awake," replied Elene.

King Theophile sighed, for when his Princess spoke in this wise she seemed to pass from his arms into the arms of her dead mother. Now when Elene heard him sigh her heart was touched, for she loved him dearly.

"King-Father, do not sigh. I will make my choice, and this will be the manner of my choosing. Thou knowst my tears can show the future."

Then the King grew pale, for he thought of the mother who could not weep until the little daughter was laid upon her breast.

"My three suitors may try their fortunes through my tears one week from, this night; that is--" she added, "if they have power to make me weep. He who beholds me weep, him will I wed."

The King was sad when he heard this, but he saw it was her will and refrained from protest. Next day he announced to the court and to the three suitors through what means the Princess Elene would make her decision.

From that day on Elene saw little of the three princes, for Prince Lorenzo was wandering off in the forests alone and Prince Martin and Prince Tristan were trying pathos on the maids of honor, each vying with the other to tell the saddest tales. They succeeded so well that the noble maidens nearly cried their eyes out. King Theophile was much embarrassed to come, in his walks, upon a little maid of honor weeping into her handkerchief, while a Prince discoursed at her feet.

At last the week wore away, and the court assembled for what someone called the Trial of Tears. A thousand wax candles were lit in the glittering throne room. King Theophile sat upon his throne, and on his right hand was the Princess Elene, crowned with white roses, and robed in white silk which had a shimmer of gold in its folds. At the foot of the throne sat the three princes.

When all were assembled the King arose and announced the intention of the Princess to give her hand to him who should behold in her tears her wedding.

Prince Tristan was the first to try his fortune. He had chosen the tale of a young girl cruelly turned adrift in a forest and left there to die, and he related it with every circumstance that could render it more piteous. Soon every lady in the court was weeping, but to the eyes of the

Princess Elene came no tears, which made Prince Tristan angry, so that he finished his tale in a sullen muttering voice.

Then Prince Martin rose and told a story of little children who had climbed into a boat which the rising tide seized and carried out to sea. They were too little to be afraid, and only when starvation seized them did they begin to wail for their mothers.

This story, related in a soft, melancholy voice, touched all hearts, and through the court there was the sound of weeping, but the Princess gazed straight before her, and her eyes were dry.

Prince Martin ended his tale with real sadness, for he saw that the Princess Elene was unmoved by his narrative, and with drooping head he returned to his seat.

Then rose Prince Lorenzo and bowed low before the Princess. "Even to win you," he said, "I would not have you shed tears, for you have been made to shed too many in your short life."

He had scarcely uttered these words when the Princess's lip quivered like that of a little child and sudden tears welled up in her eyes. As they fell Lorenzo went quickly to her, and gazing upon her face, gave a cry of joy. "O my Love!" he exclaimed. "I see thee all in a white veil and I am by thy side!"

Then smiling through her tears, she arose and held out her hand to him, and the court knew that he was the chosen one. He knelt before her and kissed her hand, while the heralds proclaimed him the victor.

So they were married and lived happily ever afterwards, for she was a true Princess and he was a true Prince.

THE GOLDEN ARCHER

In the midst of a plain stood a great church built of white stones, with a massive tower. On this tower was a weather vane in the shape of a golden man who rode a golden horse, and made ready to shoot a golden arrow. Only the arrow never left the bow, but pointed always to the direction from which the wind blew--north from the mountains; east from the sea; west from the plain; south from the waving forests.

Now the Archer looked very small from the court in front of the cathedral because he was up so high in the air; so high, indeed, that often the lightning passed through his body. In reality he was not small, but life-size, and he had once been a man, but now he was a weather vane because he had made a vow to dwell forever on the tower and show the people from which direction came the life-bringing winds.

For the reason that he had a man's heart in his golden body, life was not always easy for him up there in the high place, and his eyes would sweep the far horizons in search of someone to companion him, but no living thing passed by him but the beautiful sea-birds who had learned that his golden arrow would never pierce their breasts--and so they loved him, and perched upon his arm that drew the bow.

Even the winds were kind to him because he moved so easily at their behest, but all winds were not alike to him who had the heart of a man. When spring came and the breezes blew from the south, heavy with the scent of magnolia, of lilacs, and blue violets, the heart of the Golden Archer ached with a strange hurt out of vanished years that he couldn't quite remember. When summer brought to him the delicious odor of grapes and berries and strong bright flowers, he longed to go down from the tower and wander after the fireflies' lanterns among the loaded vines, or pillow his head on sweet hay and let the winds put him to sleep forever.

When autumn came, and the flying leaves, as golden as his own steed, looked like yellow butterflies too tired to move their wings, the Archer would think of fires on hearths only half remembered, and he wished he could stable his golden horse while he joined some group about the dancing flames.

Winter was hardest of all to him, for all the world went in-doors and left him lonely. The frost-fairies, that glided down the blue rays of the winter-moon with their little lanterns that gave much color but no heat, these little creatures could not comfort him, because though he rode so high and was so straight, still he had the heart of a man. Sometimes the wild snows came and blinded his steady, sorrowful eyes; and in blackest midnight, when the sleet rattled against the golden sides of his horse, then, indeed, he felt alone and forgotten.

For the people on the plain, though they looked to his guiding arrow did not love him because they thought him only a weather vane.

So the years drove on and the Golden Archer grew lonelier and lonelier. Came at last a spring when the scent of peach-blossom was like the hurt of too great joy, and far-away the peach-orchards splashed the land with pink. High up in the air the Archer looked wistfully southward and pointed his bow towards clouds of sweetness and rose-color. How he longed to leave the great white stones of the tower and go wandering through those creamy orchards and down the green aisles of the forests by bright refreshing streams.

As he was gazing one day over the fertile plain he saw moving upon it what looked to him from that height like a very little girl. But he knew that she must be really a tall, slender maiden. That she had golden hair he also knew because it gleamed in the sun.

Then his lonely heart desired her company and he sent out thoughts to her, for being an Archer he could do this. Thoughts were his real arrows.

So this thought he sent towards her: "I do not know who you are, but I am a lonely Archer on the great cathedral where I have made a vow to tell forever the wandering of the wind. I cannot come to thee, but climb the winding stairs to this high place that I may gaze upon thee. I am lonely."

Now the young girl was walking at sunset in the orchards with her betrothed when through the air this message came to her, and, lifting up her eyes, she said: "See where the last light lies on the Golden Archer. How graceful he is, like a bit of flame above the old white church."

"They say the view is fine from there," answered her sweetheart.

"Let us climb up to-morrow," proposed the maid, whose name was Felice.

So next day at sunset she and her betrothed climbed the winding stair of the cathedral, and emerged on the roof near the Golden Archer, who, when he saw the maiden, felt an old rapture sweep over him. For a moment he so forgot his vow that he stood quite still, though the wind was veering. How beautiful she was with all the beauty of the sweet earth from which he had been so long removed. Her hair was like harvest-corn, and her eyes were like dim places where violets hide. The soft voice of her was as music in the Archer's ears, who had heard too long the jangling of iron bells in the towers beneath him.

And now she was looking at him. Old memories stirred in him beneath the armor that hid his manhood. He wanted to get down from his golden horse and lay aside his bow and arrow, and take her in his arms.

"What a beautiful Archer," she was saying, "how crisp his hair, how clear and firm his lips, how pure his profile."

Now her betrothed could be jealous even of a weather vane, so he said: "Anyone can be beautiful who is made of metal."

"It is an imperishable beauty," she replied. "Flesh and blood decay."

The Golden Archer was so agitated that he turned his eyes upon her, and all at once she knew that he was alive and her heart was aflame with love for him.

Next day she came alone to the tower. She found him pointing north and looking away from her, for the vow had gripped him again like the frosts of winter. But she spoke softly and said, "Beloved, the spring is here."

Then the south wind came, and against his will he veered and looked at her. She came close to his golden horse and touched the arm that held the bow. "You drew me to you, and now you do not look at me," she said.

"I am afraid to look at you," he replied and dropped his golden eyelids.

"Yet you are not afraid to gaze into the sky," she ventured.

"Out of the sky will come nothing to harm me," he answered.

"Could I harm you, soul of my soul?" she cried.

"You could make me love you," was his answer.

So they were quiet for a while. She watched the sea-birds circle about his shining horse which seemed ever ready to plunge from the cathedral tower into the spaces of the air, yet remained always the toy of the winds. She listened to the hoarse voices of the huge bells that swung beneath her.

At last she rose and unbound her hair so that it floated like a golden banner in the wind. "Come," she whispered.

Then the Golden Archer felt all the pain of those who must turn away from the voice of love. His eyes looked towards the sunset, but his heart seemed drowning in a strange, sweet, throbbing darkness. "Come nearer,"

he whispered.

So she went so near that her golden hair floated all about him and he saw the landscape through a yellow cloud. "Kiss me," she said.

But he set his lips steadfastly, and tried to turn to the north, which he could not do, for the wind was steadily from the south.

"I am cold," she whispered. "Let us go down to the warm orchards."

"Go!" he answered, "for your words pierce my heart, and I have made a vow to tell the people about the coming and going of the great winds."

"My love is a great wind," she said.

Then sadly she left him. He was alone on his tower and night was coming.

He tried to think of his vow, but her eyes called him, her lips brushed his like the light wing of a nesting bird. Hour after hour he endured the pain--and at last tears rolled from his eyes and melted his armor. The Golden Archer felt his old humanity return like a flood and set him free; and in the silence that comes before the dawn, he got down from his horse. The limbs of the golden animal were moving also; and stealthily, with the cramped action of those too long in one position, horse and man went down the stairs of the church, through the stone vestibule and out into the sweet, warm plain.

The Golden Archer knelt beneath the stars and wept himself back to his old beautiful manhood, then, mounting his horse, he galloped to the edge of the forest where in a cottage smothered beneath roses and honeysuckle Felice lived; once at her window he whispered: "The Golden Archer has come for thee, dearest."

Then she came out trembling, and in the gray light he took her in his arms and comforted her. "We will ride away and be married," he said. Then he lifted her on his horse, and they rode away through the forest, she lying quite still against his heart, and gazing with wide-open eyes into the green dimness. So they came to a church and were married.

That night they went to an inn on the borders of the forest, an old house with nine gables, deep moss on the roof, and a creaking signboard with a crowing bird painted on it; and the inn was called "The Crowing Cock."

Now there were many countrymen seated in the inn-parlor, and as the Golden Archer entered the room everyone rose and bowed; and as they passed through, Felice heard a peasant say, "How strange that a prince should marry a farm-girl."

Then the hot color came into her face, for Felice was very proud, and did not like to be thought inferior to her husband. When they were alone together she related what she had heard. The Golden Archer looked puzzled, for he thought that she loved him too well to care for such trifles. "We are one because we are dear to each other," he cried, and took her in his arms and cherished her.

Next day came the Mistress of the Inn to set the room in order, and as she bustled about she said, "From what kingdom comes your husband, the Prince?"

"My husband is not a prince," said Felice.

"He talks and acts like one," remarked the Hostess. "What is he then?"

The little Felice felt her cheeks burn. She could not say that her husband had been a weather vane, and was now a man, so she replied, "He occupied a very high position of trust."

"Yet he seems to know as little of real life as a prince," mused the Hostess. "He has asked me strange questions about quite ordinary things."

Felice grew pinker than ever; and when the Golden Archer came into the room he found her in tears.

"Heart's dearest, why do you weep?" he said.

Then she told him her trouble. He must act like other people, she said, or tongues would begin to wag. He must forget that he had ever been a weather vane and must learn the ways of the world. The Golden Archer's heart was wounded by her words.

"Do you remember," he said, "that you called your love for me a great wind."

"Yes, I remember."

"A great wind blows everything before it, even the words of men."

Now Felice was a woman who catches up phrases too easily and speaks them too trippingly. So she answered, "If you love me you will do anything for me," for that was her test of love, that whoever cared for her should bend ever to her will.

"We must serve each other," said the Archer, to whom the winds in all those years had whispered many secrets. "When equality in love or friendship ceases the end of joy is near. But remove the cloud from your forehead, dear love, and let us hunt the blue gentians in the forest glades."

"Oh, no! let us go to the village fair," said Felice.

"What! Exchange those cool, dim places, flower-scented, for the glare and noise of a fair?"

"No one can see me in the forest," remarked Felice, turning her head from side to side and gazing in a mirror.

"But I see you! Isn't that enough!"

Felice sighed, for she liked admiration, and the Golden Archer said no more about gathering gentians, but went with her to the fair, which was a sacrifice, for he loved fresh air and solitude; and the crowds, the heat, and the dust made his head ache. Then, too, he was not used to fairs, and more than once made Felice uncomfortable by the questions he asked. She was always afraid that he would betray his origin when anyone spoke of the wind. Someone, indeed, said it was south, and the Golden Archer with a smile corrected him. "It is east," he remarked. "Oh, what difference does it make!" Felice cried crossly.

Her ill-temper increased because people looked more at her husband than at her. The Golden Archer was, indeed, very handsome, and he had lived so much in the skies that he had a fine, free air. People could take long breaths in his presence, instead of feeling choked and cramped, so they wanted to talk with him.

He would have been glad to gratify them, but his wife's drooping lips closed his own; and after a while both went sadly back to the inn, wondering why all the glory was gone from the day.

But in their room he drew her into his arms, and loved her anew, and talked to her of all the wonderful things that would come to them if they were faithful.

"Don't you know, sweet Felice," he said, "that love is like the seed in the ground, which comes up a little frail and tender plant; but through storm and sunshine grows into a great tree. We must be patient with each other."

Felice was of those who want their trees full-grown, and she began to wonder why she had married the Golden Archer instead of her own man, whom she could understand; and she wished that she had never climbed to the top of the tower and lost her heart to the Archer.

The days of their honeymoon dragged, for the Archer in addition to the hurt of his love had now to suffer the pain of estrangement. The more he cared for Felice the harder it was to see her restless and unhappy. "It will be different when we are in our own home," he would say to himself.

So one day they left the inn and went to their own cottage which stood on a little hill, and from the window could be seen the tower of the great white church. Now the Golden Archer used often to gaze at this tower, which made Felice ask him if he were homesick.

"No; but I miss the great winds," he replied.

"Do you know what people say?" she asked him.

"What do they say?"

"That you were struck by lightning--and all melted away."

"I was struck by lightning," he answered. "Love slew me."

This pleased her. For awhile she showed herself loving and tender, but because she obeyed moods and not a strong, steadfast will, the old unhappiness came back. The Golden Archer felt more lonely than ever he had done on the high white tower, and loneliest of all when he held her in his arms.

One day he found her crying. "Why do you cry, Beloved?" he asked her.

"I am lonely," she said.

"With me?"

"Yes," she sobbed, "with you. What have you to tell me but your tales of the great winds? Other men have had their friends, their adventures. They can relate stories of their boyhood, of their early life, but you came

from a far-off tower and know nothing of the world."

"It is true," he murmured. "I can only tell you of the skies; for all the time of my former days on earth is dim to me."

That night they sat before the fire, for it was now autumn, and the leaping flames showed her gold hair and her eyes like dark pools. Upon the Golden Archer they shone, too, where he sat still and hurt, but unable to tell his pain, because he had lived too high above the world. The low, hoarse winds drove the flying leaves against the window glass and whistled in the keyhole; at which Felice would shiver and cast sidelong glances at her strange husband.

All at once on the wind came a caroling voice. Felice rushed to the window and peered out. The voice sang:

"All that I knew of thee, my Love,
The great winds bore away.
When they are hushed wilt thou return
To bless the close of day?

"In that still hour come back to me,
And find thy longed-for rest.
Poor petal blown too near the sun,
Float downward to my breast."

"Ah," cried Felice, "it is my old Love."

"My love for thee is older than the moon," said the Golden Archer. "Can you not rest by our hearth?"

Then she knelt by him and pressed her face against his knees. And his heart grew as heavy as a weary dream before a sultry dawn when the thunder hangs in the hills. Her grief weighed all the more upon him because he knew she was trying to love him; and when that hour of effort comes death is under its cloak.

But the next day she was cheerful and sang about her tasks. The Golden Archer saddled his horse and rode miles through the forest upon the crisp red leaves; and he knew that goodness would not hold her, nor kindness, nor fidelity, nor service, for love like hers is held prisoner to nothing once its wings are outstretched, nor does it know good from evil.

[Illustration: THE GOLDEN ARCHER AND FELICE]

When he rode home the stars were peeping through the forest branches, and the white owls were flying. But the frost that silvered the red leaves was not so sharp and glistening as the memory of her tears.

As he reached his door he saw that it was open and the light from the fire shone out upon the dark paths of the forest. But the room was empty of her presence.

He called her name, but no answer was returned; then on a tablet upon the table he saw words written and brought them to the fire and read them.

"O Golden Archer, go back to thy tower, for the great winds have taken me on a long journey, and I shall never see thee again."

Then he knew that not his faithful winds, but the voice of old memories had called her, and he bowed his head in an imperishable sorrow.

Because his heart was broken he desired to cease from his humanity and return to the old white tower. As once his warm tears had thawed his shining armor and made him an inhabitant of the world, so now his cold and bitter tears encased him again in hard metal.

Walking wearily and with stiff footsteps he went to the stable, brought out his horse and rode across the plain to the great white church upon which the midnight moon was shining. He knocked on its west door, and from the vaults came the echoes.

"You cannot return, Golden Archer, for you have broken your vow!"

"But I have broken my heart also," he answered; "therefore, let me in."

"But you will come down again from the tower," cried the echoes.

"Nay, for only the broken-hearted know how to keep their vows," he answered.

So the doors swung open, and up the dim spiral stairs rode the Golden Archer, through bars of moonlight to the region of the great winds where again he mounted the tower. But always there is one dream left to the sorrowful, and his was, that some night the great winds would drive her soul against his breast.

Then he became very still and turned his arrow northward, for the wind was coming from the far circles of the Arctic ice.

Next day the sun rose red and glorious and made fires on the armor of the Golden Archer, and all the people upon the plain rubbed their eyes and cried out:

"There's a new Archer on the Cathedral. Now we shall know from which horizon comes the wind!"

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