



Fairy Dreams

By

Jane G. Austin

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FAIRY DREAMS.

Princess reaching out to fallen man

FAIRY DREAMS;

OR,

WANDERINGS IN ELF-LAND.

BY

JANE G. AUSTIN.

With illustrations,

By HAMMATT BILLINGS.

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PRINCE RUDOLF'S FLOWER

Prince Rudolph sees Rosa Munda

The palace clock with twelve sonorous peals announced the hour of noon; and as the last vibrating echo died away, King Merowald entered the audience-chamber and seated himself upon the throne, looking around upon the nobles and courtiers who stood about him.

"Is there any among you who would ask a boon of the king?" inquired he, in a gracious voice.

A short pause ensued, and then from the lower end of the hall, a handsome, graceful youth approached quickly and knelt upon one knee before the throne.

The aged king bent forward with a movement of surprise; the glittering crowd of courtiers rustled their silken garments for a moment, and each moved a step forward, and then a breathless silence filled that vast chamber; for the graceful youth kneeling so humbly there, his arms crossed, his head bowed low upon his breast, was Rudolf, the only and well-beloved son of the monarch before whom he knelt.

The silence was broken by the tremulous voice of the old king.

"My son, what seek you?" asked he.

"A boon, my gracious lord and father."

"And what?" inquired again the king.

"I ask permission, my father, to go out into the world to seek the flower of which I have dreamed, and which alone can make me happy."

"What is the flower, my son?"

"Alas, dear father, I cannot tell; the dream has fled, and I can neither recall the form, the color, or the name of this exquisite blossom, although if I should find it, I should certainly recognize it, and without it

I cannot live."

"Go first, my son," said the king, after a long pause, "to Althoso, and ask his advice. If he bid you go, I will not refuse my consent."

Prince Rudolf rose, and, bowing low, left the audience-chamber. Passing through several long corridors and galleries, he arrived at a low-arched door and knocked loudly.

The door was presently opened by a short, crooked little man, with an enormous hump upon his back, who, twisting his head so as to look up into the prince's face, croaked out:

"Oh, it's the handsome prince to-day, is it? Well, well, they all have to come to us."

Prince Rudolf paid no attention to the ugly dwarf, but mounted rapidly the steep, winding stairs which lay before him, until he arrived at another door similar to that he had just passed. Here again he knocked, but this time softly, and almost timidly.

"Who is there?" asked a deep voice.

"Prince Rudolf," replied the young man.

The heavy door swung slowly open. "Enter, prince," replied the voice; and Rudolf obeying, found himself in a small room, crowded with books, drawings, and papers.

At one side glowed a charcoal furnace, over which, in an iron pan, some strange compound was bubbling. Various utensils and preparations were scattered near it, as if the prince's entrance had interrupted in some important operation the old man who stood in the middle of the little room, his long purple gown wrapped about him, and his dark eyes fixed upon the face of the visitor.

"And what does Prince Rudolf seek of me?" asked he, at length.

"My father has sent me to ask your advice, wise Althoso," replied the prince. "For seven nights have I dreamed of a lovely flower, which, while I hold it, fills my whole soul with joy; but when I awake, I can no longer

remember the name of the flower, nor its form, color, or perfume; yet should I see it, I should at once know it. Can you tell me, O wise Althoso! the name or the home of this blossom, without which I must surely die?"

The old man smiled sadly and shook his head. "Prince," said he, "if you would value the flower, you must seek it for yourself. Could I give it to you, or tell you where to find it, you would not value it an hour. Go out into the wide world and seek it, but stop—you may not know your flower among all you will find in the world, although you think so now. Here is a white veil which I prepared for you, knowing that you would come to me, and here is a spear with a diamond point. When you have found a flower which you think may be yours, throw the veil over it; if the veil remains white and whole, leave it there till you have slept, then pluck the flower and bring it home. But should the veil show itself soiled or rent, there is not your flower; seize the veil and fly. Should you be detained by enchantments which you cannot break through, use your diamond pointed spear: before it every charm will fall. Now go, my son, and leave me to my labors."

The old man turned to his furnace as he spoke, and began stirring the mixture in the iron pan, which presently sent up a hot, stinging vapor, which filled the whole room.

Seizing the glistening white veil and the sharp, strong lance which lay upon the table, Rudolf ran down the stairs past the dwarf, who opened the door, and, hastening to his own chamber, packed in a knapsack a few clothes, and the picture of his mother, who had died when he was an infant. Then as the palace clock struck one, the prince entered the apartment of his father, who had soon returned to it from the hall of audience.

Rudolf, kneeling again before him, told him of the words of Althoso; showed him the veil and the spear, and besought his father's blessing and permission to set out.

These the old king bestowed upon him, not without tears; and, wiping his own eyes, Rudolf kissed his father's hand, and descended to the stables, where he called for his own horse, Sunbeam, and springing upon his back, rode bravely out into the world.

Many days prince Rudolf travelled, and many lovely flowers did he see, both wild by the roadside, and carefully sheltered in gardens; but none of these for a moment made him think of the flower of his dream, and he was growing very sad and discouraged, when, one sultry summer noon, he found himself in a large forest, through which wound a smooth, pleasant road, along which Sunbeam trotted gayly, his little hoofs making no sound upon the thick, soft turf.

All at once through the dusky shadows, which even in the brightest day brooded among those giant trees, the prince caught a glimpse of something shining dimly, which reminded him of the bright gardens which he had passed through on previous days.

Dismounting, and tying Sunbeam to a tree, so that he could reach the sweet grass which grew all about, prince Rudolf, taking his spear in his hand, pushed aside the underwood which barred his progress, and made his way toward the dimly seen object which had attracted him.

For a short distance, the forest was almost impenetrable. High, stiff shrubs, growing closely together, impeded him on every side; and at the end of half an hour, prince Rudolf paused, hot and weary, and half resolved to give up the attempt. Just then, however, he perceived a narrow but well-defined path opening at his feet, and leading in the direction of these glowing flowers. Following this eagerly, the prince in a few moments found himself before an arched gateway, surmounted by a gorgeous wreath of tulips of every possible color, and fresh as if just placed there. The entrance was barred by the thick, sword-like leaves of the plant, which were thickly interlaced across the opening, while the woody stalks, growing to an immense size and height, formed the framework of the portal.

The prince stood for a moment looking at this singular and beautiful gate, and longing to enter, when, to his great surprise, the sword leaves bent gracefully to the ground, and seemed to invite him to pass through the portal thus opened.

The gay young prince entered with a beating heart, and the leaves closed immediately behind him.

Before him lay a path strewn thickly with gold, and glittering and flashing in the sun, while on each side extended a large and beautiful garden, divided by golden paths like that which he was treading. Every bed was thickly set with gorgeous blossoms, but the prince observed with astonishment that there were no flowers but tulips; double and single, small and large, of every tint and variety, but still all tulips. Standing quite still in the midst of this collection, prince Rudolf looked about him for a gardener, of whom he could make some inquiries. No one was to be seen: on the borders of the immense garden rose the gloomy and impenetrable forest, looking more sullen and forbidding from its contrast with the flashing, gorgeous colors of the flowers and the gold-strewn paths.

At the farthest extremity of the garden was a sort of grove of a certain variety of the tulip, growing to a size perfectly prodigious, and surrounding and overshadowing what appeared to be a summer-house or arbor. Toward this the prince now hastened, hoping to find at last some owner of this glowing garden; but on penetrating the circle of tree-like stems, he paused in utter astonishment, for what he supposed a building was in reality an immense tulip as large as a small room, plucked from its stem and turned upside down, so that it formed a sort of tent, the curtains of which were the velvety petals of the flower, gayly striped with scarlet and gold.

Prince Rudolf stood for a moment, as I have said, lost in astonishment; then lifting the edge of one of the curtains, soft and thick as velvet, he entered with some hesitation this strange pavilion. At first he could distinguish nothing clearly in the dim light which found its way through

the thick curtains; but presently he perceived that he stood beside a straight and polished column of gold, which with five others upheld the tent, and answered to the stamens of an ordinary tulip. To the pistil of the plant was attached a petal of a very small tulip, which waved constantly backward and forward, causing a gentle breeze, which softly fanned away the sultriness of the heated air.

Directly under this fan was heaped up a mass of tulip petals, making a delightfully soft and elastic couch, upon which reclined gracefully the most beautiful maiden whom Rudolf had ever beheld. Her rich, dark hair, combed straight back from her white forehead, was thickly powdered with gold dust, and formed into a crown upon the top of her head, around which was a wreath of small tulips of a brilliant crimson, streaked and splashed with gold: her large, sleepy brown eyes were fixed upon the face of the young prince, while her full scarlet lips smiled a welcome to the handsome youth. Her dress, which left bare her lovely shoulders and round, dimpled arms, was of the same glowing, gorgeous colors as the drapery of her tent, and everywhere upon it glittered the gold dust which powdered her hair.

Prince Rudolph bows to Rosa Munda

“O the lovely flower! O my tulip queen!” whispered Rudolf, sinking upon his knee. The tulip maiden said not a word, but only smiled more lovingly, and fixed more earnestly her great eyes upon those of the prince, as she sat upright upon the couch, making her gorgeous gold-sprinkled robe flash and glitter as she moved.

“O queenly tulip! will you come with me and be the flower of my life?” whispered the prince, rising and moving timidly toward her.

Still the maiden spoke not; only moved gracefully forward as a flower upon its stem.

“Thus then I make you mine,” exclaimed Rudolf, drawing from his breast the magic veil, and throwing it over the head of the maiden.

But no sooner had the pure white tissue touched the dark and glowing hair, than it became smirched and soiled, and the maiden fell back upon her couch of petals, which now looked withered, broken, and decaying; her rich robe showed that it was soiled and rent in many places; her pure white skin was covered with blotches and pimples, and the delicate color of her cheeks deepened to a swarthy, lurid red; her languid eyes lost all their beauty, and glowed with a sullen fire; her graceful figure lost its elasticity, and instead of soft repose, expressed only a careless indolence and slothful abandonment. The air grew suffocating with a heavy perfume, so powerful as to be quite nauseous.

Prince Rudolf gazed a moment in horror; then, snatching the veil now limp and soiled, he rushed from the pavilion. But outside all seemed changed. The golden paths appeared to writhe about like great serpents, twisting themselves together, and utterly bewildering him who tried to follow them: all the millions of tulips in the flower beds were nodding and waving distractedly upon their stems, clashing their stiff leaves together, till the air seemed filled with the threatening music of an approaching army.

For a few moments, Prince Rudolf rushed at random hither and thither, backward and forward, round and round, but without making the least progress toward the gate. Suddenly remembering the spear which the Sage Althoso had given him, and which he had all this time carried fastened to his belt without thinking of it, he drew it and struck furiously all about him, at the paths, the beds, and the warlike tulips.

Immediately every thing resumed its former condition, and became beautiful and quiet as when the prince first entered the garden. Hastening along the now stationary path, Rudolf soon found himself before the entrance gate. But the stiff leaves did not now yield before him; on the contrary, turning their sharp edges toward him, one close above the other, they presented an impenetrable barrier. Rudolf laughing, touched them with the point of his spear, and instantly they drooped, languid and broken upon their stems.

The prince leaped through, and found himself again in the wild forest, but all trace of a path had disappeared; and the bewildered youth might have exhausted himself in useless struggles, had not the loud neighing of Sunbeam, who had become very impatient, directed the prince to the place where he had left him. Again mounting his horse, Rudolf rode slowly on, thinking deeply of what he had just seen. Taking the veil from his breast, he regarded it sorrowfully, thinking it quite ruined; but, to his surprise, it was fresh and pure as when Althoso first gave it to him. "Thanks, dear veil," murmured the prince, replacing it in his bosom; and, fixing his eyes vacantly upon Sunbeam's head, he again rode on many a long mile, till the stopping of the horse caused him to look around.

To his great surprise he found himself in a dense jungle. The very trees were different from any thing he had seen before. Oaks, walnuts, and birches had disappeared, and instead, on every side, rose the stately palm, the graceful banana, and the gigantic ferns of the tropics. Around and among these trees climbed flaunting vines, loaded with scarlet flowers, while innumerable birds of the most gorgeous plumage, but of harsh and startling note, flitted about, looking like flying blossoms from the drooping vines.

Sunbeam had stopped in the centre of a little open space, shaded by the nodding heads of the palms; and the creepers, which had leaped across from side to side, forming a living canopy to this little glade. On every side further progress was stopped by the dense foliage, except one little path just wide enough for the prince to pass, but not for Sunbeam. Leaving the horse, who neighed uneasily at seeing his master disappear, Rudolf entered the narrow path, which was bordered on each side by immense vines of the cactus plant interlacing themselves overhead, and so loaded with flowers that not a stem or thorn was visible. The pathway was illuminated, and the fiery hue of the flowers exhibited by the light of myriads of fireflies who flitted in every direction, now darting into the royal purple heart of a speciocissimus; now poising themselves on the pink corolla of a truncatus, now bending lightly the silvery stamens of a

gloriosus, and then settling upon the tangled curls of the prince's head. All at once the path ended at the entrance of a glade, similar to that which he had first entered; only in this, the very ground was covered with cactus blossoms, placed so closely together as to leave no trace of earth or vine visible, and forming a carpet such as no weaver on earth could equal. All around the sides and overhead climbed the vines and swung the blossoms, screamed the birds, and flitted the fireflies.

As prince Rudolf stood entranced at the entrance of this flower palace, he was saluted by a shower of silvery pollen, which was thrown in his face and all over him, while a loud peal of shrill laughter made him wipe his eyes and look hastily round. Just above his head, in a loop of the strong vine, he saw a slender figure clad in a gauzy green dress, trimmed round the skirt and neck with a border of scarlet blossoms, a wreath of which also crowned the long, dark hair which flowed loosely about her pliant form and encircled her slender waist.

Holding the vine lightly with one hand, the laughing, teasing girl stripped from the blossoms near her the silvery pollen, and dashed it in the upturned face of the prince, who, entering into the frolic with the thoughtless gayety of a boy, pelted her in turn with whole handfuls of flowers which he stripped from the vines near him, at first carefully through fear of the thorns, but more recklessly when he perceived, that, instead of standing out from the stem, these obliging spines folded themselves close down upon it, and thus were perfectly harmless. At last, Rudolf began to pursue the laughing, mocking maiden up and down the ladder-like vines, sometimes almost grasping her fluttering robe, then seeing her place herself at one bound far beyond his reach, only to peep laughingly out at him from her flowery hiding-place. At last, weary and hopeless of success, prince Rudolf descended to the ground, and, throwing himself upon the flower carpet, pretended to be asleep.

Soon he perceived by a light crackling of the branches that the green-robed maiden was also descending and approaching him. Presently, through his half-closed eyes, he could distinguish her flitting about her

gleaming bower, until at last she threw herself down also to repose after the mad chase.

Taking carefully from his bosom the gauzy veil, the prince silently approached the maiden, who now slept, or at least pretended to, and with a sudden movement threw it over her graceful figure.

The effect, though different, was as startling as with the tulip princess. From the wreath upon her head, from the girdle about her waist, from the borders of her robe, sharp, piercing thorns projected in every direction, rending and tearing the poor veil into tatters, while the closed eyes of the maiden flew open to emit rays of furious anger, while her full red lips curved themselves into a scornful, withering smile; and with those pretty fingers, which had so gracefully thrown flowers at the prince, but which were now armed each with a long, claw-like talon, she sought to rend away the veil, which embarrassed her motions, that she might rush upon the astonished youth.

Rudolf did not wait for her to free herself, but, seizing a fragment of the veil, he turned and rushed into the flowery passage, which was now dark and gloomy, for the fireflies had all hidden themselves; and from between the gay flowers at the sides, overhead, and underfoot, long thorns projected venomously, and would have entirely stopped any progress on the part of the prince, had he not laid about on every side with his spear, and thus succeeded, though not without the greatest difficulty, in regaining the spot where he had left Sunbeam, whom he found surrounded by furious parrots, macaws, and other tropical birds, who, flinging themselves at him, hit him with their long beaks, and tore him with their talons, so that the poor creature's cries filled the whole forest.

With great difficulty and by the free use of his spear, Rudolf succeeded in driving them away, and then, perceiving a slight opening in the jungle, he threw himself into it; and finally, just as the last rays of daylight were dying away, he and Sunbeam found themselves, faint, weary, and exhausted, torn with thorns and wounded by fierce birds, once more

upon the turfy road, which they had so unfortunately quitted. Taking some food and a little silver cup from his wallet, the prince threw himself upon the ground beside a cool spring, whose trickling music had betrayed its vicinity, and, having eaten, drank, and bathed, pillowed his head upon Sunbeam's shoulder, and slept peacefully all through the night.

With the first blush of morning, prince Rudolf arose and refreshed himself with a simple repast, and a long draught of water from the little rivulet, whose icy coldness in that sultry summer weather much surprised him. "I will follow the stream a little way, and see whence it draws this pure, cold water, while poor Sunbeam finishes his breakfast."

Murmuring these words half aloud, the prince fastened the bridle in such a manner that the horse should have full liberty to graze, yet be prevented from escaping, and proceeded slowly along the bank of the little stream, which, murmuring and complaining, grew more and more narrow, and tempted the youth from one bend to another, by promising to diminish to its fountainhead within a short distance.

At last, just as Rudolf, somewhat vexed at his frequent disappointments, was about to turn back, a gleam of some large object like a house shone through the trees in the rays of the rising sun, and the prince hastened to turn a sharp, projecting bend of the stream, to see more clearly what this white building could be in the lonely forest. As he turned the angle of the stream he started in astonishment.

Close beside the fountain of the rivulet rose a white marble pavilion, its slender columns sculptured to represent lily stems, with the flowers rising as a wreath about the light and graceful roof.

In the centre of the marble floor stood a chair and footstool, also of marble, and seated upon it, as upon a throne, was a fair and stately woman, upright and immovable, her abundant flaxen hair braided and carried about her head in the form of a crown, which seemed indeed a far more fitting ornament to her queenly beauty than a simple wreath. Her robe was of a stiff, white silk, embroidered with gold thread; upon

her arms and throat were golden ornaments set with pearls; in her beautiful hand, white and cold as marble, she held as a sceptre a magnificent lily, fit emblem of her queenly beauty.

Rudolf gazed silently a few moments in admiration of that fair and sovereign face; then, seeing that her cold blue eyes did not turn toward him, he ventured to steal softly up behind her and to throw over that regal head the magic veil.

For a moment there was no change; then, as the prince gazed eagerly yet half regretfully at the proud, handsome face beneath the folds, and wondered if his search was over, a slight shudder passed through that motionless form; the faint rose tinge faded utterly from the cheek and lip; the pale blue eyes lost all color; the hair became white as the brow it surrounded, and, where Rudolf had found a stately queen, he now beheld only a marble statue.

As he gazed horror stricken, the veil, stiffening as if frozen, broke in two pieces, and with a light, tinkling sound fell upon the marble floor.

Already a death chill ran through the veins of the young prince, and he was on the point of sinking down lifeless at the feet of the marble lily queen, when with a strong effort he snatched the veil from the floor, and hastened as quickly as his torpid limbs would allow from that icy throne. Pursuing again the windings of the brook, he soon reached the side of his good horse, and, mounting hastily, put him to his speed. For a considerable time he continued his journey without meeting with any adventure of importance; but it so happened one day, as he was dreaming of his father's court and of what they would say to his adventures, that he seemed suddenly enveloped in a soft and fragrant air, while his ears were greeted with the warblings of hundreds of merry little birds.

Turning suddenly, he perceived a wide and gently ascending path leading off from the main road. Down this path came the soft gush of perfume and music which had aroused him.

Again did the prince find himself overshadowed with festooning vines; but this time they were roses, which peeped and nodded to him at every turn, roses whose soft petals fluttered down upon his head and carpeted his path, while their delicate fragrance filled the air. Roses of every hue and degree; white, blush pink and deepest crimson, single roses and double roses, climbing roses and tree roses, moss roses and thornless roses; every rose that ever bloomed on this round earth clustered along that pathway, each crowding before its neighbor to look at the handsome prince, and nod a joyous welcome to him.

Dismounting from his horse and holding his plumed cap in his hand, Rudolf walked slowly along the path, hoping, at every turn, to find the divinity of this rose Eden. Nor had he long to look, for as the path, making a sudden turn, came to an end, Rudolf saw before him a bower formed by two graceful birches, which, arching toward each other, supported, the one a white, the other a crimson climbing rose, which, in their riotous luxuriance, having clothed every twig of the bending birches with their blossoms, and interlaced above, waved exultingly in the air their graceful, verdant limbs, as if to boast triumphantly of having overcome every obstacle.

Upon a gently sloping bank beneath this odorous canopy reclined a graceful maiden, clothed in a pure white robe, her golden hair curling loosely about her snow-white shoulders, and her blue eyes gently beaming with love and purity. A few moss-rose buds nestling at her bosom, and a slender garland of wild roses about her head, were her only ornaments. Upon her finger sat a ring-dove, to whose plaintive cooing the maiden replied with soft caresses. A pair of humming-birds buzzed about her head, plunging their dagger-like bills into the roses of her garland, while a honey-bee loaded himself with sweets from the buds at her bosom. All about her feet bloomed the wild roses, and a tall bush of sweetbriar nodded caressingly over her fair head.

Prince Rudolf gazed eagerly at the beautiful picture for a moment, then threw himself at the feet of the rose sylph.

“O flower of my dream!” murmured he, “have I at last found you? Art thou the rose I sought? Wilt thou leave thy bower to bloom for me only? Shall thy perfume and thy sweets be for my home and my people?”

The maiden said never a word, only her fair head drooped lower and lower, and she hid her blushing face in her slender hands.

Gently and carefully the prince threw over that sunny head the magic veil, which again was fair and whole as the day he received it, but, oh sad and disappointing result! beneath the gauzy folds no longer was visible the graceful form of a blushing maid, but only a slender bush crowned with one lovely blush rose, its yellow stamens the color of the maiden’s hair.

Grieved and disappointed, Rudolf stood regarding the transformation. Suddenly he remembered the words of the wise Althoso: “If the veil remains white and whole, leave it there till you have slept, then pluck the flower and bring it home.”

White and whole the veil certainly was; and throwing himself upon the ground, Rudolf resolutely closed his eyes, nor did he open them till the hum of the birds and bees, the warmth of the summer morning, and the stillness of the spot, had granted him the sleep he so longed for.

It was not, however, long, and the sun had not yet reached his height, when Rudolf opening his eyes, started eagerly to his feet, and turned to look at the rose.

There it stood as he had left it;—a lovely rose, yet nothing but a rose.

Rudolf stood sadly before it, half resolved to pluck the flower from its tree and try to rest content with that, when a sudden thought flashed across his mind, and seizing his diamond spear, with its point he gently touched the rose-bush.

The effect was instantaneous. In the spot where a moment before had stood only a silent plant, Rudolf beheld with delight the slender figure of his rose maiden, her yellow hair circled with a garland of white moss

buds, beneath which flowed the silvery folds of the veil, shading but not concealing the faint blush of her cheeks and the deep blue of her starry eyes, which timidly sought the ground.

“O my rose! O my lovely, long-sought flower!” cried the prince, seizing her soft, white hand.

“Come, my Rose, my Rosa Munda, my flower of the whole earth! come to bloom forever in my garden; to be cherished forever in my heart.”

The Rose drooped gently forward. The prince, taking her in his arms, placed her upon Sunbeam’s back, mounted behind her, and with joyous, loving hearts, they journeyed back to his father’s court, where, for very many long and happy years, the beauty of the gentle Rose made all around her happy and contented.

Prince Rudolph and Rosa Munda on
a horse

KÖNIG TOLV'S BRIDE

Mable reading a book

Far in the depths of the wild and gloomy forests of the Hartz mountains stood a little hut, where dwelt the charcoal-burner, Karl Gatz and his daughter Mabel.

Alone they dwelt for years before Mabel's gentle mother had faded from earth, chilled to death perhaps by the stern, morose husband, to whom her parents had given her. She died, and one summer morning Gatz made a grave for her, beneath the huge blasted pine which towered above his cabin, and then returned to his charcoal burning with no difference except, perhaps, an added gloom and silence in his wayward manner.

Little Mabel was never a joyous child; how should she be, when the tall blasted pine brooded over her home, and her father, who seemed the embodied spirit of the tree, threw as gloomy and baleful a shade over her young heart.

From whence rose the cloud which shadowed all the life of these two, no one knew; but the few poor peasants and mountain dwellers, who alone had heard or cared to talk of so obscure a person, whispered strange stories of a man with whom Karl Gatz had quarrelled, and who had gone up the mountain to claim some money which the charcoal-burner owed him, and never returned. There were no friends or relatives to make inquiries into his fate, and the few who knew of the circumstance shrugged their shoulders and said, "It is no concern of ours. If a fool puts his head under the bear's paw, must we run to pull him away?" So no one ever asked what had become of Johan Brenner, but all agreed that from that day the black and never lifting cloud had settled close and thick upon the brow and heart of Karl Gatz.

One would have thought that under this dark and poison-dripping shade all pure and lovely things must have withered and died as had the charcoal-burner's wife, but never in sunniest *parterre* or most lovingly cared for flower plot had bloomed a fairer, sweeter, more sky-like flower than the dreamy Mabel. Light and gracefully moulded as the fawn, fair and delicate as the wild anemone, her blue eyes had gazed at heaven until they had caught its purest light, and the sun had given his own rays to sparkle in her wavy tresses.

Between the father and daughter there could be but little sympathy or love. The eyes of the silent man bent earthward, and had never marked the wondrous beauty which the slow, sad years were unfolding in his dark and lonely hut, nor had he once met the sad, appealing looks, which, in the gloomy days since her mother died, the heart of the love-longing maiden cast toward the only parent left her. He never looked up, and the thirsty, fainting heart sadly turned away and lived thereafter in its own loneliness.

Mabel had often been with her mother to the convent in the valley, where the poor woman went to confess her fancied sins, and to comfort her yearning heart by hearing of the love which is for all mankind, but is seldom truly valued save by such as, like her, are stimulated by earthly affliction.

While the mother prayed and wept, the little Mabel wandered, like a gleam of summer through the vaulted corridors, and shone by turns into all the narrow, tomblike cells.

The poor nuns, shut out from life and love, gladly welcomed this sweet, fresh presence, beaming with joy and freedom; and many a sister did penance on aching knees, for cherishing, through one wild moment, the wish that she had been an earthly bride, and clasped a child like this to a mother's heart.

Finding how much the little maiden longed to be able to read and write, good old sister Ursula offered to teach her, and found herself amply rewarded by the warm, tearful smile with which the glad child kissed her

withered hand.

An apt and eager scholar did Mabel prove; and in the year which followed, she learned to read and write with fluency and ease, and was able to repay her kind old instructress for her pains by reading in a sweet, hushed voice, those tender, loving promises and solemn, thrilling aspirations, which filled the volumes of the scanty library, and which the dim and fading eyes of sister Ursula could no longer distinguish but with pain and uncertainty.

Little Mabel took great delight in these readings, and she longed to have a book of her own, that she might pursue her studies at home. Expressing this wish one day at the convent, sister Benedicta, with the consent of the Lady Superior, gave her a copy of the mangled and corrupted edition of the Holy Book, prepared for convents and the Catholic use, while the Fraulein von Rosenberg, one of the noble young ladies who boarded and were educated at the convent, called her to the dormitory, and, producing from her trunk a little worn volume, she gave it to her saying,

“So much religion and so many pious works are truly very edifying, dear little one, but I think, for my part, it will do you no harm to read a little of something more amusing; so take this volume of fairy tales, which I have all by heart, and put it into the bosom of your frock.”

Mabel’s eyes sparkled like stars, with delight and gratitude, but pausing as she was concealing the little book as directed, she said,

“But why shall I hide your gift, dear Fraulein? If it is right that I should have it, all may see it.”

“Nonsense, little saint!” said the young lady angrily; but pausing a moment, she kissed the child’s pure brow, and said, “you are right, little one, and I am wrong,—go show the book to your mother and do as she says about keeping it.”

Mabel's mother did not object to the child's receiving the little book, nor did she think it necessary to mention it to any of the sisterhood, knowing that she should thereby bring the gay young Fraulein into disgrace; so Mabel kept the book, and while the sad and silent mother spun or sewed in the summer sunshine or by the winter's fire, the child sat on a low stool by her side, reading in her clear, sweet voice, stories of the graceful little fairies, who dance through the long, bright summer nights; of the crooked, swarthy gnomes who forever pile up riches which they can never enjoy, in the gloomy mountain caverns; of the fair and graceful Undines who frolic in the mountain streams and broad, rolling rivers; of the wood-nymphs, whose slender, supple figures animate the graceful, waving trees, and whisper to each other in the evening breezes.

But chief among all these wonders was the dreamy child impressed with the story of King Tolv, who, every midsummer night, rides, at speed, with all his gallant retinue, through lonely woods and mountain gorges, and if in his wild career he should meet a pure and spotless maiden, her he seizes for his bride and queen, in his glowing, golden palace, deep in the green hill-side.

Many an hour did Mabel peer about in the wild thickets and among the grotesquely piled rocks which lay about her home, to find the entrance to that fairy palace, for the story said that it was in the Hartz Mountains that he always disappeared, and the mountain of Köningsberg, on which the charcoal-burner lived, was the highest, the wildest, and the most goblin-haunted of all the pine-clad peaks.

Either, however, Mabel did not look in the right spot, or King Tolv had so cunningly concealed the entrance to his abode that she passed without noticing it, for she never could find it; and before she had done looking for it the deep snows of winter, and then her mother's long, fading illness and death, chased such things from her mind, and filled her heart with such deep sorrow and hopeless loneliness that she thought no more of König Tolv or her other goblin friends, but turned, with a heart thankful to the kind old nun, who had put the key of consolation in her hand, to the sublime promises and comforting words

of Holy Writ, the living beauty of which not even the garbled and imperfect form in which the Catholic Church presents it to her children can wholly disguise.

Mabel read and prayed, and wept the long winter months away, making from time to time vain efforts to find the way to her father's heart, more securely hidden than even the hill-side door to König Tolv's golden palace.

At last she gave up the search, and contented herself with providing for her father's comfort, as well as she could, and praying, night and morning, to the Holy Virgin and all the saints to turn toward her that stony heart, and show her the way to gain the love of the only one left on earth to whom she could turn for affection and comfort.

So passed the long, chill winter; but when the cold, deep snow had turned to fresh young grass, and trees which all winter had clashed their bare brown arms against each other as in the vain attempt to keep warm, had put on their new green dresses, and the wood-nymphs had begun to whisper again among their leaves, then Mabel once more wandered forth and found among the spring flowers her own old sadly joyous dreams and fancies. Again she took the book of fairy tales from the shelf, where it had lain undisturbed ever since the last time she had read to her mother, sitting on the little footstool by her side. Again she read, and now with a deeper and more thrilling interest than ever, the legend of König Tolv.

"To be loved," murmured she, sitting by the leaping, laughing mountain stream, the book upon her knees, and her soft, dreamy eyes fixed upon the distant turrets of the old gray castle of Wolfsmarchen, which rose on the far horizon, "To be loved even by König Tolv—ah, what joy! Truly it would not be so hard a fate to meet him beneath the midsummer moon, and be borne away to dance and laugh and love within his golden halls! Who is there but my father for me to love on earth? and were I König Tolv's bride I could come at night and leave gifts of gold and jewels on his pillow, which would more than make up to him for all that he would

lose in me;" and as she admitted to her heart the dreary truth that gold was fairer and dearer to her father's heart than his own child, great pearly drops rose slowly to her thoughtful eyes, and fell plashing upon the open book.

Mabel rose, and went slowly home to prepare the evening meal. That over, and the hut restored to what order was possible with its extreme poverty, the maiden bid a timid good-night to her father, who sat, as usual, smoking his evening pipe in morose silence. She received no answer, and though she expected none, she sighed heavily as she closed the door of the little closet which her mother had persuaded Karl, years before, to partition off from the common room, that her daughter might not, for want of privacy, lose the sensitive modesty which is to a woman what the dew-drop is to the rose, the bloom to the grape, as great a charm while it remains as impossible to replace, once carelessly brushed off.

Mabel dreamed that she was the loved and loving bride of King Tolv. She sat with him upon a bank thickly set with new and beautiful flowers, as is the sky with stars upon a frosty night. Before them wheeled and glided elves and fairies dancing to music which made glad the hearts of all who heard it; in her ear whispered her fairy lover words whose intoxicating sweetness still thrilled the maiden's heart as she slowly awoke, with a vague sense of regret to find herself alone in the smoky little mountain cabin.

King Tolv and Mable at their wedding

That day she renewed her old search for the hidden door, which should open to her that joyous scene which filled her heart with such wild longing, but still the mystic gate evaded her most earnest search. The next night and the next her dream was renewed, and as she awoke on the third morning the thought flashed across her mind that midsummer night was fast approaching, and that by meeting King Tolv on his midnight ride she could learn the way to his palace home without further

trouble of her own. “And if I should not like him,” whispered she to herself, “I can easily steal away and come home, and all will be as before.”

This wild thought dwelt in Mabel’s mind day after day; her father, to whom added years brought but added gloom, evidently cared nothing for her presence or absence. The only notice he had taken of her since her mother’s death was to forbid her visits to the convent since she had delivered a message from the Mother, warning him that unless he attended mass and confession his soul stood in imminent peril. When Mabel tremblingly repeated these unwelcome words, Karl Gatz turned for a moment his gloomy eyes upon her, and bid her, if she would ever see his face again, to cease from that day her visits to the good sisters, whom he designated by a word that puzzled, while it instinctively shocked, the pure and unsullied mind of his daughter.

The dreamy, balmy summer days swept on all too fast for the hesitating, irresolute girl. One day she renounced her scheme, the next it again filled all her heart. So midsummer day came, and through the long, sunny hours Mabel could not trust herself to the soft influences of her favorite haunts, but in the intervals of unaccustomed labor she knelt and wept and prayed beside her little bed.

As daylight faded, she threw herself, without undressing, upon her rude pillow, and soon slept soundly.

As her eyelids fell, the old dream sunk down on her spirit more vivid, more sweet and tempting, than ever before. She woke, and, gliding to her little window, looked out. The night had not yet reached its noon, although the round-orbed moon rode high in the heavens.

The stillness in the outer room was proof that Karl Gatz had, as was often his wont, stayed all night in the forest, where lay his employment.

Murmuring a fervent prayer, Mabel threw her mother’s bridal veil over her head and glided out into the moonlight, looking like one of the fair and gentle spirits of whom she loved to read.

Rapidly, yet with trembling steps, the maiden pursued her way to the spot where, two roads crossing each other upon the mountain side, a cross had been erected, that the devout might pause to pray and rest upon the bench at its foot.

Arriving here, the trembling girl sunk upon her knees at the foot of the cross, half resolved to fly while yet there was time, and half reluctant to lose forever the fulfilment of that fair dream.

While still she lingered, her light form swayed by each contending impulse as sways the bird upon the waving tree-top, her fate was deciding the question, for suddenly the clatter of horses' feet, descending the mountain road, smote upon her ear, and, making a convulsive effort to rise and fly, she sunk senseless at the foot of the cross, and lay in the moonlight still and white as a wreath of new-fallen snow.

Mabel at her mother's grave

When Mabel again opened her eyes a few moments after, she at first thought that she was dreaming of the beloved and familiar scene, for over her bent the earnest, handsome face of a young man, who, as her eyes opened, launched into them the look of admiration, love, and respect which had so often filled her heart.

As Mabel's eyes fell, however, upon the horses standing beside her and the old stone cross above her head, she remembered her position, and recollected that the last sound which had met her ears was the approaching clatter of horses' feet.

With a blush deep as guilt, she sprang to her feet, and covering her glowing face with her hands she murmured,

"Take pity, O King Tolv! Pardon and suffer me to leave you!"

She did not look up as she spoke to see the puzzled expression in the face of the fairy king giving place, suddenly, to a look of enlightenment and merry joy. He did not speak, and Mabel, her eyes still cast down, turned to depart.

“Hold, maiden!” exclaimed a rich and sonorous voice, “where wouldst thou go?”

“To my father’s hut, most noble king.”

“Thy name, child?”

“I am Mabel, the daughter of Karl Gatz the charcoal-burner; and my father will, e’er now, be wondering at my absence.”

“Nay, maiden,” returned the stranger, gently taking her slender hand in his, “thou art no longer his daughter, but the bride of King Tolv. Didst thou not know, fairest, that when he meets beneath the midsummer moon a maiden fair and pure as thou, carries her to his own home, to reign for ever queen of him and his?”

“But heaven? My soul?” murmured the trembling girl.

“Thou shalt be wedded by a man of God (thou seest I can pronounce that sacred name), and the benediction of heaven shall rest upon our heads. Thou knowest, dear Mabel, the hermit who makes his dwelling in a mountain cave near by?”

“Father Franz—I know and love him,” murmured Mabel in a half reassured voice.

“Then, if he will bless our union, wilt thou be content, sweet one?” asked the lover, in a voice sweet and low as the dream-voice of King Tolv.

“Yes,” faltered the maiden, and in another moment found herself borne swiftly upon the back of the goblin horse up the mountain road. Arrived at the nearest point of the path to the hermit’s cave, King Tolv checked the fiery steed, and, lifting Mabel from his back, led her tenderly along the rugged and barely discernible footpath which led up to the mountain summit. Weary and breathless they reached the cave, where Mabel had often been to carry the aged hermit little delicacies for his table, and to hear his words of holy cheer.

Placing her upon the rude stone seat just without the grotto, the majestic lover once more took the maiden’s hand and said solemnly,

“Mabel, wilt thou promise, as thou art a pure and stainless maiden, to be my bride?”

Unfalteringly Mabel raised her clear eyes to the noble face which bent toward her with a heart-searching gaze.

“I will, if the holy man says it is no sin,” said she.

“Wait here then, *liebe*, till I bring him,” said the lover in a lighter and more joyous tone.

Mabel sat many minutes on the stone bench, and heard the round, manly tones of her bridegroom alternating with the more feeble, solemn voice of the aged priest in an earnest conversation, of which, however, no distinct words reached her ear.

At last, priest and king stepped out into the rich, full moonlight, and Mabel, even at that moment of anxiety and agitation, felt a thrill of admiration as she noted the tall, manly figure and open, handsome face of her lover. Then her eye fell upon the mild, benign face of Father Franz, and her heart leaped for joy as she saw by his calm, benevolent smile and serene expression, as he laid his hand upon her head, in silent benediction that he was not displeased at the proposed union.

“And may I be King Tolv’s bride, and yet remain a daughter of the Church?” whispered she falteringly.

“You may wed your noble suitor without sin or fear, daughter,” responded the priest, with a smile more nearly approaching humor than Mabel had ever seen before on his calm and thoughtful face; “and,” he added, “thy power of serving holy Mother Church will be far greater as his wife than it could be in thy present estate.”

The Latin ceremony was solemnly performed, the nuptial benediction spoken; and Mabel, half bewildered, felt a warm kiss pressed upon her lips, never touched before save by her mother’s mild caress.

“It is not fitting, dearest love,” said the young husband, “that thou shouldst enter thy future home thus alone and unattended. Return for a few hours to thy father’s house, and when the day which now is dawning

has reached its noon, stand there by the cross where first I saw thee, and King Tolv will come with his retinue to carry his fair and gentle queen to her new home."

"I myself will leave thy wife at her father's door, most noble king," said the hermit, with a half smile. "Business takes me to the monastery in the valley, and I shall not reach there before sunrise if I set forth now."

As Father Franz went into his cave to make his simple preparations, the bridegroom followed him. A whispered conversation ensued, and as they again issued forth Mabel heard the holy father say,—

"I will surely be there, mein Herr."

King Tolv tenderly supported his trembling bride down the steep mountain path, and then, with one more fond kiss upon her quivering lips, he sprang upon his fiery steed and was gone.

When next the mid-day sun looked down upon the old oak shading the lonely cross, his rays, struggling through the envious leaves, fell in flecks of ardent light upon the white clad figure of the maiden bride, supplying with their golden sheen the lack of those ornaments which indeed, had they been formed of aught less pure than the eternal radiance of the sun, would have rather dimmed than added to the wondrous loveliness of the expectant bride.

Again, as Mabel listened, the sound of horses' feet came thrilling upon her ear; but now the horses were many, and the sound of wheels mingled with their tread. They came, too, up the road from the valley; but ere Mabel had time to doubt, a glad burst of music fell upon her ear, and a number of horsemen, riding two and two, each with a bridal favor upon his arm, appeared surrounding a carriage, which, to the timid eyes of the bride, far outshone all that she had read of in fairy land. A band of music followed playing a joyful bridal march, and within the carriage, radiant and smiling, sat King Tolv, clad in a rich dress, whose sparkling jewels and heavy embroidery gave him a still more noble and commanding air than he had worn the night before in his simple hunting suit of russet brown.

As the carriage stopped, the bridegroom sprang to the ground, and taking the cold and trembling fingers of Mabel in his own, he turned to the retainers who stood about them, saying:

“Behold my bride, and your future mistress.”

One by one the horsemen passed before the shrinking yet graceful girl, making a low obeisance and saying:

“Hail to our noble Mistress!”

When all had passed, King Tolv led his bride to the carriage, and, placing her in it, seated himself by her side. So ardent were his whispered promises of love and tender praises of her beauty, that the blushing, agitated girl did not once raise her eyes from the floor at her feet till the carriage suddenly stopped, and, glancing hastily up, Mabel found herself in the court-yard of a castle, in whose open door stood a beautiful and magnificently dressed lady. A servant opened the door of the carriage, and the bridegroom descending, handed out his bride, and led her up the steps to where the fair lady stood, then exchanging his soft, lover-like tones for a voice clear, sonorous, and grave, he said:

“My dear sister, and you my faithful retainers. I have brought home to you my wife whom you now see; beautiful and good she is already; and that she may be as happy as she deserves shall henceforth be my aim, and I trust yours also.”

The crowd which filled the court-yard shouted, with willing zeal, “Joy to our noble Graff and his lovely Graffin.”

The fair and noble lady who stood on the threshold clasped Mabel in a warm embrace, while she whispered,

“Ah, little one! you studied well the little book I gave you years ago.”

Looking up with a startled look, Mabel recognized the Fraulein von Rosenberg who had in the cloister given her the little volume where first she read of König Tolv, and who now stood watching her with laughing eyes.

Mabel turned to her husband, but he silenced her with a grave smile, and, turning again to his people, said,

“My wife and I have already been married in a private manner; but that you, my children, may be witnesses of my happiness, the same priest will now perform a more public ceremony, and then we will sit down to the marriage feast.”

Then, taking Mabel by the hand, while his noble sister walked by the side of the bride, the Graff von Rosenberg led the way to the great hall of the castle, where stood Father Franz in his solemn robes of office, and by his side, as assistant, one of the brethren of the neighboring monastery.

The solemn ordinance proceeded, and the simple Mabel found herself the wife of Fredrich von Rosenberg, Count of Wolfsmarchen.

“But König Tolv?” whispered she, as her husband sat beside her, at the head of the long table.

“Shall never have my Mabel for his bride,” was the whispered response.

Karl Gatz was informed, the same day, of his daughter’s marriage, by the hermit, who was also charged to inquire in what way his son-in-law could serve him.

“By keeping out of my way,” was his only reply; and when Mabel, a few days after, went with her husband to renew their offers, they found the hut deserted, the charcoal pit extinguished, and no trace remaining of the late owner, nor from that day were tidings ever heard of Karl Gatz, although the mountaineers scrupled not to say, that, being deserted by his guardian angel, Mabel, the devil had claimed his own.

No such scandal, however, reached the ear of Mabel, who, in the warmth and light of her love-crowned life, bloomed into such exuberance of loveliness as astonished those who had thought her perfect before.

“And a tender consort made he,

And her gentle mind was such
That she grew a noble lady,
And the people loved her much.”

THE GRAY CAT AND THE CAVE OF THE WINDS

Ernest and the Gnomes

Once upon a time there was a young man named Ernest, who lived all alone in a little hut upon the sea-shore. He had lived there ever since he could remember, and always alone, except when, in summer, some wandering traveller would stop at his hut to ask a night's lodging or a supper or dinner, or when the fierce storms of winter had twice driven a ship upon the rocks which lay between him and the sea, and a few poor half-drowned sailors had been cast upon the beach, where they would soon have perished had it not been for Ernest's ready aid.

From these and the travellers the youth heard many stories of the great world, its wonders and its pleasures, and several times his visitors had invited him to go with them and see the marvels which they described; but Ernest always shook his head, saying,

"No, no, I have no place in this great world of yours; nobody would know or care for me. Here I have friends on every side; the loons, the gulls, the wild geese, and the ospreys know me and like me. I think even the waves feel acquainted with me, and I know that the fish do. No, I will stay."

So the tourists and the sailors went their way, and Ernest remained alone.

At last a whole year went by, and brought no visitors. Autumn, winter, spring, and summer passed, and autumn had come again, without a single word having broken the silence which reigned about the little hut. No voice but the solemn ocean murmur.

At first Ernest liked this, and dreaded the arrival of a stranger; but by-and-by he began to wonder why no one came, and then to look longingly up and down the beach and out to sea, in hopes to see some one, but he

looked in vain.

At last, when the pleasant summer was quite gone, and the cold and dreary autumn winds began to blow, lashing the sea into foam and whistling drearily down the chimney of the little hut, Ernest grew very sad and discontented. He roamed uneasily up and down the beach, but never could make up his mind to leave it and turn his steps inland, and always at night he found himself back at his little cabin.

One night, when the winds and the waves together were making such a din and commotion that one could hardly have heard a cannon at a quarter of a mile's distance, Ernest sat gloomily alone brooding over his driftwood fire, which danced and flickered uneasily as the draughts from door or windows fanned it. Ernest had no clock or watch, nor would he have known the use of it if he had; but after sitting quite motionless for a long time staring at the fire, which now was almost out, he began to feel as if it was bedtime, and was wearily rising from his chair to look out once more at the night, when from the window behind him he heard a faint and prolonged

"M-e-w!"

Turning hurriedly about, Ernest ran to the window and threw it open, upon which, with a pleased and grateful purr, a beautiful gray cat stepped upon the table which stood beneath the window, and, looking in the young man's wondering face, remarked again,

"M-e-w!"

"You said that before, but I don't know what it means," said Ernest gayly, who, although he had never seen a real cat, had heard them described and had seen pictures of them, so he at once guessed what his visitor was, and was well pleased that at last he had a companion.

"Let me see; perhaps 'w' means fish," continued he, going to a shelf in the corner, which served him for a pantry, and taking a wooden platter with the remains of a broiled fish upon it. This he set upon the table in front of the gray cat, who, first rubbing herself with a melodious purr

against his hand, applied herself to the fish, and daintily eat some of the best pieces, then drank a little water which Ernest offered her with an apology for having no milk to give, which he said he had heard ladies of her degree were very fond of. “But,” as he said, “since I not only have no milk, but never saw it, or even the cows and goats which give it, I am very glad to see that your highness can drink water.”

The cat, having finished her meal, leaped softly to the floor, and, after walking slowly round the room, looking attentively at every thing in it, she sprang gracefully into Ernest’s arm-chair (which was indeed the only chair in the whole house), and, seating herself upright in the middle of the cushion, began to wash her face and paws with her little red tongue.

“That’s right, my queen, don’t be ceremonious,” said Ernest, laughing aloud. “To be sure you have left me nothing to sit on except this log of wood, but then you are company, and should have the best. Pray make yourself entirely at home. I am very sorry I have no fine napkin to offer you to wipe those pretty paws upon now that you have washed them, but perhaps you can dry them by the fire. Let me make it up.”

So Ernest threw some more wood upon the fire; and then, seating himself upon a great block in the opposite chimney corner, leaned his elbows upon his knees and took an attentive survey of his visitor, who, having completed her toilet, sat regarding the fire with half-closed eyes, purring softly a little tune of her own composition, and beating time with her long tail.

Ernest and the Gray Cat

She was a very pretty cat, with fur of a rich dark gray, except her paws and face, which were pure white, and a crown or circle about her head, of an indescribable glittering appearance. It was this crown-like circle which had induced Ernest to call her highness and queen.

After looking at her a while, the young man reached across the fire, and, taking the cat gently up, placed her in his lap and began to smoothe her rich fur and fondle her, but in spite of all his endeavors to hold her,

Pussy glided from his grasp, and with noiseless leap regained her position in the easy-chair.

“You don’t like familiarity—mustn’t be handled, eh?” said Ernest. “Your majesty is very unkind, I think; but perhaps when we are better acquainted——”

Ernest stopped thunderstruck. It was just twelve o’clock, although he did not know it; and at the moment when the clock, had there been one, would have struck the hour, a cloud of golden sparks rose from the circlet upon the cat’s head and filled the whole room, so that Ernest closed his eyes and covered his face with his hands.

In a moment, however, he looked up and rubbed his eyes. The flaming sparks no longer blinded him, but still he doubted his own sight, for there before him, there where a moment before he had seen the gray cat, he now beheld, seated in his old arm-chair, as if on a throne, a beautiful and majestic woman, in the first bloom of youth and loveliness.

Her long, wide dress, which flowed upon the ground at each side, was a rich, soft velvet of a beautiful silver-gray color, and from its loose sleeves and beneath its hem peeped the smallest and whitest of hands and feet. The beautiful face was surrounded by long, dark hair, and in a circle about the head was the glittering, crown-like appearance which Ernest had noticed on the cat’s head. It did not seem of any substance, like gold, for instance, but merely light and color. The large, light-colored eyes of the beautiful stranger were fixed anxiously upon Ernest, as if waiting for him to speak.

At last he stammered out:

“Are you—can it be—but it was a cat!”

“Yes, it was a cat,” replied the sweetest voice in the world, “but it was also me, Ernest. I am the princess Phelia, only daughter of the king of Catland. All my race have the privilege of assuming at will the human form or the cat form. The nobility and royalty generally appear as men

and women, only assuming the cat form in play or as a disguise; but vast numbers of our subjects of the inferior order retain the cat form altogether, and as such live unsuspected among men.

"As for me, I never was degraded from the human form until in an unhappy hour I wandered from my father's kingdom into that of our neighbor, the Gold King. Here I met his daughter Oriphera, who is an enchantress, and of a very bad disposition. She hated me beside, because she had heard that I was more beautiful than she. So snatching from my head the crown which I always wore as a badge of my rank, she threw some water in my face and said:

"'Take your cat form, you miserable Pussy, and retain it for the rest of your life, except during the half hour between twelve and one o'clock on Halloween. You never shall be released from this spell unless you can find a young man twenty-five years of age, who has never looked on woman's face, although free to go wherever he chooses, and who shall be able to take from me this crown, and replace it on your head before two years from this day.'

"As she finished she threw some more water upon me (I never *could* bear to be wet), and with a mew of grief and anger I ran away as fast as I could go. Of course I could not present myself at my father's court in such a disguise,—I, who had always taken pride in being as un-cat-like in my demeanor as possible; and so I wandered uneasily about the world, looking for the wonderful youth, who, although at perfect liberty to do so, had never looked upon a woman's face. Fortunately I was not to be mistaken for a common cat. Oriphera, although she stole my crown, could not deprive me of its light, which is my birthright, and by that I have always been recognized among cats as one of the royal family, although no one knew me as the unhappy Phelia.

"You may be sure I never omitted to ask every cat with whom I met if they had ever heard of a young man such as I described, but every one answered no, and I began to despair, for in one month more, the two years will be gone, and after that all aid is vain. But a few weeks ago I fell

in with a seafaring cat, just returned from a whaling voyage, and he, in answer to my inquiries turned two somersets backward (which is equivalent among cats to clapping the hands among men), and said,

"'I know the very man. My master, who is a sailor, was shipwrecked four years ago, and rescued by the very youth you want to find. I have often heard him speak of him.'

"My friend, the seafaring cat, then proceeded to tell me minutely where to find you; and, not to be tedious, I arrived very tired and discouraged at your window this evening." Here the princess, overcome by her feelings, covered her face with her hands and made a long pause,—at last looking up and smiling sweetly upon Ernest, she said, "Now tell me, will you recover my crown from that —— Oriphera, and make me the happiest of princesses"

"Can you ask, revered princess? My life is yours; only tell me how and where to find her," exclaimed Ernest.

"The kingdom of Aura, her father, is in the centre of the earth. You will find the entrance in the forest of Gnomes; but you can never get the crown unless you have the flute from the Cave of the Four Winds, to lull the Gnomes to sleep."

"And where is the Cave of the Four Winds, most beautiful of princesses?" asked Ernest, eagerly.

"It is on the top of —— m-e-w!" This last word was uttered in a very angry voice, for just as Phelia had said "top of," her half hour of freedom closed, and she was suddenly retransformed into a cat, without even power to add the one word which would have directed Ernest to the Cave of the Four Winds.

The young man was as much disappointed as the princess, but consoled himself by promising her that he would use so much diligence and make so many inquiries, that he did not doubt to soon meet with some one who could direct him to the cave where the magic flute was to be found.

To this, however, the cat only shook her head with a melancholy air, and Ernest felt quite discouraged again. Suddenly, as he sat thinking of every possible way in which to gain the desired information, a thought flashed into his head which made him clap his hands for joy.

“I have it, dear Phelia,” said he. “The winds themselves shall carry me.” He then went on to narrate that several years before he had been visited by an old man of wise and venerable appearance, who appeared to be very much delighted about something; and at last told him that he had travelled the world over to find the place where the Four Winds meet, for there is where they bring every thing that is lost in the world, and heap all up together, so that any man who can find this place may help himself to whatever he pleases. The old man had taken all he wished, which was a parchment containing the secret of a lost art,—that of making gold; and he was going away content. He advised Ernest to go and search in this wonderful collection, which abounded in wealth, honors, and all that men value. “But,” said he, “you must be careful not to be caught there when the Four Winds meet at midnight, for you would be whirled up and carried away to their cave before you knew it.”

Ernest had never thought much about the old man’s advice till now, as he did not know exactly what he wanted to find, and had never lost any thing; but now he at once determined to go to the place described, and wait till midnight, when the Four Winds should meet to go home together, and would whirl him away with them.

He told his plan to the gray cat, who purred an assent; and then, as morning had broke, he led her out to the sea-shore and showed her a little cove where every evening she would find fish of some kind stranded among the rocks. He advised her to remain in the hut all the time when she was not at the cove, lest something should happen to harm her, and he faithfully promised, that, unless he lost his life in the attempt, she should see him with the missing crown in his hand before many days. Ernest then took leave of the disguised princess, who graciously presented her white paw for him to kiss, and set out upon his lonely travels.

All that day and the next he journeyed among the mountains which lay behind his little hut, but although he followed attentively the directions which the old man had given him, it was not until evening on the second day that he found himself approaching the place where the Four Winds meet.

This was a deep, rocky valley, approached from the north, south, east, and west by a deep, narrow ravine, which was the only means by which the valley was made accessible.

All the surface of the valley was strewn with the lost articles which the winds had swooped up and brought there. It would take a whole book, and a large one too, to tell half the precious things which lay scattered there; so I will only say that every thing which once was possessed, and now is hopelessly lost, was to be seen there, and a wonderful sight it was.

In the middle of the valley, however, was a small space entirely clear of every thing, even of the least particle of dust. It was swept clean every night by the Four Winds when they met. Ernest knew in a moment that this must be the case; and when it grew too dark for him to see the curious things which lay scattered about him, he wrapped himself closely in the great cloak which he wore, and seated himself in the centre of the clean-swept space.

Presently, overcome by fatigue, he fell asleep; nor did he stir till midnight, when he was awakened by a terrific rushing and roaring sound.

It was the Four Winds, each coming down his own ravine, and making for the common centre. As they entered the valley Ernest could hear the lost things which they had brought pattering on the ground all about him, as they were dropped; but in another moment the Winds were upon him, and almost senseless with the rapid motion, he found himself whirled round and round, and up and up, and on and on, till it seemed to him that they had flown beyond the stars. Suddenly he found himself dropped softly to the earth, and heard the Winds entering a cave above

him with a hollow, rushing sound. Freeing himself with some difficulty from the cloak, which had been wound about him by the rapid, circular motion till it was almost as tight as his skin, Ernest looked about him.

He found himself upon the top of one of the highest mountains in the whole world, entirely inaccessible to man, bird, or beast. All around lay silence and perpetual snow, and it was owing to the soft bed of the latter, upon which he had fallen, that Ernest found himself unhurt. The cave in which dwelt the Four Winds lay above him, on the very crest of the mountain. Creeping softly up to the mouth of the cavern, he peeped cautiously in, and, finding himself unheeded by the Winds, who were busy unloading themselves of the material for their suppers which they had brought with them, crept through the narrow entrance and crouched in a dark corner among some little Breezes which were sleeping there, and looked curiously about him.

The cave was divided into four quarters by two deep, narrow cracks or chasms, extending through its whole length and breadth. In each division stood a chair and table, and at each table now sat a Wind eating his supper. The reason of their being thus distinct Ernest perceived was because the temperature in which each one delighted would have been very disagreeable to either of his brothers, and so with the food and drink which stood before them.

The North Wind was voraciously eating a great lump composed of narrow strips of meat wound round and round into a ball, and then thoroughly saturated with melted grease. Before him stood a bucket filled with whale-oil, from which every few moments he drank greedily. His dress was the skin of a polar bear, with the fur outside, which he wrapped about him like a mantle. His face was red and full, his eyes, of a bright, clear blue, sparkled frostily, his long, light hair hung about his shoulders, and his bushy, flax-colored beard and moustache were hung full of icicles.

His voice was deep and thunderous; and when he laughed, fragments of the solid rock were shaken off and fell about him.

Next him sat the West Wind, whose name was Zephyrus, and Ernest at once decided that he was by far the most prepossessing of the four brothers. He was as tall as his neighbor the North, but not nearly so heavy, looking strong, but yet graceful. His hair and curling beard were of a dark brown, his eyes a dark gray, his teeth very white and sound, and he had a particularly fresh and healthy glow shining through the tan upon his cheeks. His voice and laugh were hearty and joyous, but not so deep and rough as that of the North Wind. His table was spread with ears of Indian corn, heads of wheat, a wild turkey, and a large ham. He was drinking from a little cask of Catawba wine.

Next came the South Wind, sometimes called Auster, a slight, dark-skinned youth, with straight, purple-black hair and glowing, dark eyes. He looked pale and languid, and reclined in his chair as if he wished it were a bed; his voice was soft and sighing, and he never laughed.

Upon the table before him were bunches of grapes, oranges, melons, bananas, and sugar-cane. For drink he pressed some orange juice into a jar, and then sent one of the Breezes to fill it with snow, remarking at the same time with a sigh, that sherbet was the only luxury which he gained by living in this horribly cold cave with his brothers.

“Ho! ho!” laughed the North Wind. “Nothing could be more comfortable than this cave, if only you will keep at your proper distance, and not be melting me with your hot breath.”

“I have to breathe as fast as I can to keep a little circle of air warm around my table,” murmured the South. “If I did not, you and East would chill me to death.”

“Yes, you always run away when I come,” piped East. “How many times I have whistled with delight at seeing how every thing would change before me when I come stealing along at noon, after you have been making a fine morning on earth. How the people begin to shiver and shut down the windows and put on their shawls—how the flowers wither up, and droop, and hang their heads—Ph-e-w!”

Thus spake Eurus, the East Wind, a thin, sallow, unhappy looking person, with watery blue eyes, a peaked blue nose, and a withered, crooked form. He looked bilious and ill-natured, had a shrill, whining voice, and never laughed, although he whistled a great deal in a very sharp, ill-natured manner. His supper consisted of a little rice, a raw fish, which he had whipped up as he came sweeping over the Atlantic Ocean, and a great bowl of tea which he had brought from China.

Supper ended, the North Wind, whom his brothers addressed as Boreas, stretched himself, and said,—

"Well, I'm off! I have got some ships jammed up there near the Pole, and I'm going to blow 'em out. I wish these navigators, as they call themselves, would stay away. They come creeping along up there, and you always help them, Auster, which I think is very ill-natured of you; and then I have to get 'em out after they're blocked in, or if I don't come, the sailors plague my life out whistling for me. Pretty soon, too, I shall have to drive down the snow clouds. I have got a nice flock of them waiting up there at the Pole. I am going to make a tremendous winter of it."

"Yes, winter is your time, and spring is mine," said Eurus, the East Wind. "Auster and I, between us, will soon drive you from the field when we set about it. Just now, though, I have got a fine little lot of vessels to attend to on the Atlantic coast. I am going to drive them on the rocks, and then, how I'll whistle through the ropes—Ph-e-w! They call some of the ropes shrouds,—a capital name when I get hold of 'em. Then I have a good deal to do in China. I suppose they are waiting for me to get their ships out of the river. If I feel good-natured I'll do it; if not, I'll leave em just at low tide, and let them pull for themselves. It does me good to plague these mortals."

"It does you good to plague anybody, I believe, Eurus," sighed Auster. "I am sure you are always thwarting me. I am going to visit the tropics to-morrow, and shall leave the northern regions to Boreas, Zephyrus, and you, for several months."

“What route do you take, brother?” asked Zephyrus; “for I don’t wish to interfere with you.”

“I am going through the forest of Gnomes, and then straight down to Quito. I like to see the Gnomes at work, they look so warm. Where are you going, brother?”

“I don’t know,” said Zephyrus. “I have some whalers to help round Cape Horn, and then I think I shall go and see Boreas. He and I do nicely together, when he is not too savage. Let us each take a turn at the flute, to see if our voices are in tune, and then be off.”

So saying, Zephyrus took from a shelf behind him an instrument shaped something like a German flute, and played a piece of spirited martial music upon it, with great taste and execution.

He then passed the flute to the North Wind, who roared through it a stormy Norwegian Berserker song, and then threw it to East, who squealed out a favorite Chinese air, with very high notes and very little variety. Auster, the South, was the next performer, and played a fandango, followed by the tune of a languishing love-song.

The flute was then replaced on its shelf, and as it wanted an hour of sunrise, the usual hour for the brothers to set out upon their day’s journey, each composed himself for a little nap.

As soon as the Four Winds and all the Breezes and Zephyrs were sound asleep, Ernest stole softly from his place of concealment, took the flute, disjointed it, and placed it in his breast; then, creeping carefully under the loose mantle of the South Wind, he tied himself firmly to one of his legs (for all the Winds were four or five times as large as common men), and waited anxiously for sunrise, which he knew would awake all four brothers.

The moment at last arrived; Boreas, Zephyrus, and Eurus, one after the other awoke, and left the cave; and last of all, Auster, who, finding himself belated, rushed through the narrow opening with great velocity,

without noticing at all in his hurry the passenger whom he was taking with him.

After traversing with the speed of the “winds” many a mile of sea and land, Ernest found that his conductor was pausing in the tops of some high pine trees in the centre of a vast forest.

Peering cautiously down, the young man perceived some little yellow figures running about among the trees, diving suddenly into the earth, and as suddenly reappearing upon its surface. Ernest at once concluded that this must be the forest of the Gnomes, and, hastily untying the scarf with which he had bound himself to the South Wind, he slipped off into the top of a tree and scrambled down the branches, leaving the Wind languidly sighing and moaning before taking a fresh start.

Having reached the lower branch of the tree which he had selected, Ernest looked attentively about him. The little yellow men were still running about as busily as ever, and did not seem to have heard his approach. They seemed to be employed in bringing little scales and particles of gold from beneath the ground and scattering it upon the earth; and Ernest, noticing that the trees and shrubs grew greener and larger as they did so, concluded that the Gnomes were watering their garden. Presently he noticed that directly at the foot of the tree where he crouched was one of the holes by which the Gnomes continually emerged and reëntered, and, seizing a moment when it was empty, Ernest dropped himself directly into it, and found himself at the top of a long flight of rocky steps. For a moment the Gnomes stood motionless with astonishment at this sudden apparition; but as soon as they perceived the intruder was a man, they rushed toward him, each armed with the little pick-axe which he wore in his belt; and although each Gnome was very small, their numbers made them formidable.

However, the instant he touched ground, Ernest had pulled the flute from his bosom and commenced putting it together. As he did so, he noticed that there were four mouthpieces, each marked with the name of a Wind, and, selecting that of the South as likely to be the most soothing,

he began to play as he had seen the Winds do. To his pleasure and surprise—for he knew nothing about music—the flute played the same airs which it had done when the South Wind blew into it, and the Gnomes, dropping their weapons, sunk down upon the ground, and presently fell fast asleep.

As soon as Ernest was sure that they were so, he began to descend the steps, which wound round and round, constantly descending, so that very soon not a ray of light was to be seen. Then he stopped playing, and, indeed, all his breath was no more than sufficient to support him in the close and heavy atmosphere in which he found himself. At last the steps ended in a narrow passage, and Ernest proceeded a long distance through it in total dark and silence, guiding himself by feeling the cold, dripping walls at each side, which seemed hewn out of the solid rock, and was so low and narrow that he was obliged to stoop very low to get through at all.

Suddenly a sound of merry voices broke the silence, and, turning a sharp corner, the young man found himself close to an opening, which appeared to conduct into a grotto or cavern; but the only thing which Ernest could distinguish was a heavy curtain whose rich folds lay upon the ground at his feet. It seemed to be of satin; but on putting out his hand to pull it cautiously away, Ernest found to his astonishment that it was made of gold, so pure in its quality and beaten so thin in substance, that it was flexible and delicate as silk. Creeping cautiously along behind this screen, Ernest presently came to a small opening between his curtain and the next one, through which he could see plainly without being himself discovered.

He found that the opening, as he supposed, led into a small grotto, across whose rocky roof ran in every direction veins of purest gold, which sparkled in the brilliant rays of the immense carbuncle hanging from the centre of the roof, which was thickly studded with twinkling diamond stars.

All around, the walls were draped with curtains like that which concealed Ernest, and the floor was composed of alternate blocks of gold and silver.

At one side of the cavern was a throne of gold and gems, over which hung by way of canopy an immense orange, the lobes divided and spread apart at the bottom, but united at the top. The peel of this orange was of solid gold, roughened to resemble the natural skin; but the interior or pulp was composed of innumerable little cells, each wrought separately in fine gold, and then placed in their natural position; the seeds were represented by very pale topazes, cut in the exact shape of an orange seed.

Upon this throne sat a young woman about the age of Phelia, whom Ernest at once concluded to be her rival Oriphera; for on her head, which was covered with long golden ringlets, was placed a crown, composed entirely of the gems known as cat's-eyes, held together by gold wire.

This princess was very gorgeously dressed and decorated with a great many jewels, and to most persons would have appeared very beautiful; but, of course, Ernest could not think any thing of the sort, seeing in her as he did, only the enemy and rival of his beloved Phelia.

All around the princess stood her beautiful maids of honor, while behind the throne Ernest perceived a body-guard of Gnomes, each armed, in addition to his pick-axe, with a sling, while in a pouch at his belt he carried a supply of golden bullets. Other Gnomes were constantly appearing from behind the screens and laying at the feet of their princess whatever rare or beautiful gems they had discovered in their mining operations. Some of these Oriphera ordered her treasurer, a little, old, yellow Gnome, to take up and carry away, others she pushed aside with her foot, and they were taken away to be put in the rubbish-pit.

Suddenly, as Ernest was looking with all his eyes, he heard a noise behind him, and, listening attentively, he found that the Gnomes whom he had left above ground had awakened from their sleep and were pursuing him.

Seizing his flute, Ernest blew a hurried strain with all his force; but, not stopping to select his mouthpiece, he took that belonging to Boreas, the North Wind, and the noise which ensued was so loud and sudden that it cracked the golden curtain from top to bottom, caused several of the diamond stars to fall from the roof, set the great carbuncle swinging like a pendulum, and made the princess and all her attendants fall down as if they had been shot.

Ernest stood for a moment, thunderstruck at the mischief he had wrought; but, quickly recovering himself, he darted forward, seized Phelia's crown from the head of the prostrate Oriphera, filled his pockets with some of the refuse diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, and then, finding the proper mouthpiece, he made the best of his way out of the grotto and up the stairs, playing away as hard as he could at the fandango and love-song of the South Wind. He however found it necessary to go very slowly, not only on account of the darkness, but because on almost every step lay a Gnome stupefied, or rather entranced with the music; and Ernest, who was a very kind-hearted young man, could not bear to hurt one of the little fellows, although they would willingly have killed him.

At length he found himself once more in the open air, and, heaving a great sigh of relief, he hastened on, hoping soon to get out of the wood; but what with constantly losing his way, and what with having to stop every little while to play the Gnomes to sleep (who pursued him furiously), it was many days before he gained the open country, and a great many more before he found himself approaching the beloved hut where he hoped to find Phelia waiting for him. Even then he turned a little out of his way to visit the place where the Four Winds meet, that he might lay the borrowed flute upon the little circle in the centre, where the Winds could not fail to see and reclaim it; for, as Ernest said to

himself, if they had not the flute, how could they try their voices to see if they were in tune? and if they were obliged to sing false, what would become of the world then?

Finally, toward evening, on the very last day of the month which had been allowed him for his enterprise, Ernest came in sight of his little hut, where almost the first object that met his view was the Gray Cat perched upon the top of the chimney, and anxiously looking in every direction to see if she could catch sight of her deliverer.

No sooner did she see him than, leaping to the ground, she came bounding to meet him; but before she had quite reached him, her dignity as a princess overcame her delight as a cat, and, pausing at the foot of a low rock, she leaped upon it, and seated herself upright with her tail folded closely about her feet, in a very stately and formal manner.

Ernest approached the presence of this little sovereign with all the respect imaginable, and, kneeling upon one knee, laid the recovered crown at her feet.

The cat purred her thanks and approval, but gracefully intimated, by placing her paw upon the crown and then upon her head, that she would thank her gallant knight to complete her transformation by placing the diadem in its proper place.

Ernest understood the silent request, and immediately complied with it. No sooner had he done so than the Gray Cat forever disappeared, and in her place sat the Princess Phelia, who extended her white hand to the young man, with the same gracious dignity with which she had given him her paw to kiss when he was setting out upon his journey.

“How can I ever thank you,—how can I ever reward you, dearest friend?” said she, softly.

“I will tell you, fairest Phelia,” replied Ernest, blushing far more deeply than the princess, brought up in a court, had done.

“You can reward me by giving me this little hand, which I fear but for me would have been but a cat’s paw to the end of time.”

Phelia, to this proposition—which, perhaps, was not quite unexpected—yielded a gracious assent; and the next day the young couple journeyed together to Catland, where they were immediately married, and, soon succeeding to the throne, lived and reigned many, many happy years; and, for any thing I have ever heard, they do so still.

The Gray Cat being crowned

THE FROST-MAIDEN

Little Claude in bed looking at his window

Once there was a little boy, who more than any thing else loved to look at pictures. He had but few books containing them, nor were his parents able to hang their walls with beautiful paintings and engravings, as rich people can do. Still, little Claude found pictures all about him. In the spring, it was the tender green of the new leaves and the springing grass; in the summer, the thousand different flowers and the beautiful birds; in the autumn, the gorgeous scarlet and golden tints of the changing woods; and in the winter—oh, in the winter—Claude never wanted for pictures!

Every morning there they were, twelve new ones, all different, ready placed to meet his eyes as soon as they should open!

But what do you think these twelve pictures were, and where were they drawn?

Why, on the twelve panes of glass in the window of Claude's little bedroom.

Every morning was to the boy a new delight; and how sorry he felt, if, by sleeping a little later than usual, he lost a few minutes of the half hour which he usually enjoyed before his mother called him to get up.

The pictures were quite different. Sometimes there was a dense forest covering all one pane, the tree tops crowded together with scarcely any gap between them.

Sometimes there was a grove at one side, and a wide, lawn-like field stretching away out of sight at the other.

Sometimes a few scattered trees, with a brook winding among them, and troops of deer drinking at it.

Sometimes a wild and savage ravine between two precipices, and a crazy waterfall dashing down between them.

Sometimes a flowery plain, with a star-spangled sky overhead, and a flower wreathed May-pole, waiting quietly for a troop of happy children to dance about it in the sunrise.

Sometimes, behind a trim and quiet-looking group of trees, Claude could see the outline of a stately castle, its chimneys and turrets peeping over the tree tops.

Sometimes it was a ruined and deserted tower, standing gloomy and solitary upon a craggy mountain side.

In short, there was no end to the beauty and variety of the pictures in Claude's gallery.

But who drew them in a single night, while all in the house slept?

This question troubled the boy's mind constantly. His mother said the frost did it; but how could that be? "Frost has nothing lovely about him," thought Claude. "He turns all my beautiful flowers to ugly black stalks as soon as he sees them; he makes the ground hard and white, and changes the soft green of the grass to a dull brown; he makes my mother's pretty face look blue and pinched, and spoils her curls. How can it be the frost who draws my dear pictures?"

His mother could not tell him why,—only she was quite sure it was the frost, because everybody said so.

He asked his father, who laughed, and told him that when he was older he would find out.

So Claude asked no more questions, but wondered all the more.

One morning there was a new picture, one which had never come before; and Claude's eyes only glanced at the rest, turning again and again to this new one, which seemed to call him to it as if it spoke.

A low, irregular mountain, with a wide plain at its foot,—that was all.

But stop!—was it a mountain? No,—it was a palace; very large, and very fantastic in its shape, but evidently a palace, and a very magnificent one.

What he had at first taken for crags and ice-peaks were in reality graceful minarets and spires; what he had supposed a mass of frozen snow upon the mountain top was the sheeny, silvered roof of the palace; what had been solitary trees upon the mountain side were now gayly floating banners; little clear spots, which he had not noticed at first, now showed as thousands of windows and scores of doors; what, at the first glance, seemed wild bushes about the base of the hill, suddenly became a troop of guards, some mounted, some on foot.

Claude, astonished, raised himself upon his elbow to look more closely at this transformation. Just then his mother entered the room to call him to breakfast.

"See, see, mother!" cried he, "that beautiful palace, in the middle of my window! How I wish I could really go to it!"

"Palace, child!" said his mother, "I see no palace. There is something there which looks like a mountain, but nothing more. You will hurt yourself, dear boy, looking so much at these frost pictures; we shall have you crazy next. Come, now, and eat some nice, warm breakfast."

"But, mother"—began Claude, and then stopped suddenly. His mother was right, it *was* nothing but a mountain,—how could he have been so deceived? "And yet,"—

Claude rose, and dressed himself slowly, often glancing at the window, where now the mountain (nothing but a mountain) was fading slowly under the bright rays of the rising sun, which shone full upon it.

Claude paid but little attention to his breakfast, or his dinner either, he was so anxious to have night come and go again, that he might see if the enchanted palace, as he called it, would reappear.

The next morning, as soon as there was light enough to see any thing, his eager eyes started open, and turned at once to the upper centre pane of glass, which was, indeed, the only one bearing any intelligible picture, all

the rest being covered with a thick white coat, looking like nothing, unless it was a curtain, to hide what might be behind. But there, where it had stood before, rose clear and sharp the fairy palace; and Claude wondered how he could have taken it for a mountain.

After looking at it for a while, the boy suddenly noticed a new feature in his picture.

This was a large fir-tree, standing in the middle of the plain, quite alone, its lower branches dead and broken, while the top was dense and flourishing. Under the tree was an object which Claude could not make out.

“It must be a little bush,” thought he, and turned his eyes again toward the palace.

The next morning Claude slept late, and when he woke was obliged to jump up directly.

He looked at the window, but saw nothing except a shapeless mark, hardly resembling even a mountain.

All that day Claude was sad and uneasy, feeling as if something were wanting to his happiness which he knew not where to find.

The next morning, however, he waked betimes, and turned eagerly to the window. Clear and splendid rose the palace in the frosty air; stern and sad stood the lonely tree,—but, that shrub at its foot! How blind he had been! It was the perfect and graceful figure of a young girl,—her long hair hanging about her, her gossamer looking robe and scarf fluttering in the morning air. She seemed looking down at something lying at the foot of the old fir, something quite as vague to Claude, however, as the girl herself had been when he first saw her.

Full of delight, he bounded from his bed, and rushed to the window to examine more closely this new figure in the strange frost picture; but, when he reached it, look as he might, he could see nothing but a rugged mountain, a tree, and a bush.

Sad and disappointed, Claude crept back to bed, but comforted himself by thinking,—"Somewhere, somewhere in this world, stands that palace,—lives that maiden. In a few years I shall be a man, and then I will go and find them."

Again he turned his eyes upon the window, through which the sun's first rays were streaming. Under their influence the picture began to disappear; but for one moment first, they stood out, clear and distinct as over,—the palace and the maiden.

Many mornings came and went. Often the enchanted palace greeted Claude's wakening eyes, but there were also long intervals in which he saw nothing, or only the shapeless mountain.

Still the idea grew in his mind, that somewhere he should find the palace, the tree, and the maiden who waited beneath it,—waited, perhaps, for him.

Years rolled away. Claude left his home, and travelled in many countries.

He found himself in glowing southern lands, with pictures all around him,—pictures painted by men, which thrilled his heart as he gazed at them; pictures in the trees and flowers, such as he had known and loved at home; beautiful women and beautiful palaces; but none ever contented him or held him long; still he whispered to himself,—

"Here is not *my* palace or *my* maiden," and then he wandered on.

At last he left this warm and glowing land, and found himself in a frozen, wintry region, where on every side rose steep and snow-clad mountains, upon whose summits the foot of man had never rested.

Here Claude felt more content, and looked eagerly around him for the mountain he had known so many years.

No, it was not here; and still he wandered on.

On, through level, fertile plains, over which he hastened impatiently; on, through cities and over seas, ever looking, ever longing.

At last he reached a frozen country, where people hardly dared breathe the cutting, icy air; and where no trees and flowers grew, except the strongest and bravest of their kind.

On wandered Claude, a wild impatience burning in his heart; a feeling as if what he so long had sought was close at hand,—almost within his grasp.

Late one night he reached a lonely hut, far beyond all towns and farms, where dwelt an old man with his old wife. They welcomed the youth, gave him of their reindeer's milk and coarse bread, and then spread a couch of lichens in the corner of the hut, where Claude slept soundly till morning light. Then, springing up, he bade the aged couple good-by with many thanks, and was leaving the hut, when the old man said kindly,—

"But, my son, where will you go? Beyond here lies only the country of King Frost; a country in which no man can live a day."

Claude and the Old Man

"Stay with us till summer comes, or else go back from whence you came; you are too young and too beautiful to die in the cold grasp of the frost-king."

A glad smile came upon Claude's pale face, and he said suddenly,—

"I know it now. It is to King Frost's palace that I am going. Farewell, father."

And before the old man could say another word, the youth was far beyond the sound of his feeble voice.

All day Claude hastened on, although the cold became so terrible that it seemed to fetter his limbs with icy chains.

At last, just at sunset, he found himself upon a wide plain, covered with hard, frozen snow. No shelter was at hand, nothing to protect him from the cutting wind, which began to rise; but stop,—yes, there is one tree, an aged fir, standing in the centre of the plain.

Toward it Claude staggered feebly, hoping to find some slight relief from his suffering by interposing its gnarled trunk between him and the biting wind.

He reached it, and sunk upon the snow, his eyes closing with a sense of drowsiness.

As they did so, Claude half saw before him a low, broad mountain covered with snow, which glittered in the rays of the setting sun.

He started with a sudden thought, opened his eyes, and looked about him.

Yes! The mountain, the tree, the plain! It was, at last, the long-sought picture; but, sinking back, he murmured with a bitter sigh,—

“It was only a mountain, after all!”

Once more he unclosed his eyes, and gazed steadfastly before him.

As he did so, he started upright; the warm blood tingling again in his frozen veins.

It was the palace! The palace of his boyish dreams! The palace of King Frost!

Eagerly he strove to move toward it, but his limbs refused to obey him; he sunk exhausted upon the snow, his eyes fixed upon the fairy palace.

At that moment the great doors were thrown wide open, the guards ranged themselves upon either hand, and between them appeared a light and graceful figure, her white robes floating back as she came swiftly toward him.

The stiffening eyelids fell over Claude’s weary eyes. With an effort he raised them once more, and she stood over him, looking down, as he had seen her in the frost picture; a tall and slender maiden, with eyes blue as the winter sky, and bright as the stars in a frosty night; her long, waving hair, pale as the rays of the setting sun which shone upon her; her brow and cheeks pure and pale as the new-fallen snow.

Lovingly she looked down at him, and earnestly Claude tried to return her gaze; but the heavy lids closed over his eyes in spite of every effort. The frost-maiden knelt beside him and took his hand in hers. A feeling of delicious repose stole over Claude's senses, and he slept, while in a low, whispering voice, the maiden murmured in his ear,—

"You have come, my darling, you have come! Long have I waited and watched, since the night I first peeped in at your casement, while I drew the pictures that you love; since I showed you my father's palace, and this tree, and my own image; long have you wandered, long have you sought, my poor Claude! Did you think to find the frost-maiden in that burning south where you have been so long? I should die, my beloved, if I even hovered over that scorching land,—die, and fall in tears, which men call rain. No, here is my home; and here shall you dwell ever with me, my Claude! The walls of my father's palace are covered with pictures such as mortals never saw; and when we tire of them, the frost-sprites which wait upon us shall draw other and more beautiful ones.

"Then, together we will roam over sea and land, borne upon the broad wings of the north wind, and, passing by the curtained, shuttered windows of the rich, we will draw our fairest pictures on the lowly casement where dwell those who have none save those we give them. We will touch with flying feet the surface of the lake and brook, and spread a glittering roof over the Naiads far below; we will breathe, as we pass by, upon the withering leaves, and clothe their death with beauty; we will fringe the cottage eaves with pendant jewels, such as no queen wears; we will open the chestnut burrs that the squirrels may feast, and kiss the cheeks of merry children till they bloom like winter roses. All this, and more will we do, dear Claude. Come, then, to the home of the frost-maiden,—come, come, come!"

Singing the last words in a low, sighing voice, the frost-maiden breathed upon Claude's face. Immediately a light vapor rose into the air above where he lay, and rapidly took form and shape; it was Claude, yet not Claude. He was changed to a frost-sprite, and no longer could suffer pain in the kingdom of the Frost King.

He seized the maiden's hand, together they entered the palace, and the great gates closed slowly behind them.

So now every child who sees in the morning his window covered with pictures, will know that while he slept, Claude and the frost-maiden have been at work.

UNDER THE SEA

Ernest sees a mer-maiden

In the middle of the ocean, thousands of miles from any land, a great ship lay becalmed. It was a passenger ship, bound to the East Indies, and there were a good many families on board, and a still larger number of young men who had left their friends behind, and were going out to see if they could gather some of the famous “riches of the Indies” into their own pockets. Among these young men was one called Ernest, who not only had no relatives or near friends on board the ship, but, so far as he knew, in the wide world. Ever since he could remember he had been alone, and very lonely; nor did he feel less so now among all these persons, who each seemed to have some one to love or take an interest in them, except himself; and so still he was alone.

Day after day passed, and the ship lay becalmed, until the motionless heat became very oppressive. One night Ernest, strolling languidly up and down the deck, stopped, and, looking over the taffrail near the stern of the vessel, saw a little boat, which had been let down that one of the officers might bathe from it, and which still lay rocking gently on the little waves; so Ernest, thinking it would be a pleasant place to lie and dream, clambered down the side of the great ship, and, stretching himself upon a cloak in the bottom of the boat, soon fell fast asleep.

Some hours passed, and then Ernest awoke with a start, for a great wave had broken over his little skiff and drenched him with water. Sitting upright, he looked about him in silent amazement. During the night the wind had suddenly risen, and in a few hours increased to a gale. On board the ship, the sailors who were keeping watch had set the great sails, glad enough to see them fill once more. But no one had remembered or noticed the little boat towing astern, which, after

following quietly on for awhile, pulling harder and harder upon the slender line which held it to the ship, suddenly snapped it in two, and in a moment was left far behind.

So now, when Ernest sat up and looked about him, he saw nothing but water; on every side, great black waves with white, foamy crests, came rolling angrily toward him, as if they would swallow him up; and some of them, like the one which had awakened him, even broke into the little boat, so that for some time Ernest was too busy in baling out the water to have time even to be frightened.

The rest of the night passed in this manner; but just before sunrise the wind died away to little and less, until, as the first level rays shot across the ocean, the calm was as intense as it had been the day before.

The waves continued restless some hours longer; but before noon they too had sunk to sleep, and the little boat with the lonely youth remained motionless, the centre of a great, round water-plain extending on every side to where the burning sky dipped down, trying in vain to cool itself.

For many hours Ernest had suffered terribly from heat and thirst, and now that the utter calm increased both, he thought he must surely die. Wrapping himself again in the thick cloak, and covering his head from the blistering rays of the sun, he lay many hours motionless in a sort of swoon. When he recovered consciousness, night had come again; the fierce sun had given way to the cool, pitying moon, which, round and full, beamed kindly down upon him; and a little breath of air, not enough to make the gentlest breeze, just rippled the surface of the water, and gave a faint, delightful motion to the little boat.

Ernest, faint and exhausted, sat up and looked about him. The scene was delightful, but he hardly knew it, his sufferings from thirst and fever were so intense; he looked toward the east and shuddered,—a few hours more and the sun would rise, burning and scorching all before him, and Ernest felt that then he must die.

With a low moan he stretched himself again in the bottom of the boat, and lay there still, with half-closed eyes, listening to the soft ripple of the tiny wavelets upon the side, and soothed by the faint motion of the little skiff.

Suddenly he perceived that this motion had increased; that it had become a gentle, regular rocking, although the noise of the water against the side was rather less than more. Raising his languid eyes, what was Ernest's astonishment to see a row of little white hands clasping the edge of the boat on each side, and rocking it as if it were a cradle. Softly putting out his own hand, Ernest cautiously touched one of those nearest to him; yes, they were real fingers,—cool, white, and soft.

Rising upon his elbow, the young man peeped over the gunwale of his boat. Oh, what a singular picture met his view! The world beneath the sea had come up to visit the world above the sea. Strange, beautiful fishes, such as no man's eye ever saw before, glittered and swam on every side; great whales, white as milk, too cautious ever to appear by day, moved in stately measure beneath the moon; the sea-serpent undulated his miles of glossy length, coiling himself up, and suddenly whirling into the air and down again in a great, gleaming arch to the water; far away in lonely grandeur, vast, white, and motionless, lay the great Kraken, that mysterious, traditional inhabitant of the sea, only known to men through the wild stories which ancient mariners will sometimes tell around the evening fire. Wonderful enough it was to see all these; but Ernest hardly glanced at them,—for, close about his boat on every side crowded beautiful forms, with fair, childlike faces and long, golden hair, which floated and glittered upon the moon-lit waves, as they swam gracefully hither and thither. Ernest knew them at once; they were the mer-maidens, the children of the sea, of whom he had often heard, and for whom he had often vainly gazed across the midnight ocean.

These it were, who, grasping with white fingers the little boat, had rocked it softly to the cadence of an inarticulate song. As the youth arose and looked at them, they gently loosed their hold, and sunk beneath the water; but in an instant he heard them again behind him, and, turning

suddenly, saw them surrounding a great sea-shell, white without, and of an exquisite pink within, which they were softly moving on across the water toward his own boat, while they sung in unison their mysterious, wordless song. But Ernest neither looked nor listened to the mer-maidens, for within the shell, robed in the rich abundance of her own golden hair, reclined the loveliest creature that the youth had ever seen, with fair, pale face and great, dreamy eyes, blue as the sea itself. Upon her head was set a crown, and about her neck and arms were strings of enormous pearls, perfect in form and color, and yet no whiter or rounder than the throat and arms which they encircled.

Princess Su-le-mair plays the harp

In her hands she carried a little golden harp, and when she had approached within a few feet of Ernest's boat, gently motioning her maidens to pause, she raised it and swept her tiny hand across the strings; a faint, sweet sound, like summer wind sighing through summer woods, met the young man's ear, and then in a soft, low voice she sung. The words were in the same unknown tongue with which the mer-maidens had chanted his lullaby, but as Ernest listened they shaped themselves into meaning in his mind; and this was the song of the sea-princess:—

Come with me! Come with me!
To the world beneath the sea.
There live we, with mirth and glee,
Oh, 'tis pleasant there to be!

Pearls so rare, jewels fair,
Gather we to deck our hair;
Toil nor care, dwell not there,
Come then, mortal, if thou dare!

The song was repeated over and over, and each moment Ernest longed more to go and dwell in this fair world beneath the sea. At last the shell-boat was pushed close to his own; and all the little white hands of the

mer-maidens, clasping one side of his skiff, tipped it more and more, until half unconsciously he slid from his own to the boat of the beautiful maiden, who clasped him in her arms, murmuring her soft song dreamily into his ear, while the great pink shell began first slowly, then more and more swiftly, to spin round and round, sinking at the same time until it was countless fathoms beneath the sea.

Ernest awoke as from a dream, to find himself laid upon a couch of soft, many colored sea-mosses, heaped high in the centre of a grotto-like chamber, whose walls of red and white coral were curiously cut, by the labor of the sword-fish employed as decorator in the royal palace, into the delicate and fanciful images of all the beautiful flowers and leaves which grow far beneath the sea, and are never seen by men. A cool, green light diffused itself through the chamber, and showed to Ernest the figure of the princess seated beside him, and gazing at him with loving eyes.

“What is your name, fair queen?” asked the young man softly.

“I am the Princess Su-le-mair, daughter of the great King Maro,” replied the maiden, a little proudly; but added, in a more tender voice, “And you, beautiful mortal,—what do they call you, above there?”

“My name is Ernest; but no mortal will ever call me so again, for I will live here always with you, beautiful Sulemair,” and the youth timidly kissed the rose-red lips of the fair sea-maiden.

“Then come with me and see our palace,—your home, now,” said Sulemair, bashfully drawing back, but holding out her cool, white hand to take that of her lover.

So Ernest went, guided by the princess, from one curious and beautiful room to another, until he had seen all the wonders of the palace in which he was now to dwell. Then Sulemair proposed that he should come with her to see her father and mother, who lived at some distance; for each of the princes and princesses had a palace to themselves; and as the royal family was very large, the king was obliged to keep a large corps of sword-fish coral-cutters constantly at work.

The young couple found that King Maro was just presiding at his council table, so that he could not receive them; but Queen Nymphia, Sulemair's mother, professed herself very much pleased with their visit, and welcomed Ernest to the kingdom under the sea very warmly and gracefully.

After this, it being dinner time, the two returned to their own palace, and spent the rest of the day very happily in telling each other the history of their previous lives.

So the days went dreamily on. Sometimes Sulemair sung to her golden harp love-songs, or ballads of sea-life; sometimes she and her maidens danced with Ernest, who soon learned their strange and fanciful figures, while a band of conchs, carefully graduated in tone, played each on his own shell; sometimes the princess, or one of the maidens, told strange stories of wonderful sights and romantic adventures in their own country, to which Ernest replied with stories of the world above the sea, which made the mer-maidens open their blue eyes wide with astonishment.

These and other amusements filled the day; yet sometimes Ernest would find time to wonder if matters went on above as they had done in his own time, and to wish occasionally that he and Sulemair could make a little visit to earth, just to see how it looked once more. He never mentioned this fancy to his beautiful bride, however, lest she should think him discontented; but keeping it to himself, he dwelt upon it more and more, until at last he thought of hardly any thing else, and at times was so absent and dreamy that he forgot to listen to the songs and stories, or to dance when it was his turn to do so.

Sulemair was not slow to notice and to suspect the cause of this alteration in her beloved Ernest, and she, too, grew silent, thoughtful, and abstracted. At last, one day, Ernest, rousing suddenly from a reverie, found the princess seated beside him gazing into his face, while great tears, rolling down her cheeks and dropping off her chin, fell in round, white pearls at her feet.

“Dearest, sweetest, what is the matter?” asked Ernest, anxiously; for he had never seen the princess cry before.

“It is—it is, that Ernest wishes to leave me,” sobbed the poor little sea-nymph.

“Leave you! leave my Sulemair!” exclaimed Ernest, kissing her over and over; “I never dreamed of such a thing. But if you and I together, dearest, could make just a little visit up above,—eh, Susu?”

“Listen, dear,” said the princess, sitting up, and wiping her eyes; “for I have something to tell you. I never can visit the world above and return here—never. But I have one chance to exchange this life for that, if I choose, though I never thought of wishing it before. Are you sure, very sure, dear Ernest, that you wish me to come too? Will it not be enough if you can return alone? Perhaps, after a while, you would grow tired of your poor Sulemair, and then what should she do, all alone in a strange world?”

It required several words and a great many kisses to convince the princess of the absurdity of this idea; but at last she continued:—

“We daughters of the royal house have a privilege not shared by any other of the maidens of the sea. On the night we are sixteen (our birthdays always come in the full moon), if we can by any means persuade a mortal maiden to leap into the sea, and catch her in our arms as she falls, we are able to change conditions with her,—she becoming a mer-maiden, and we a child of earth. This is possible, but rarely attempted by us; partly because we love our own natures so well we do not care to change, and partly from the difficulty of inducing any earthly maiden to make the exchange. Sometimes, however, one of us has done it; my eldest sister did. She ascended to the upper waters on her birth-night, and found herself near a ship moving slowly through the sea; floating quietly about it she perceived a beautiful girl leaning over the side, and looking sadly into the water. My sister, who had a harp like mine, began to play and sing softly, and the maiden, fixing her eyes upon the spot where my sister’s hair, floating behind her, looked like what the

sailors call a moon-glade, drooped lower and lower over the side of the vessel, until Neria, holding out her arms, the maiden sunk into them, and in the next moment floated away a mer-maiden, while my sister clambered into the ship and took her place."

"But did they look alike?" asked Ernest.

"Oh, the two change faces as well as forms, you understand."

"But then you would not be my Sulemair any more," said Ernest, discontentedly.

"Foolish boy, you will find some one so much more beautiful to take my place, that you will be glad to make the change," said the princess, laughing merrily.

"*I* shall find, little Susu? What does that mean?" asked the lover.

"Why, my plan is, that you shall return immediately to the earth, and spend the time from now to my birthday, which will not be for ten more full moons, in trying to find a maiden (a beautiful one, mind—I won't change with an ugly one), who will leap into the sea of her own freewill. I don't think it right to charm one, as Neria did, although I dare say I could"—

"As you charmed me," suggested Ernest.

"No, I didn't charm you, I only sung to you," replied Sulemair innocently.

"All the same; but go on with your little plan, darling."

"Well, if you can find one who will change with me willingly, bring her to a place which I will show you, the night of the tenth full moon from that now shining; let her leap into my arms, and the next moment you will have me, a mortal maiden, ready to live and die with you in your own way."

"Let me set out immediately," exclaimed Ernest, starting up, "I shall find not one, but twenty maidens, with whom to purchase my Sulemair's life."

“Not twenty, but one will be enough,” smiled the princess, as, winding her arms about Ernest, she floated with him to the surface of the ocean, directing her course obliquely, as if to reach some particular point. Emerging at length, they found themselves near the shore, and directly opposite a high cliff of peculiar shape, which overhung the water like a petrified cataract.

“There, Ernest,” said the princess, pointing at the cliff, “you see that—we call it ‘the frozen fall’—now if you can find a maiden willing to exchange with me, bring her there, and let her leap, just as the moon reaches the summit of the heavens, into my arms, which shall be open to catch her. Farewell till then.”

And Sulemair, with a little laugh and a playful gesture, sunk beneath the surface and was gone immediately. Ernest would have followed, to assure her once more that he would certainly return; but to his surprise he found the water, which had so long been like a native element to him, had suddenly become a foreign one, and he was obliged to swim vigorously to gain the shore, which, while he was floating with Sulemair, had seemed so near and easy of access.

Once landed, Ernest immediately set out upon his strange search. He travelled far and wide, and tried to persuade many beautiful maidens to change their earthly condition for a life beneath the sea. But some laughed in his face, some told him he was a madman who should be shut up, some shuddered, and said they were frightened at the very idea, and some tried to persuade him to stay with them instead.

So one month after another slipped away, until the tenth moon had grown from a crescent to half its full size, and still the maiden was not found.

Gloomy and despairing, Ernest had almost abandoned hope; and one day finding himself in a thick wood just outside a great city, he threw himself upon the ground, and covering his face with his hands, began to lament and groan aloud; but after a while, his grief becoming a little calmer, he lay quite still and quiet; to his great surprise, however, the

sounds of lamentation still echoed through the stillness of the wood, as if the very trees were mourning with him. Thinking that this could hardly be the case, Ernest looked about him in every direction, and presently perceived at a little distance a female figure seated upon the ground, her face covered with her hands, and her whole form shaken with the violence of her grief.

Full of compassion and some little curiosity, Ernest arose, and approaching the stranger, asked kindly what was the matter with her. Looking up, with a little startled cry, the mourner showed the face of a young girl, with so striking resemblance to Sulemair, that the lover uttered an exclamation of astonishment; but without heeding this, the young girl said sadly,—

"You ask what is the matter, sir, that I thus weep and lament. I will tell you; for you look kind and good. My father, whom they call a traitor, though no man is less so, is to be beheaded at sunrise to-morrow, and I shall be left alone in the wide world." Saying this, she burst into fresh tears and sobs. Ernest sat down beside her, and when her grief had a little subsided, told her how sorry he felt for her, and that if he could in any way help her or her father, he would do so. Then he told her his own story, and asked if she could help him.

Veria (this was the maiden's name) listened attentively to Ernest's story, and when he had finished, sat for a moment thinking. Then, holding out her hand to the youth, she said,—

"I will be the maiden for whom you search, Ernest, if you will find means to save my father's life. Gladly will I give mine for his; and if I can make you and Sulemair happy at the same time, it will be so much the more joy. Will you try, Ernest?"

"I will try, Veria," said the young man, sadly; for he did not quite like the idea, after all, of seeing Veria throw herself into the sea, and become a mer-maiden.

Nevertheless, he rose, and walked quickly toward the city, leaving the maiden still weeping in the wood.

Having engaged a lodging at a small inn near the city gate, Ernest mingled with a group of men at the door of the inn, who were busily talking in a low voice, and who did not notice that a stranger had joined them.

“But what will they do for an executioner to-morrow,” said one, “since Vincent cannot be found?”

“Do you suppose some of Hugo’s friends hired him to run away, that the execution might be deferred?” asked another.

“Like enough,” responded a third; “and if it could be put off altogether, I don’t think any one would be sorry; for, after all, what has this Hugo done, to have his head chopped off? There are more worse than better men, I’ll be bound.”

“Yes,” said the first cautiously, “and I, for my part, would gladly help to set him free, if it could be done.”

“Aye,” responded the second, “but how is that to be accomplished?”

“I will tell you, good friends,” interrupted Ernest, “*I* will set him free, if you will only help me.”

“You, young man? How will you do it?”

“Come close to me, and I will tell you my plan.”

The citizens crowded about Ernest, who in a very low voice told them a plan which had just occurred to him, and which they all agreed was an excellent one. Each promised to help him in every way that he should point out, and all kept their word.

That very night Ernest presented himself to the governor of the city as an executioner from another town, who was willing to take the place of Vincent, the missing officer, who had suddenly disappeared. The governor asked, of course, for his certificates of character and ability, but Ernest was ready for him; for his good friends of the tavern had provided him with papers, which, if not quite as genuine, were just as good looking as any executioner could have shown.

The governor read all the papers carefully, examined the signatures, asked Ernest a good many questions, and finished by engaging him, offering to pay him half the price for which they agreed in advance; but Ernest, who was too honest to take money for work which he never meant to do, said he preferred to wait, and have it altogether.

The next morning at sunrise was the time appointed, and a great crowd had collected to witness the execution; but Ernest saw with pleasure that his new friends had contrived to get places next the scaffold, and all looked determined and ready.

Presently the criminal, Hugo, as he was called, was brought from the interior of the prison, and Ernest felt a double longing to save him when he saw how much he resembled Veria.

Making a pretence of arranging his dress that it might not interfere with the blow, he whispered rapidly that he was no executioner, but was there to save him; and as he stood close behind him he slyly cut the cords which bound Hugo's arms, and, slipping a strong knife into his hand, bid him do just as he did.

Hugo, although startled for a moment, soon recovered his self-possession, and, in a whisper, said he was ready.

Then Ernest, springing from the scaffold into the midst of the group of friends who were waiting for him, brandished his axe about his head, crying,—

"Rescue! rescue! Good men, rescue!"

Hugo, flourishing his knife, and crying out, "Help! friends, help!" followed immediately; and the little group, each of whom drew a knife, a dagger, a pistol, or some other weapon, closed about them, all crying, "Rescue! rescue!" which induced many others to join them.

More than this, the people, who all wished well to Hugo, made way for him and his friends to pass, but closed up when the soldiers tried to follow them, which caused much delay and vexation to the pursuers. Reaching the city gates, Hugo, Ernest, and one or two others, rushed

out, and their friends, snatching the keys from the astonished guard, locked the gates, and threw the keys over the wall; then, hiding their weapons and mingling in the crowd, they escaped unrecognized.

The little group outside meantime had gained the wood, where horses were waiting for them; and Hugo, with one hurried kiss and good-by to Veria (who also was there waiting for him), mounted with one or two friends and rode off at full speed, and that same night left the country forever.

Ernest and Veria, at the same time mounting the two remaining horses, set out in another direction, and when the angry soldiers from the city had at last forced the gate and reached the forest, they found it silent and deserted; nor did they ever again see one of the fugitives.

Ernest and Veria, saying but little to each other, and both exceedingly sorrowful, rode all that day, and the next, and the next, until, the very evening when the tenth full moon was rising majestically from the sea, they turned loose their exhausted horses at the foot of the cliff which Sulemair had named the Frozen Fall.

Silently the two climbed the cliff, until they had nearly reached its crest, and then, Ernest motioning his companion to seat herself on a flat, gray rock which lay there, threw himself at her feet, and, looking up in her face, said,—

“Veria, I will not have it so. Why are you to sacrifice yourself that Sulemair should be happy? She has never known any other life than that beneath the sea, and she will soon forget me and her wild dream of becoming a mortal. I will stay with you, Veria, and we shall all be happy in our own way.”

Veria smiled sadly in the moonlight.

“No, Ernest,” said she, “I have bought my father’s life, and I will pay the price. Sulemair trusted you, and brought you back to earth that you might win for her the means of living always with you. Shall we be so base as to deceive and defraud her?”

Ernest, covering his face, groaned aloud, but did not speak; nor did either utter another word until the moon, sailing slowly through the calm, blue ocean of heaven, stood in the zenith smiling down at the twin moon, which smiled up to her from the ocean of waters beneath.

Then Veria, rising, pointed upward, and said softly,—

“Ernest, do you see?”

The young man slowly raised his pale face and looked. Veria, standing on the very verge of the cliff, the soft night wind floating back her snow-white dress and golden hair, her hands clasped and raised, as were her soft eyes, to heaven,—stood ready for the leap.

Below, gazing up at her, as the moon below gazed up to the moon above, floated Sulemair; her white form gleaming through the still water, her yellow hair floating out upon the waves, her snowy arms extended upward.

“Veria, Veria, stay!” shouted the young man in agony.

“Veria, Veria, come!” floated up from the water like a mocking echo, in the silvery voice of Sulemair.

Ernest sprung forward; but Veria, with one wild glance backward, leaped from the cliff, and was clasped in the white arms of Sulemair.

Mechanically, more with the idea of saving Veria than of greeting her rival, Ernest rushed down the path leading to the beach, and stood a moment, with the little laughing waves curling and plashing round his feet.

A white, floating figure rose to the surface, and was borne gently toward him;—plunging in, the young man swam toward her, reached her, and drew her out. Then, standing on the moon-lit beach, he gazed in astonishment at the being beside him. Fair and golden-haired, she had the dove-like, spiritual eyes of Veria, but the laughing, rose-red mouth and dimpled cheek of Sulemair. Upon her head and neck and arms

shone the crown and pearls of the sea-princess, but her form was clothed in the modest garments of the earth-maiden. All that he had loved, all that was best and dearest of each, was there. Who was it?

“Veria!—Sulemair!” stammered Ernest. “Which are you? What does this mean? Speak to me!”

“Dear Ernest!” said a voice as true and loving as Veria, as arch and playful as Sulemair, “I am both,—all. What each wanted, the other possessed,—I am the childlike, frolicsome mer-maiden joined to the true heart and immortal soul of Veria. When we clasped our arms about each other, the heart of each leaped to meet that of the other; in a moment we were one,—two in one. Do you like me, Ernest?”

“Like you, my queen, my angel?” exclaimed the youth, clasping her to his heart; “I love you with twofold love. All my old love for Sulemair, all my new love for Veria, has mingled in my heart, as you two have mingled soul and body; and my love is as much stronger for you than for either of those, as you now are more perfect and more charming than either half could have been alone.”

“But my name?” murmured the maiden, “what will you call me, now that I have lost both those which I bore before?”

“I will call you Una now, for you are perfect—you are one,—a woman; and can be no better, no higher.”

And the moon beamed, and the wavelets crisped in her pure light at their feet; and their hearts had room for no more joy.

Veria leaps from the cliff

THE CASTLE ON THE CLIFF

Hans and Fritzchen fishing

Perched upon a high cliff which overhung the mouth of a mighty river, stood the castle of the Baron von Hoche, and beneath it, in a little harbor sheltered by the huge rocks stretching into the water on either side, lay the boats in which the baron with his crew of ruffians used to attack and plunder all vessels which tried to pass up or down the river; so that after a while, no ship thought of attempting the passage, unless it was armed with sufficient force to beat off the pirates, who would be sure to assail it.

Other times, the baron and his troop would mount their horses, and, swooping down the road which led to the plains below, would pounce upon unwary travellers or rich trains of merchandise, and force them to give up all they had of value. In short, the Baron von Hoche and his followers were so wicked and so bold that the whole country trembled when only his name was mentioned.

A little distance below the castle stood the hut of old Hans the fisherman, who dwelt there alone with Fritzchen, his little son; and thither came, one Christmas morning, a servant from the castle, with a message that the baron would make a great feast that night, and that Hans must supply twice the amount of fish, which he carried daily to the castle as Reiter-malle or black-mail, with which to purchase the baron's protection and good-will.

So Hans, bidding Fritzchen follow him, went down to the shore, and, loosing his little boat, spread the tattered sail, and set out for his favorite fishing-ground. All day Hans and Fritzchen, fearful that they were wrong in laboring even at the command of their master, upon the birthday of the Lord Jesus, sung hymns and anthems, and repeated pious sentences from good books which they had heard read in the convent chapel, where they sometimes went; and this pious conduct had its reward, for

the fish, crowding to the boat to hear the holy music, were taken in crowds, and it was hardly more than noon when Hans again hoisted his ragged sail and turned his boat's head homeward.

"Now, my Fritzchen," said he, as they landed, "here are more fish than the baron bade us bring, or than they can use; so we will take out four for ourselves, and will make a little Christmas feast of our own."

"Good, dear father!" said Fritzchen. "And let me take out this great turbot, the finest of the whole load, and carry it to the convent, that the good fathers may add it to their feast to-night. The baron will then have three times as many as we carry him every day."

"But, my Fritzchen, it is far to the convent, and the ground is covered deep with snow," said the father anxiously.

"Oh, that will not hurt me." said Fritzchen skipping about; "I shall run so fast that I shall keep myself warm, and the way will seem so short that I shall hardly start before I reach there."

"Go, then, good child," said the old man, fondly patting the boy's shoulder. "But first carry this fish to the castle, with our humble duty and Christmas greeting."

So Fritzchen, taking the great sack of fish upon his shoulder, trudged away to the castle, where he went to the kitchen to leave his load. Here he found old Brigitta, the housekeeper, fuming round and scolding everybody, because she had so much work to do. Fritzchen, cap in hand, laid his sack of fish upon the floor and gave his father's message.

"Yes, yes, a merry Christmas to idlers like you, who have nothing to do but catch a few miserable fish, it may be," said the cross old woman. "But for me, who have the whole castle on my shoulders, and no one to do a hand's turn to help me;—but, there now, why can't you go, my Fritzchen, to the town and buy the candles?" pursued the old woman, changing to a wheedling tone as a new thought crossed her mind.

"The candles, ma'am?" asked Fritzchen.

“Yes, child; we have not more than half candles enough to illuminate the castle, and the baron has ordered that every window shall blaze to-night; so go you to the town and buy me a dozen pounds, and you shall have three pennies for yourself to buy a Christmas-box.”

“Yes, indeed, ma’am, I will go; and I can go to the convent on the way,” said the boy, gayly.

“And what do you go to the convent for?” asked the dame curiously.

“To carry a great fish to the fathers for their Christmas supper,” said Fritzchen simply.

“And get your pay in Aves and Paters, eh?” said the dame, with a sneer. “I’ve seen enough of priests, if they’re all like old Father Boniface, who drank himself to death here last year at Whitsuntide. Well, here’s your money, and mind you get me the best candles, and be sure to get home before dark.”

“I will be as quick as I can, ma’am,” said Fritz sorrowfully, for it grieved him to hear any one slight the good fathers, whom he loved, and who had been so kind to him.

Running home for the fish, he told his father hurriedly of his errand, and that he should be later home than he expected; but old Hans promised to have supper all ready without his help, and bid him haste away.

So Fritzchen with the fish at his back, and a great piece of black bread in his hand for dinner, set out, whistling merrily as he ran over the snowy ground.

Arriving at the convent, he left his great fish with the kitchener, who, besides thanking him, gave him his blessing and a beautiful picture of the Virgin Mary all dressed in a blue gown with a red mantle and a green scarf wound about her head. The picture was in a little wooden frame, and Fritzchen thought that surely nothing else in the wide world could be one half so fine or valuable.

His picture under his arm, the little boy ran on to the town, which was still half a mile off; and there, having bought dame Brigitta's candles, he spent his three pennies; one in buying two little rolls of white bread to add to their Christmas supper, and the rest for two small candles of yellow wax, with which he said to himself he would illuminate their cottage in honor of the holy Christmas night. Then Fritzchen turned his face homeward and hurried along, now running, now walking, but always singing,—with his mouth when he had breath, and with his heart when he had not,—until he reached the foot of the cliff, and began to climb the steep pathway leading to the castle of the robber-baron.

But here, half way up the ascent, he paused, shuddering with fright and astonishment. The servants were just beginning to light up the windows, and while the great square keep, which formed the centre of the castle, frowned in black and sullen shadow, the two wings—one of which was the great banqueting-hall, and the other the neglected and ruined chapel —were in a blaze of light.

But this was not what had so startled Fritzchen. The banqueting-hall, where already the guests were assembled, was illuminated not only by the lights within, but by a lurid, deep-red cloud, or mist, which, falling lower and lower, seemed about to swallow it altogether; beneath the cloud, brooding indeed on the very roof-tree of the hall, hovered a huge, bat-like figure, black as midnight, who, slowly flapping his great wings, seemed to draw with them the lurid cloud ever nearer and nearer.

The chapel, too, was illuminated in otherwise than by Dame Brigitta's candles, for over it and around it shone a soft, clear light, white and pure, by which Fritzchen could see a beautiful silver-white dove, clinging to the roof, and seeming, with the gentle motion of its wings, to create and retain the heavenly radiance which surrounded it. In the east, toward which the chapel wing pointed, rose the calm, pure moon from out the sea; but in the west, opposite the banqueting-hall, great angry thunderclouds were gathering sullenly and slow,—but rising, always rising.

Fritzchen stood long looking at these strange appearances, not daring to approach any nearer to the castle, and once he turned to run homeward; but just then he remembered that he had promised Dame Brigitta to buy her candles, and had taken the money which she had given him for doing so. He remembered, too, the words which his father had often repeated to him,—

"God and duty first—self last."

So, keeping his eyes upon the ground, he rapidly approached the castle, and went round the chapel-end (though the path lay the other side) to the kitchen door, gave his parcel to one of the maids without speaking, and then, never looking behind, ran toward home as fast as his legs would carry him.

Old Hans was ready with the supper, and so merry and full of jokes and laughter, that Fritzchen would not tell him what he had seen, lest it should sadden him, and spoil his little holiday.

So, while Hans, proud of his cookery dished the smoking fish and placed them on the table, Fritzchen lighted his candles, and placed one before the picture of the Holy Virgin, and the other in the one window of the hut, that its light might ascend gratefully toward heaven.

At the castle, meantime, all was noisy mirth and rude merriment. The baron, sitting at the head of his long table, with his retainers and their wives, with a few guests of their own stamp ranged down either side, ate and drank, laughed, sung, and swore by turns; and each man present, thinking to flatter his humor, ate, drank, laughed, sung, and swore likewise, till the sound of their rioting and their blasphemies shook the very roof above them, close to which now clung the lurid cloud, hiding the bat-like demon, who, brooding closer and closer to the roof-tree, leaned over now and again to glare with great red eyes through the unshuttered windows at the mad revellers within.

"More wine—more!" shouted the baron every moment; and the old butler was forced to make so many journeys from the hall to the cellar and the cellar to the hall, that he had not time to drink more than six

bottles to his own share, and grumbled loudly at the hardships of such a life.

But at last the baron, in the very midst of a horrible oath, dropped his head upon the table, and sunk into a heavy, drunken sleep. Many of the others followed his example, and for the rest old Peter did not care; so, muttering to himself "'Every dog shall have his day,' and mine comes now," he took a candle from the table and descended once more to the cellar, locking the door behind him, lest he should be interrupted.

The Old Butler in the cellar

"The best, the oldest and the best," muttered he, staggering around among the casks and bottles. "I won't live such a dog's life for nought,—I will have my pleasure too, when I get a chance." Talking in this way to himself, the butler suddenly came upon a dim old cask standing under an arch in the western wing of the castle, and so concealed that he had not noticed it before.

"Aha! what have we here?" muttered he, stooping, and putting his auger into the wood near the bottom of the cask. "Some rare old vintage, I'll be bound, that's been hid away here ever since the castle was a convent,—we're not much like a convent now, I think. Saint Jude! what stuff have we here?—droll wine this," added he, as a stream of something black and shining followed the auger when he drew it out. Full of curiosity, he stooped to examine it. Just then a terrific peal of thunder rocked the cliff to its foundation; at the same instant a blinding bolt shot from roof-tree to cellar,—and, in another moment, butler, castle, and revellers were blown altogether hundreds of feet into the air.

The terrible noise of the explosion wakened both Hans and Fritzchen; but, too much terrified to rise or look out, they only clung the closer to each other, and said over and over all the prayers that they knew.

At last, an hour after every thing was still, they timidly rose, and, holding fast by each other's hand, crept to the door and looked out. All about the little hut lay great stones, beams, and fragments; but not the smallest

pebble had touched the humble roof, on which now perched, surrounded by its pure, soft light, the silver-white dove.

“The castle, father! the dove has left the castle!” cried Fritzchen. “Come and see what has befallen it.”

Still hand in hand they hastened up the cliff. On its summit stood nothing but cold, gray walls, roofless and desolate, through whose empty window places the setting moon cast long, mournful beams, while overhead the gloomy thunderclouds were breaking and rolling away in great masses.

Hans and Fritzchen stood long looking at the ruin, but neither spoke; and presently they silently turned, and, reëntering the little hut, over which still clung the bright cloud—although the dove had flown—they trimmed the little candles which yet burned with a clear, steady light, and, having once more murmured a prayer, lay down and again slept sweetly and calmly.

Hans and Fritzchen looking at the ruin

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Perceived typographical errors have been silently corrected.

Chapter headings as listed in the Table of Contents have been added to the text.

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