

**BAUM LYMAN
FRANK**

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND
OF YEWS

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The Enchanted Island of Yew

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L. Frank Baum

The Enchanted Island of Yew / Whereon Prince Marvel Encountered the High Ki of Twi and Other Surprising People

1. "Once on a Time"

I am going to tell a story, one of those tales of astonishing adventures that happened years and years and years ago. Perhaps you wonder why it is that so many stories are told of "once on a time", and so few of these days in which we live; but that is easily explained.

In the old days, when the world was young, there were no automobiles nor flying-machines to make one wonder; nor were there railway trains, nor telephones, nor mechanical inventions of any sort to keep people keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. Men and women lived simply and quietly. They were Nature's children, and breathed fresh air into their lungs instead of smoke and coal gas; and tramped through green meadows and deep forests instead of riding in street cars; and went to bed when it grew dark and rose with the sun-which is vastly different from the present custom. Having no books to read they told their adventures to one another and to their little ones; and the stories were handed down from generation to generation and reverently believed.

Those who peopled the world in the old days, having nothing but their hands to depend on, were to a certain extent helpless, and so the fairies were sorry for them and ministered to their wants patiently and frankly, often showing themselves to those they befriended.

So people knew fairies in those days, my dear, and loved them, together with all the ryls and knooks and pixies and nymphs and other beings that belong to the hordes of immortals. And a fairy tale was a thing to be wondered at and spoken of in awed whispers; for no one thought of doubting its truth.

To-day the fairies are shy; for so many curious inventions of men have come into use that the wonders of Fairyland are somewhat tame beside them, and even the boys and girls can not be so easily interested or surprised as in the old days. So the sweet and gentle little immortals perform their tasks unseen and unknown, and live mostly in their own beautiful realms, where they are almost unthought of by our busy, bustling world.

Yet when we come to story-telling the marvels of our own age shrink into insignificance beside the brave deeds and absorbing experiences of the days when fairies were better known; and so we go back to "once on a time" for the tales that we most love-and that children have ever loved since mankind knew that fairies exist.

2. The Enchanted Isle

Once there was an enchanted island in the middle of the sea. It was called the Isle of Yew. And in it were five important kingdoms ruled by men, and many woodland dells and forest glades and pleasant meadows and grim mountains inhabited by fairies.

From the fairies some of the men had learned wonderful secrets, and had become magicians and sorcerers, with powers so great that the entire island was reputed to be one of enchantments. Who these men were the common people did not always know; for while some were kings and rulers, others lived quietly hidden away in forests or mountains, and seldom or never showed themselves. Indeed, there were not so many of these magicians as people thought, only it was so hard to tell them from common folk that every stranger was regarded with a certain amount of curiosity and fear.

The island was round-like a mince pie. And it was divided into four quarters-also like a pie-except that there was a big place in the center where the fifth kingdom, called Spor, lay in the midst of the mountains. Spor was ruled by King Terribus, whom no one but his own subjects had ever seen-and not many of them. For no one was allowed to enter the Kingdom of Spor, and its king never left his palace. But the people of Spor had a bad habit of rushing down from their mountains and stealing the goods of the inhabitants of the other four kingdoms, and carrying them home with them, without offering any apologies whatever for such horrid conduct. Sometimes those they robbed tried to fight them; but they were a terrible people, consisting of giants with huge clubs, and dwarfs who threw flaming darts, and the stern Gray Men of Spor, who were most frightful of all. So, as a rule, every one fled before them, and the people were thankful that the fierce warriors of Spor seldom came to rob them oftener than once a year.

It was on this account that all who could afford the expense built castles to live in, with stone walls so thick that even the giants of Spor could not batter them down. And the children were not allowed to stray far from home for fear some roving band of robbers might steal them and make their parents pay large sums for their safe return.

Yet for all this the people of the Enchanted Isle of Yew were happy and prosperous. No grass was greener, no forests more cool and delightful, no skies more sunny, no sea more blue and rippling than theirs.

And the nations of the world envied them, but dared not attempt to conquer an island abounding in enchantments.

3. The Fairy Bower

That part of the Enchanted Isle which was kissed by the rising sun was called Dawna; the kingdom that was tinted rose and purple by the setting sun was known as Auriel, and the southland, where fruits and flowers abounded, was the kingdom of Plenta. Up at the north lay Heg, the home of the great barons who feared not even the men of Spor; and in the Kingdom of Heg our story opens.

Upon a beautiful plain stood the castle of the great Baron Merd-renowned alike in war and peace, and second in importance only to the King of Heg. It was a castle of vast extent, built with thick walls and protected by strong gates. In front of it sloped a pretty stretch of land with the sea glistening far beyond; and back of it, but a short distance away, was the edge of the Forest of Lurla.

One fair summer day the custodian of the castle gates opened a wicket and let down a draw-bridge, when out trooped three pretty girls with baskets dangling on their arms. One of the maids walked in front of her companions, as became the only daughter of the mighty Baron Merd. She was named Seseley, and had yellow hair and red cheeks and big, blue eyes. Behind her, merry and laughing, yet with a distinct deference to the high station of their young lady, walked Berna and Helda-dark brunettes with mischievous eyes and slender, lithe limbs. Berna was the daughter of the chief archer, and Helda the niece of the captain of the guard, and they were appointed play-fellows and comrades of the fair Seseley.

Up the hill to the forest's edge ran the three, and then without hesitation plunged into the shade of the ancient trees. There was no sunlight now, but the air was cool and fragrant of nuts and mosses, and the children skipped along the paths joyously and without fear.

To be sure, the Forest of Lurla was well known as the home of fairies, but Seseley and her comrades feared nothing from such gentle creatures and only longed for an interview with the powerful immortals whom they had been taught to love as the tender guardians of mankind. Nymphs there were in Lurla, as well, and crooked knooks, it was said; yet for many years past no person could boast the favor of meeting any one of the fairy creatures face to face.

So, gathering a few nuts here and a sweet forest flower there, the three maidens walked farther and farther into the forest until they came upon a clearing-formed like a circle-with mosses and ferns for its carpet and great overhanging branches for its roof.

"How pretty!" cried Seseley, gaily. "Let us eat our luncheon in this lovely banquet-hall!"

So Berna and Helda spread a cloth and brought from their baskets some golden platters and a store of food. Yet there was little ceremony over the meal, you may be sure, and within a short space all the children had satisfied their appetites and were laughing and chatting as merrily as if they were at home in the great castle. Indeed, it is certain they were happier in their forest glade than when facing grim walls of stone, and the three were in such gay spirits that whatever one chanced to say the others promptly joined in laughing over.

Soon, however, they were startled to hear a silvery peal of laughter answering their own, and turning to see whence the sound proceeded, they found seated near them a creature so beautiful that at once the three pairs of eyes opened to their widest extent, and three hearts beat much faster than before.

"Well, I must say you DO stare!" exclaimed the newcomer, who was clothed in soft floating robes of rose and pearl color, and whose eyes shone upon them like two stars.

"Forgive our impertinence," answered the little Lady Seseley, trying to appear dignified and unmoved; "but you must acknowledge that you came among us uninvited, and-and you are certainly rather odd in appearance."

Again the silvery laughter rang through the glade.

"Uninvited!" echoed the creature, clapping her hands together delightedly; "uninvited to my own forest home! Why, my dear girls, you are the uninvited ones-indeed you are-to thus come romping into our fairy bower."

The children did not open their eyes any wider on hearing this speech, for they could not; but their faces expressed their amazement fully, while Helda gasped the words:

"A fairy bower! We are in a fairy bower!"

"Most certainly," was the reply. "And as for being odd in appearance, let me ask how you could reasonably expect a fairy to appear as mortal maidens do?"

"A fairy!" exclaimed Seseley. "Are you, then, a real fairy?"

"I regret to say I am," returned the other, more soberly, as she patted a moss-bank with a silver-tipped wand.

Then for a moment there was silence, while the three girls sat very still and stared at their immortal companion with evident curiosity. Finally Seseley asked:

"Why do you regret being a fairy? I have always thought them the happiest creatures in the world."

"Perhaps we ought to be happy," answered the fairy, gravely, "for we have wonderful powers and do much to assist you helpless mortals. And I suppose some of us really are happy. But, for my part, I am so utterly tired of a fairy life that I would do anything to change it."

"That is strange," declared Berna. "You seem very young to be already discontented with your lot."

Now at this the fairy burst into laughter again, and presently asked:

"How old do you think me?"

"About our own age," said Berna, after a glance at her and a moment's reflection.

"Nonsense!" retorted the fairy, sharply. "These trees are hundreds of years old, yet I remember when they were mere twigs. And I remember when mortals first came to live upon this island, yes-and when this island was first created and rose from the sea after a great earthquake. I remember for many, many centuries, my dears. I have grown tired of remembering-and of being a fairy continually, without any change to brighten my life."

"To be sure!" said Seseley, with sympathy. "I never thought of fairy life in that way before. It must get to be quite tiresome."

"And think of the centuries I must yet live!" exclaimed the fairy in a dismal voice. "Isn't it an awful thing to look forward to?"

"It is, indeed," agreed Seseley.

"I'd be glad to exchange lives with you," said Helda, looking at the fairy with intense admiration.

"But you can't do that," answered the little creature quickly. "Mortals can't become fairies, you know-although I believe there was once a mortal who was made immortal."

"But fairies can become anything they desire!" cried Berna.

"Oh, no, they can't. You are mistaken if you believe that," was the reply. "I could change YOU into a fly, or a crocodile, or a bobolink, if I wanted to; but fairies can't change themselves into anything else."

"How strange!" murmured Seseley, much impressed.

"But YOU can," cried the fairy, jumping up and coming toward them. "You are mortals, and, by the laws that govern us, a mortal can change a fairy into anything she pleases."

"Oh!" said Seseley, filled with amazement at the idea.

The fairy fell on her knees before the baron's daughter. "Please-please, dear Seseley," she pleaded, "change me into a mortal!"

4. Prince Marvel

It is easy to imagine the astonishment of the three girls at hearing this strange request. They gazed in a bewildered fashion upon the kneeling fairy, and were at first unable to answer one word. Then Seseley said-sadly, for she grieved to disappoint the pretty creature:

"We are but mortal children, and have no powers of enchantment at all."

"Ah, that is true, so far as concerns yourselves," replied the fairy, eagerly; "yet mortals may easily transform fairies into anything they wish."

"If that is so, why have we never heard of this power before?" asked Seseley.

"Because fairies, as a rule, are content with their lot, and do not wish to appear in any form but their own. And, knowing that evil or mischievous mortals can transform them at will, the fairies take great care to remain invisible, so they can not be interfered with. Have you ever," she asked, suddenly, "seen a fairy before?"

"Never," replied Seseley.

"Nor would you have seen me to-day, had I not known you were kind and pure-hearted, or had I not resolved to ask you to exercise your powers upon me."

"I must say," remarked Helda, boldly, "that you are foolish to wish to become anything different from what you are."

"For you are very beautiful NOW," added Berna, admiringly.

"Beautiful!" retorted the fairy, with a little frown; "what does beauty amount to, if one is to remain invisible?"

"Not much, that is true," agreed Berna, smoothing her own dark locks.

"And as for being foolish," continued the fairy, "I ought to be allowed to act foolishly if I want to. For centuries past I have not had a chance to do a single foolish thing."

"Poor dear!" said Helda, softly.

Seseley had listened silently to this conversation. Now she inquired:

"What do you wish to become?"

"A mortal!" answered the fairy, promptly.

"A girl, like ourselves?" questioned the baron's daughter.

"Perhaps," said the fairy, as if undecided.

"Then you would be likely to endure many privations," said Seseley, gently. "For you would have neither father nor mother to befriend you, nor any house to live in."

"And if you hired your services to some baron, you would be obliged to wash dishes all day, or mend clothing, or herd cattle," said Berna.

"But I should travel all over the island," said the fairy, brightly, "and that is what I long to do. I do not care to work."

"I fear a girl would not be allowed to travel alone," Seseley remarked, after some further thought. "At least," she added, "I have never heard of such a thing."

"No," said the fairy, rather bitterly, "your men are the ones that roam abroad and have adventures of all kinds. Your women are poor, weak creatures, I remember."

There was no denying this, so the three girls sat silent until Seseley asked:

"Why do you wish to become a mortal?"

"To gain exciting experiences," answered the fairy. "I'm tired of being a humdrum fairy year in and year out. Of course, I do not wish to become a mortal for all time, for that would get monotonous, too; but to live a short while as the earth people do would amuse me very much."

"If you want variety, you should become a boy," said Helda, with a laugh, "The life of a boy is one round of excitement."

"Then make me a boy!" exclaimed the fairy eagerly.

"A boy!" they all cried in consternation. And Seseley added:

"Why-you're a GIRL fairy, aren't you?"

"Well-yes; I suppose I am," answered the beautiful creature, smiling; "but as you are going to change me anyway, I may as well become a boy as a girl."

"Better!" declared Helda, clapping her hands; "for then you can do as you please."

"But would it be right?" asked Seseley, with hesitation.

"Why not?" retorted the fairy. "I can see nothing wrong in being a boy. Make me a tall, slender youth, with waving brown hair and dark eyes. Then I shall be as unlike my own self as possible, and the adventure will be all the more interesting. Yes; I like the idea of being a boy very much indeed."

"But I don't know how to transform you; some one will have to show me the way to do it," protested Seseley, who was getting worried over the task set her.

"Oh, that will be easy enough," returned the little immortal. "Have you a wand?"

"No."

"Then I'll loan you mine, for I shall not need it. And you must wave it over my head three times and say: 'By my mortal powers I transform you into a boy for the space of one year'."

"One year! Isn't that too long?"

"It's a very short time to one who has lived thousands of years as a fairy."

"That is true," answered the baron's daughter.

"Now, I'll begin by doing a little transforming myself," said the fairy, getting upon her feet again, "and you can watch and see how I do it." She brushed a bit of moss from her gauzy skirts and continued: "If I'm to become a boy I shall need a horse, you know. A handsome, prancing steed, very fleet of foot."

A moment she stood motionless, as if listening. Then she uttered a low but shrill whistle.

The three girls, filled with eager interest, watched her intently.

Presently a trampling of footsteps was heard through the brushwood, and a beautiful deer burst from the forest and fearlessly ran to the fairy. Without hesitation she waved her wand above the deer's head and exclaimed:

"By all my fairy powers I command you to become a war-horse for the period of one year."

Instantly the deer disappeared, and in its place was a handsome charger, milk-white in color, with flowing mane and tail. Upon its back was a saddle sparkling with brilliant gems sewn upon fine dressed leather.

The girls uttered cries of astonishment and delight, and the fairy said:

"You see, these transformations are not at all difficult. I must now have a sword."

She plucked a twig from a near-by tree and cast it upon the ground at her feet. Again she waved her wand-and the twig turned to a gleaming sword, richly engraved, that seemed to the silent watchers to tremble slightly in its sheath, as if its heart of steel throbbed with hopes of battles to come.

"And now I must have shield and armor," said the fairy, gaily. "This will make a shield," – and she stripped a sheet of loose bark from a tree-trunk, – "but for armor I must have something better. Will you give me your cloak?"

This appeal was made to Seseley, and the baron's daughter drew her white velvet cloak from her shoulders and handed it to the fairy. A moment later it was transformed into a suit of glittering armor that seemed fashioned of pure silver inlaid with gold, while the sheet of bark at the same time became a handsome shield, with the figures of three girls graven upon it. Seseley recognized the features as those of herself and her comrades, and noted also that they appeared sitting at the edge of a forest, the great trees showing plainly in the background.

"I shall be your champion, you see," laughed the fairy, gleefully, "and maybe I shall be able to repay you for the loss of your cloak."

"I do not mind the cloak," returned the child, who had been greatly interested in these strange transformations. "But it seems impossible that a dainty little girl like you can ride this horse and carry these heavy arms."

"I'll not be a girl much longer," said the little creature. "Here, take my wand, and transform me into a noble youth!"

Again the pretty fairy kneeled before Seseley, her dainty, rounded limbs of white and rose showing plainly through her gauzy attire. And the baron's daughter was suddenly inspired to be brave, not wishing to disappoint the venturesome immortal. So she rose and took the magic wand in her hand, waving it three times above the head of the fairy.

"By my powers as a mortal," she said, marveling even then at the strange speech, "I command you to become a brave and gallant youth-handsome, strong, fearless! And such shall you remain for the space of one year."

As she ceased speaking the fairy was gone, and a slender youth, dark-eyed and laughing, was holding her hand in his and kissing it gratefully.

"I thank you, most lovely maiden," he said, in a pleasant voice, "for giving me a place in the world of mortals. I shall ride at once in search of adventure, but my good sword is ever at your service."

With this he gracefully arose and began to buckle on his magnificent armor and to fasten the sword to his belt.

Seseley drew a long, sighing breath of amazement at her own powers, and turning to Berna and Helda she asked:

"Do I see aright? Is the little fairy really transformed to this youth?"

"It certainly seems so," returned Helda, who, being unabashed by the marvels she had beheld, turned to gaze boldly upon the young knight.

"Do you still remember that a moment ago you were a fairy?" she inquired.

"Yes, indeed," said he, smiling; "and I am really a fairy now, being but changed in outward form. But no one must know this save yourselves, until the year has expired and I resume my true station. Will you promise to guard my secret?"

"Oh, yes!" they exclaimed, in chorus. For they were delighted, as any children might well be, at having so remarkable a secret to keep and talk over among themselves.

"I must ask one more favor," continued the youth: "that you give me a name; for in this island I believe all men bear names of some sort, to distinguish them one from another."

"True," said Seseley, thoughtfully. "What were you called as a fairy?"

"That does not matter in the least," he answered, hastily. "I must have an entirely new name."

"Suppose we call him the Silver Knight," suggested Berna, as she eyed his glistening armor.

"Oh, no! – that is no name at all!" declared Helda. "We might better call him Baron Strongarm."

"I do not like that, either," said the Lady Seseley, "for we do not know whether his arm is strong or not. But he has been transformed in a most astonishing and bewildering manner before our very eyes, and I think the name of Prince Marvel would suit him very well."

"Excellent!" cried the youth, picking up his richly graven shield. "The name seems fitting in every way. And for a year I shall be known to all this island as Prince Marvel!"

5. The King of Thieves

Old Marshelm, the captain of the guard, was much surprised when he saw the baron's daughter and her playmates approach her father's castle escorted by a knight in glittering armor.

To be sure it was a rather small knight, but the horse he led by the bridle was so stately and magnificent in appearance that old Marshelm, who was an excellent judge of horses, at once decided the stranger must be a personage of unusual importance.

As they came nearer the captain of the guard also observed the beauty of the little knight's armor, and caught the glint of jewels set in the handle of his sword; so he called his men about him and prepared to receive the knight with the honors doubtless due his high rank.

But to the captain's disappointment the stranger showed no intention of entering the castle. On the contrary, he kissed the little Lady Seseley's hand respectfully, waved an adieu to the others, and then mounted his charger and galloped away over the plains.

The drawbridge was let down to permit the three children to enter, and the great Baron Merd came himself to question his daughter.

"Who was the little knight?" he asked.

"His name is Prince Marvel," answered Seseley, demurely.

"Prince Marvel?" exclaimed the Baron. "I have never heard of him. Does he come from the Kingdom of Dawna, or that of Auriel, or Plenta?"

"That I do not know," said Seseley, with truth.

"Where did you meet him?" continued the baron.

"In the forest, my father, and he kindly escorted us home."

"Hm!" muttered the baron, thoughtfully. "Did he say what adventure brought him to our Kingdom of Heg?"

"No, father. But he mentioned being in search of adventure."

"Oh, he'll find enough to busy him in this wild island, where every man he meets would rather draw his sword than eat," returned the old warrior, smiling. "How old may this Prince Marvel be?"

"He looks not over fifteen years of age," said Seseley, uneasy at so much questioning, for she did not wish to be forced to tell an untruth. "But it is possible he is much older," she added, beginning to get confused.

"Well, well; I am sorry he did not pay my castle a visit," declared the baron. "He is very small and slight to be traveling this dangerous country alone, and I might have advised him as to his welfare."

Seseley thought that Prince Marvel would need no advice from any one as to his conduct; but she wisely refrained from speaking this thought, and the old baron walked away to glance through a slit in the stone wall at the figure of the now distant knight.

Prince Marvel was riding swiftly toward the brow of the hill, and shortly his great war-horse mounted the ascent and disappeared on its farther slope.

The youth's heart was merry and light, and he reflected joyously, as he rode along, that a whole year of freedom and fascinating adventure lay before him.

The valley in which he now found himself was very beautiful, the soft grass beneath his horse's feet being sprinkled with bright flowers, while clumps of trees stood here and there to break the monotony of the landscape.

For an hour the prince rode along, rejoicing in the free motion of his horse and breathing in the perfume-laden air. Then he found he had crossed the valley and was approaching a series of hills. These were broken by huge rocks, the ground being cluttered with boulders of rough stone. His horse speedily found a pathway leading through these rocks, but was obliged to proceed at a walk, turning first one way and then another as the path zigzagged up the hill.

Presently, being engaged in deep thought and little noting the way, Prince Marvel rode between two high walls of rock standing so close together that horse and rider could scarcely pass between the sides. Having traversed this narrow space some distance the wall opened suddenly upon a level plat of ground, where grass and trees grew. It was not a very big place, but was surely the end of the path, as all around it stood bare walls so high and steep that neither horse nor man could climb them. In the side of the rocky wall facing the entrance the traveler noticed a hollow, like the mouth of a cave, across which was placed an iron gate. And above the gateway was painted in red letters on the gray stone the following words:

WUL-TAKIM

KING OF THIEVES

-

HIS TREASURE HOUSE

KEEP OUT

Prince Marvel laughed on reading this, and after getting down from his saddle he advanced to the iron gate and peered through its heavy bars.

"I have no idea who this Wul-Takim is," he said, "for I know nothing at all of the ways of men outside the forest in which I have always dwelt. But thieves are bad people, I am quite sure, and since Wul-Takim is the king of thieves he must be by far the worst man on this island."

Then he saw, through the bars of the gate, that a great cavern lay beyond, in which were stacked treasures of all sorts: rich cloths, golden dishes and ornaments, gemmed coronets and bracelets, cleverly forged armor, shields and battle-axes. Also there were casks and bales of merchandise of every sort.

The gate appeared to have no lock, so Prince Marvel opened it and walked in. Then he perceived, perched on the very top of a pyramid of casks, the form of a boy, who sat very still and watched him with a look of astonishment upon his face.

"What are you doing up there?" asked the prince.

"Nothing," said the boy. "If I moved the least little bit this pile of casks would topple over, and I should be thrown to the ground."

"Well," returned the prince, "what of it?"

But just then he glanced at the ground and saw why the boy did not care to tumble down. For in the earth were planted many swords, with their sharp blades pointing upward, and to fall upon these meant serious wounds and perhaps death.

"Oh, ho!" cried Marvel; "I begin to understand. You are a prisoner."

"Yes; as you will also be shortly," answered the boy. "And then you will understand another thing-that you were very reckless ever to enter this cave."

"Why?" inquired the prince, who really knew little of the world, and was interested in everything he saw and heard.

"Because it is the stronghold of the robber king, and when you opened that gate you caused a bell to ring far down on the hillside. So the robbers are now warned that an enemy is in their cave, and they will soon arrive to make you a prisoner, even as I am."

"Ah, I see!" said the prince, with a laugh, "It is a rather clever contrivance; but having been warned in time I should indeed be foolish to be caught in such a trap."

With this he half drew his sword, but thinking that robbers were not worthy to be slain with its untarnished steel, he pushed it back into the jeweled scabbard and looked around for another weapon. A stout oaken staff lay upon the ground, and this he caught up and ran with it from the cave, placing himself just beside the narrow opening that led into this rock-encompassed plain. For he quickly saw that this was the only way any one could enter or leave the place, and therefore knew the robbers were coming up the narrow gorge even as he had himself done.

Soon they were heard stumbling along at a rapid pace, crying to one another to make haste and catch the intruder. The first that came through the opening received so sharp a blow upon the head from Prince Marvel's oak staff that he fell to the ground and lay still, while the next was treated in a like manner and fell beside his comrade.

Perhaps the thieves had not expected so sturdy an enemy, for they continued to rush through the opening in the rocks and to fall beneath the steady blows of the prince's staff until every one of them lay senseless before the victor. At first they had piled themselves upon one another very neatly; but the pile got so high at last that the prince was obliged to assist the last thieves to leap to the top of the heap before they completely lost their senses.

I have no doubt our prince, feeling himself yet strange in the new form he had acquired, and freshly transported from the forest glades in which he had always lived, was fully as much astonished at his deed of valor as were the robbers themselves; and if he shuddered a little when looking upon the heap of senseless thieves you must forgive him this weakness. For he straightway resolved to steel his heart to such sights and to be every bit as stern and severe as a mortal knight would have been.

Throwing down his staff he ran to the cave again, and stepping between the sword points he approached the pile of casks and held out his arms to the boy who was perched upon the top.

"The thieves are conquered," he cried. "Jump down!"

"I won't," said the boy.

"Why not?" inquired the prince.

"Can't you see I'm very miserable?" asked the boy, in return; "don't you understand that every minute I expect to fall upon those sword points?"

"But I will catch you," cried the prince.

"I don't want you to catch me," said the boy. "I want to be miserable. It's the first chance I've ever had, and I'm enjoying my misery very much."

This speech so astonished Prince Marvel that for a moment he stood motionless. Then he retorted, angrily:

"You're a fool!"

"If I wasn't so miserable up here, I'd come down and thrash you for that," said the boy, with a sigh.

This answer so greatly annoyed Prince Marvel that he gave the central cask of the pyramid a sudden push, and the next moment the casks were tumbling in every direction, while the boy fell headlong in their midst.

But Marvel caught him deftly in his arms, and so saved him from the sword points.

"There!" he said, standing the boy upon his feet; "now you are released from your misery."

"And I should be glad to punish you for your interference," declared the boy, gloomily eying his preserver, "had you not saved my life by catching me. According to the code of honor of knighthood I can not harm one who has saved my life until I have returned the obligation. Therefore, for the present I shall pardon your insulting speeches and actions."

"But you have also saved my life," answered Prince Marvel; "for had you not warned me of the robbers' return they would surely have caught me."

"True," said the boy, brightening up; "therefore our score is now even. But take care not to affront me again, for hereafter I will show you no mercy!"

Prince Marvel looked at the boy with wonder. He was about his own size, yet strong and well formed, and he would have been handsome except for the expression of discontent upon his face. Yet his manner and words were so absurd and unnatural that the prince was more amused than angered by his new acquaintance, and presently laughed in his face.

"If all the people in this island are like you," he said, "I shall have lots of fun with them. And you are only a boy, after all."

"I'm bigger than you!" declared the other, glaring fiercely at the prince.

"How much bigger?" asked Marvel, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, ever so much!"

"Then fetch along that coil of rope, and follow me," said Prince Marvel.

"Fetch the rope yourself!" retorted the boy, bluntly. "I'm not your servant." Then he put his hands in his pockets and coolly walked out of the cave to look at the pile of senseless robbers.

Prince Marvel made no reply, but taking the coil of rope on his shoulder he carried it to where the thieves lay and threw it down beside them. Then he cut lengths from the coil with his sword and bound the limbs of each robber securely. Within a half-hour he had laid out a row of thieves extending half way across the grassy plain, and on counting their number he found he had captured fifty-nine of them.

This task being accomplished and the robbers rendered helpless, Prince Marvel turned to the boy who stood watching him.

"Get a suit of armor from the cave, and a strong sword, and then return here," he said, in a stern voice.

"Why should I do that?" asked the boy, rather impudently.

"Because I am going to fight you for disobeying my orders; and if you do not protect yourself I shall probably kill you."

"That sounds pleasant," said the boy. "But if you should prove my superior in skill I beg you will not kill me at once, but let me die a lingering death."

"Why?" asked the prince.

"Because I shall suffer more, and that will be delightful."

"I am not anxious to kill you, nor to make you suffer," said Marvel, "all that I ask is that you acknowledge me your master."

"I won't!" answered the boy. "I acknowledge no master in all the world!"

"Then you must fight," declared the prince, gravely. "If you win, I will promise to serve you faithfully; and if I conquer you, then you must acknowledge me your master, and obey my commands."

"Agreed!" cried the boy, with sudden energy, and he rushed into the cave and soon returned clad in armor and bearing a sword and shield. On the shield was pictured a bolt of lightning.

"Lightning will soon strike those three girls whose champion you seem to be," he said tauntingly.

"The three girls defy your lightning!" returned the prince with a smile. "I see you are brave enough."

"Brave! Why should I not be?" answered the boy proudly. "I am the Lord Nerle, the son of Neggar, the chief baron of Heg!"

The other bowed low.

"I am pleased to know your station," he said. "I am called Prince Marvel, and this is my first adventure."

"And likely to be your last," exclaimed the boy, sneeringly. "For I am stronger than you, and I have fought many times with full grown men."

"Are you ready?" asked Prince Marvel, for answer.

"Yes."

Then the swords clashed and sparks flew from the blades. But it was not for long. Suddenly Nerle's sword went flying through the air and shattered its blade against a wall of rock. He scowled at Prince Marvel a moment, who smiled back at him. Then the boy rushed into the cave and returned with another sword.

Scarcely had the weapons crossed again when with a sudden blow Prince Marvel snapped Nerle's blade in two, and followed this up with a sharp slap upon his ear with the flat of his own sword that fairly bewildered the boy, and made him sit down on the grass to think what had happened to him.

Then Prince Marvel's merry laugh rang far across the hills, and so delighted was he at the astonished expression upon Nerle's face that it was many minutes before he could control his merriment and ask his foeman if he had had enough fight.

"I suppose I have," replied the boy, rubbing his ear tenderly. "That blow stings most deliciously. But it is a hard thought that the son of Baron Neggar should serve Prince Marvel!"

"Do not worry about that," said the prince; "for I assure you my rank is so far above your own that it is no degradation for the son of Neggar to serve me. But come, we must dispose of these thieves. What is the proper fate for such men?"

"They are always hanged," answered Nerle, getting upon his feet.

"Well, there are trees handy," remarked the prince, although his girlish heart insisted on making him shiver in spite of his resolve to be manly and stern. "Let us get to work and hang them as soon as possible. And then we can proceed upon our journey."

Nerle now willingly lent his assistance to his new master, and soon they had placed a rope around the neck of each thief and were ready to dangle them all from the limbs of the trees.

But at this juncture the thieves began to regain consciousness, and now Wul-Takim, the big, red-bearded king of the thieves, sat up and asked:

"Who is our conqueror?"

"Prince Marvel," answered Nerle.

"And what army assisted him?" inquired Wul-Takim, curiously gazing upon the prince.

"He conquered you alone and single-handed," said Nerle.

Hearing this, the big king began to weep bitterly, and the tear-drops ran down his face in such a stream that Prince Marvel ordered Nerle to wipe them away with his handkerchief, as the thief's hands were tied behind his back.

"To think!" sobbed Wul-Takim, miserably; "only to think, that after all my terrible deeds and untold wickedness, I have been captured by a mere boy! Oh, boo-hoo! boo-hoo! boo-hoo! It is a terrible disgrace!"

"You will not have to bear it long," said the prince, soothingly. "I am going to hang you in a few minutes."

"Thanks! Thank you very much!" answered the king, ceasing to weep. "I have always expected to be hanged some day, and I am glad no one but you two boys will witness me when my feet begin kicking about."

"I shall not kick," declared another of the thieves, who had also regained his senses. "I shall sing while I am being hanged."

"But you can not, my good Gunder," protested the king; "for the rope will cut off your breath, and no man can sing without breath."

"Then I shall whistle," said Gunder, composedly.

The king cast at him a look of reproach, and turning to Prince Marvel he said:

"It will be a great task to string up so many thieves. You look tired. Permit me to assist you to hang the others, and then I will climb into a tree and hang myself from a strong branch, with as little bother as possible."

"Oh, I won't think of troubling you," exclaimed Marvel, with a laugh. "Having conquered you alone, I feel it my duty to hang you without assistance—save that of my esquire."

"It's no trouble, I assure you; but suit your own convenience," said the thief, carelessly. Then he cast his eye toward the cave and asked: "What will you do with all our treasure?"

"Give it to the poor," said Prince Marvel, promptly.

"What poor?"

"Oh, the poorest people I can find."

"Will you permit me to advise you in this matter?" asked the king of thieves, politely.

"Yes, indeed; for I am a stranger in this land," returned the prince.

"Well, I know a lot of people who are so poor that they have no possessions whatever, neither food to eat, houses to live in, nor any clothing but that which covers their bodies. They can call no man friend, nor will any lift a hand to help them. Indeed, good sir, I verily believe they will soon perish miserably unless you come to their assistance!"

"Poor creatures!" exclaimed Prince Marvel, with ready sympathy; "tell me who they are, and I will divide amongst them all your ill-gotten gains."

"They are ourselves," replied the king of thieves, with a sigh.

Marvel looked at him in amazement, and then burst into joyous laughter.

"Yourselves!" he cried, greatly amused.

"Indeed, yes!" said Wul-Takim, sadly. "There are no poorer people in all the world, for we have ropes about our necks and are soon to be hanged. To-morrow we shall not have even our flesh left, for the crows will pick our bones."

"That is true," remarked Marvel, thoughtfully. "But, if I restore to you the treasure, how will it benefit you, since you are about to die?"

"Must you really hang us?" asked the thief.

"Yes; I have decreed it, and you deserve your fate."

"Why?"

"Because you have wickedly taken from helpless people their property, and committed many other crimes besides."

"But I have reformed! We have all reformed—have we not, brothers?"

"We have!" answered the other thieves, who, having regained their senses, were listening to this conversation with much interest.

"And, if you will return to us our treasure, we will promise never to steal again, but to remain honest men and enjoy our wealth in peace," promised the king.

"Honest men could not enjoy treasures they have stolen," said Prince Marvel.

"True; but this treasure is now yours, having been won by you in fair battle. And if you present it to us it will no longer be stolen treasure, but a generous gift from a mighty prince, which we may enjoy with clear consciences."

"Yet there remains the fact that I have promised to hang you," suggested Prince Marvel, with a smile, for the king amused him greatly.

"Not at all! Not at all!" cried Wul-Takim. "You promised to hang fifty-nine thieves, and there is no doubt the fifty-nine thieves deserved to be hung. But, consider! We have all reformed our ways and become honest men; so it would be a sad and unkindly act to hang fifty-nine honest men!"

"What think you, Nerle?" asked the Prince, turning to his esquire.

"Why, the rogue seems to speak truth," said Nerle, scratching his head with a puzzled air, "yet, if he speaks truth, there is little difference between a rogue and an honest man. Ask him, my master, what caused them all to reform so suddenly."

"Because we were about to die, and we thought it a good way to save our lives," replied the robber king.

"That's an honest answer, anyway," said Nerle. "Perhaps, sir, they have really reformed."

"And if so, I will not have the death of fifty-nine honest men on my conscience," declared the prince. Then he turned to Wul-Takim and added: "I will release you and give you the treasure, as you request. But you owe me allegiance from this time forth, and if I ever hear of your becoming thieves again, I promise to return and hang every one of you."

"Never fear!" answered Wul-Takim, joyfully. "It is hard work to steal, and while we have so much treasure it is wholly unnecessary. Moreover, having accepted from you our lives and our fortunes, we shall hereafter be your devoted servants, and whenever you need our services you have but to call upon us, and we will support you loyally and gladly."

"I accept your service," answered the prince, graciously.

And then he unbound the fifty-nine honest men and took the ropes from their necks. As nightfall was fast approaching the new servants set to work to prepare a great feast in honor of their master. It was laid in the middle of the grassy clearing, that all might sit around and celebrate the joyous occasion.

"Do you think you can trust these men?" asked Nerle, suspiciously.

"Why not?" replied the prince. "They have been exceedingly wicked, it is true; but they are now intent upon being exceedingly good. Let us encourage them in this. If we mistrusted all who have ever done an evil act there would be fewer honest people in the world. And if it were as interesting to do a good act as an evil one there is no doubt every one would choose the good."

6. The Troubles of Nerle

That night Prince Marvel slept within the cave, surrounded by the fifty-nine reformed thieves, and suffered no harm at their hands. In the morning, accompanied by his esquire, Nerle, who was mounted upon a spirited horse brought him by Wul-Takim, he charged the honest men to remember their promises, bade them good by, and set out in search of further adventure.

As they left the clearing by the narrow passage that led between the overhanging rocks, the prince looked back and saw that the sign above the gate of the cave, which had told of the thieves' treasure house, had been changed. It now read as follows:

WUL-TAKIM

KING OF HONEST MEN

-

HIS PLEASURE HOUSE

WALK IN

"That is much better," laughed the prince. "I accomplished some good by my adventure, anyway!"

Nerle did not reply. He seemed especially quiet and thoughtful as he rode by his master's side, and after they had traveled some distance in silence Prince Marvel said:

"Tell me how you came to be in the cave of thieves, and perched upon the casks where I found you."

"It is a sad story," returned Nerle, with a sigh; "but since you request me to tell it, the tale may serve to relieve the tedium of your journey.

"My father is a mighty baron, very wealthy and with a heart so kind that he has ever taken pleasure in thrusting on me whatever gift he could think of. I had not a single desire unsatisfied, for before I could wish for anything it was given me.

"My mother was much like my father. She and her women were always making jams, jellies, candies, cakes and the like for me to eat; so I never knew the pleasure of hunger. My clothes were the gayest satins and velvets, richly made and sewn with gold and silver braid; so it was impossible to wish for more in the way of apparel. They let me study my lessons whenever I felt like it and go fishing or hunting as I pleased; so I could not complain that I was unable to do just as I wanted to. All the servants obeyed my slightest wish: if I wanted to sit up late at night no one objected; if I wished to lie in bed till noon they kept the house quiet so as not to disturb me.

"This condition of affairs, as you may imagine, grew more and more tedious and exasperating the older I became. Try as I might, I could find nothing to complain of. I once saw the son of one of our servants receive a flogging; and my heart grew light. I immediately begged my father to flog me, by way of variety; and he, who could refuse me nothing, at once consented. For this reason there

was less satisfaction in the operation than I had expected, although for the time being it was a distinct novelty.

"Now, no one could expect a high-spirited boy to put up with such a life as mine. With nothing to desire and no chance of doing anything that would annoy my parents, my days were dreary indeed."

He paused to wipe the tears from his eyes, and the prince murmured, sympathetically: "Poor boy! Poor boy!"

"Ah, you may well say that!" continued Nerle. "But one day a stranger came to my father's castle with tales of many troubles he had met with. He had been lost in a forest and nearly starved to death. He had been robbed and beaten and left wounded and sore by the wayside. He had begged from door to door and been refused food or assistance. In short, his story was so delightful that it made me envy him, and I yearned to suffer as he had done. When I could speak with him alone I said: 'Pray tell me how I can manage to acquire the misfortunes you have undergone. Here I have everything that I desire, and it makes me very unhappy.'

"The stranger laughed at me, at first; and I found some pleasure in the humiliation I then felt. But it did not last long, for presently he grew sober and advised me to run away from home and seek adventure.

"'Once away from your father's castle,' said he, 'troubles will fall upon you thick enough to satisfy even your longings.'

"'That is what I am afraid of!' I answered. 'I don't want to be satisfied, even with troubles. What I seek is unsatisfied longings.'

"'Nevertheless,' said he, 'I advise you to travel. Everything will probably go wrong with you, and then you will be happy.'

"I acted upon the stranger's advice and ran away from home the next day. After journeying a long time I commenced to feel the pangs of hunger, and was just beginning to enjoy myself when a knight rode by and gave me a supply of food. At this rebuff I could not restrain my tears, but while I wept my horse stumbled and threw me over his head. I hoped at first I had broken my neck, and was just congratulating myself upon the misfortune, when a witch-woman came along and rubbed some ointment upon my bruises, in spite of my protests. To my great grief the pain left me, and I was soon well again. But, as a slight compensation for my disappointment, my horse had run away; so I began my journey anew and on foot.

"That afternoon I stepped into a nest of wasps, but the thoughtless creatures flew away without stinging me. Then I met a fierce tiger, and my heart grew light and gay. 'Surely this will cause me suffering!' I cried, and advanced swiftly upon the brute. But the cowardly tiger turned tail and ran to hide in the bushes, leaving me unhurt!

"Of course, my many disappointments were some consolation; but not much. That night I slept on the bare ground, and hoped I should catch a severe cold; but no such joy was to be mine.

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