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THE OLIVE FAIRY BOOK

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PREFACE

Many years ago my friend and publisher, Mr. Charles Longman, presented me with *Le Cabinet des Fées* ('The Fairy Cabinet'). This work almost requires a swinging bookcase for its accommodation, like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and in a revolving bookcase I bestowed the volumes. Circumstances of an intimately domestic character, 'not wholly unconnected,' as Mr. Micawber might have said, with the narrowness of my study (in which it is impossible to 'swing a cat'), prevent the revolving bookcase from revolving at this moment. I can see, however, that the Fairy Cabinet contains at least forty volumes, and I think there are about sixty in all. This great plenitude of fairy tales from all quarters presents legends of fairies, witches, genii or Djinn, monsters, dragons, wicked step-mothers, princesses, pretty or plain, princes lucky or unlucky, giants, dwarfs, and enchantments. The stories begin with those which children like best – the old *Blue Beard*, *Puss in Boots*, *Hop o' my Thumb*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Toads and Pearls*. These were first collected, written, and printed at Paris in 1697. The author was Monsieur Charles Perrault, a famous personage

in a great *perruque*, who in his day wrote large volumes now unread. He never dreamed that he was to be remembered mainly by the shabby little volume with the tiny headpiece pictures – how unlike the fairy way of drawing by Mr. Ford, said to be known as 'Over-the-wall Ford' among authors who play cricket, because of the force with which he swipes! Perrault picked up the rustic tales which the nurse of his little boy used to tell, and he told them again in his own courtly, witty way. They do not seem to have been translated into English until nearly thirty years later, when they were published in English, with the French on the opposite page, by a Mr. Pote, a bookseller at Eton. Probably the younger Eton boys learned as much French as they condescended to acquire from these fairy tales, which are certainly more amusing than the *Télémaque* of Messire François de Salignac de la Motte-Fénelon, tutor of the children of France, Archbishop Duke of Cambrai, and Prince of the Holy Roman Empire.

The success of Perrault was based on the pleasure which the court of Louis XIV. took in fairy tales; we know that they were told among Court ladies, from a letter of Madame de Sévigné. Naturally, Perrault had imitators, such as Madame d'Aulnoy, a wandering lady of more wit than reputation. To her we owe *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Yellow Dwarf*. Anthony Hamilton tried his hand with *The Ram*, a story too prolix and confused, best remembered for the remark, 'Ram, my friend, begin at the beginning!' Indeed, the narrative style of the Ram is lacking in lucidity! Then came *The Arabian Nights*, translated by Monsieur

Galland. Nobody has translated *The Arabian Nights* so well as Galland. His is the reverse of a scientific rendering, but it is as pleasantly readable as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would be if Alexandre Dumas had kept his promise to translate Homer. Galland omitted the verses and a great number of passages which nobody would miss, though the anthropologist is supposed to find them valuable and instructive in later scientific translations which do not amuse. Later, Persian Tales, Tales of the Sea, and original inventions, more or less on the fairy model, were composed by industrious men and women. They are far too long – are novels, indeed, and would please no child or mature person of taste. All these were collected in the vast Fairy Cabinet, published in 1786, just before the Revolution. Probably their attempt to be simple charmed a society which was extremely artificial, talked about 'the simple life' and the 'state of nature,' and was on the eve of a revolution in which human nature revealed her most primitive traits in orgies of blood.

That was the end of the Court and of the Court Fairy Tales, and just when they were demolished, learned men like the Grimms and Sir Walter Scott began to take an interest in the popular tales of peasants and savages all the world over. All the world over the tales were found to be essentially the same things. *Cinderella* is everywhere; a whole book has been written on *Cinderella* by Miss Cox, and a very good book it is, but not interesting to children. For them the best of the collections of foreign fairy tales are the German stories by the Grimms,

the *Tales from the Norse*, by Sir G. W. Dasent, (which some foolish 'grown-ups' denounced as 'improper'), and Miss Frere's Indian stories. There are hundreds of collections of savage and peasant fairy tales, but, though many of these are most interesting, especially Bishop Callaway's Zulu stories (with the Zulu versions), these do not come in the way of parents and uncles, and therefore do not come in the way of children. It is my wish that children should be allowed to choose their own books. Let their friends give them the money and turn them loose in the book shops! They know their own tastes, and if the children are born bookish, while their dear parents are the reverse, (and this does occur!), then the children make the better choice. They are unaffected in their selections; some want Shakespeares of their own, and some prefer a volume entitled *Buster Brown*. A few – alas, how few! – are fond of poetry; a still smaller number are fond of history. 'We know that there are no fairies, but history stories are *true*!' say these little innocents. I am not so sure that there are no fairies, and I am only too well aware that the best 'history stories' are not true.

What children do love is ghost stories. 'Tell us a ghost story!' they cry, and I am able to meet the demand, with which I am in sincere sympathy. Only strong control prevents me from telling the last true ghost story which I heard yesterday. It would suit children excellently well. 'The Grey Ghost Story Book' would be a favourite. At a very early age I read a number of advertisements of books, and wept because I could not buy dozens of them,

and somebody gave me a book on Botany! It looked all right, nicely bound in green cloth, but within it was full of all manner of tediousness.

In our Fairy Cabinet, which cannot extend to sixty volumes, we have aimed at pleasing children, not 'grown-ups,' at whom the old French writers directed their romances, but have hunted for fairy tales in all quarters, not in Europe alone. In this volume we open, thanks to Dr. Ignaz Künos, with a story from the Turks. 'Little King Loc' is an original invention by M. Anatole France, which he very kindly permitted Mrs. Lang to adapt from *L'Abeille*.

Major Campbell, as previously, tells tales which he collected among the natives of India. But the sources are usually named at the end of each story, and when they are not named children will not miss them. Mrs. Lang, except in cases mentioned, has translated and adapted to the conditions of young readers the bulk of the collection, and Mrs. Skovgaard-Pedersen has done 'The Green Knight' from the Danish. I must especially thank Monsieur Macler for permitting us to use some of his *Contes Arméniens* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, Editeur).

MADSCHUN

Once upon a time there lived, in a small cottage among some hills, a woman with her son, and, to her great grief, the young man, though hardly more than twenty years of age, had not as much hair on his head as a baby. But, old as he looked, the youth was very idle, and whatever trade his mother put him to he refused to work, and in a few days always came home again.

On a fine summer morning he was lying as usual half asleep in the little garden in front of the cottage when the sultan's daughter came riding by, followed by a number of gaily dressed ladies. The youth lazily raised himself on his elbow to look at her, and that one glance changed his whole nature.

'I will marry her and nobody else,' he thought. And jumping up, he went to find his mother.

'You must go at once to the sultan, and tell him that I want his daughter for my wife,' he said.

'What?' shouted the old woman, shrinking back into a corner, for nothing but sudden madness could explain such an amazing errand.

'Don't you understand? You must go at once to the sultan and tell him that I want his daughter for my wife,' repeated the youth impatiently.

'But – but, do you know what you are saying?' stammered the mother. 'You will learn no trade, and have only the five gold

pieces left you by your father, and can you really expect that the sultan would give his daughter to a penniless bald-pate like you?'

'That is *my* affair; do as I bid you.' And neither day nor night did her son cease tormenting her, till, in despair, she put on her best clothes, and wrapped her veil about her, and went over the hill to the palace.

It was the day that the sultan set apart for hearing the complaints and petitions of his people, so the woman found no difficulty in gaining admission to his presence.

'Do not think me mad, O Excellency,' she began, 'though I know I must seem like it. But I have a son who, since his eyes have rested on the veiled face of the princess, has not left me in peace day or night till I consented to come to the palace, and to ask your Excellency for your daughter's hand. It was in vain I answered that my head might pay the forfeit of my boldness, he would listen to nothing. Therefore am I here; do with me even as you will!'

Now the sultan always loved anything out of the common, and this situation was new indeed. So, instead of ordering the trembling creature to be flogged or cast into prison, as some other sovereigns might have done, he merely said: 'Bid your son come hither.'

The old woman stared in astonishment at such a reply. But when the sultan repeated his words even more gently than before, and did not look in anywise angered, she took courage, and bowing again she hastened homeward.

'Well, how have you sped?' asked her son eagerly as she crossed the threshold.

'You are to go up to the palace without delay, and speak to the sultan himself,' replied the mother. And when he heard the good news, his face lightened up so wonderfully that his mother thought what a pity it was that he had no hair, as then he would be quite handsome.

'Ah, the lightning will not fly more swiftly,' cried he. And in another instant he was out of her sight.

When the sultan beheld the bald head of his daughter's wooer, he no longer felt in the mood for joking, and resolved that he must somehow or other shake himself free of such an unwelcome lover. But as he had summoned the young man to the palace, he could hardly dismiss him without a reason, so he hastily said:

'I hear you wish to marry my daughter? Well and good. But the man who is to be her husband must first collect all the birds in the world, and bring them into the gardens of the palace; for hitherto no birds have made their homes in the trees.'

The young man was filled with despair at the sultan's words. How was he to snare all these birds? and even if he *did* succeed in catching them it would take years to carry them to the palace! Still, he was too proud to let the sultan think that he had given up the princess without a struggle, so he took a road that led past the palace and walked on, not noticing whither he went.

In this manner a week slipped by, and at length he found himself crossing a desert with great rocks scattered here and

there. In the shadow cast by one of these was seated a holy man or dervish, as he was called, who motioned to the youth to sit beside him.

'Something is troubling you, my son,' said the holy man; 'tell me what it is, as I may be able to help you.'

'O, my father,' answered the youth, 'I wish to marry the princess of my country; but the sultan refuses to give her to me unless I can collect all the birds in the world and bring them into his garden. And how can I, or any other man, do that?'

'Do not despair,' replied the dervish, 'it is not so difficult as it sounds. Two days' journey from here, in the path of the setting sun, there stands a cypress tree, larger than any other cypress that grows upon the earth. Sit down where the shadow is darkest, close to the trunk, and keep very still. By-and-by you will hear a mighty rushing of wings, and all the birds in the world will come and nestle in the branches. Be careful not to make a sound till everything is quiet again, and then say "Madschun!" At that the birds will be forced to remain where they are – not one can move from its perch; and you will be able to place them all over your head and arms and body, and in this way you must carry them to the sultan.'

With a glad heart the young man thanked the dervish, and paid such close heed to his directions that, a few days later, a strange figure covered with soft feathers walked into the presence of the sultan. The princess's father was filled with surprise, for never had he seen such a sight before. Oh! how lovely were those

little bodies, and bright frightened eyes! Soon a gentle stirring was heard, and what a multitude of wings unfolded themselves: blue wings, yellow wings, red wings, green wings. And when the young man whispered 'Go,' they first flew in circles round the sultan's head, and then disappeared through the open window, to choose homes in the garden.

'I have done your bidding, O Sultan, and now give me the princess,' said the youth. And the sultan answered hurriedly:

'Yes! oh, yes! you have pleased me well! Only one thing remains to turn you into a husband that any girl might desire. That head of yours, you know – it is so *very* bald! Get it covered with nice thick curly hair, and *then* I will give you my daughter. You are so clever that I am sure this will give you no trouble at all.'

Silently the young man listened to the sultan's words, and silently he sat in his mother's kitchen for many days to come, till, one morning, the news reached him that the sultan had betrothed his daughter to the son of the wizir, and that the wedding was to be celebrated without delay in the palace. With that he arose in wrath, and made his way quickly and secretly to a side door, used only by the workmen who kept the building in repair, and, unseen by anyone, he made his way into the mosque, and then entered the palace by a gallery which opened straight into the great hall. Here the bride and bridegroom and two or three friends were assembled, waiting for the appearance of the sultan for the contract to be signed.

'Madschun!' whispered the youth from above. And instantly

everyone remained rooted to the ground; and some messengers whom the sultan had sent to see that all was ready shared the same fate.

At length, angry and impatient, the sultan went down to behold with his own eyes what had happened, but as nobody could give him any explanation, he bade one of his attendants to fetch a magician, who dwelt near one of the city gates, to remove the spell which had been cast by some evil genius.

'It is your own fault,' said the magician, when he had heard the sultan's story. 'If you had not broken your promise to the young man, your daughter would not have had this ill befall her. Now there is only one remedy, and the bridegroom you have chosen must yield his place to the bald-headed youth.'

Sore though he was in his heart, the sultan knew that the magician was wiser than he, and despatched his most trusted servants to seek out the young man without a moment's delay and bring him to the palace. The youth, who all this time had been hiding behind a pillar, smiled to himself when he heard these words, and, hastening home, he said to his mother: 'If messengers from the sultan should come here and ask for me, be sure you answer that it is a long while since I went away, and that you cannot tell where I may be, but that if they will give you money enough for your journey, as you are very poor, you will do your best to find me.' Then he hid himself in the loft above, so that he could listen to all that passed.

The next minute someone knocked loudly at the door, and the

old woman jumped up and opened it.

'Is your bald-headed son here?' asked the man outside. 'If so, let him come with me, as the sultan wishes to speak with him directly.'

'Alas! sir,' replied the woman, putting a corner of her veil to her eyes, 'he left me long since, and since that day no news of him has reached me.'

'Oh! good lady, can you not guess where he may be? The sultan intends to bestow on him the hand of his daughter, and he is certain to give a large reward to the man who brings him back.'

'He never told me whither he was going,' answered the crone, shaking her head. 'But it is a great honour that the sultan does him, and well worth some trouble. There *are* places where, perhaps, he may be found, but they are known to me only, and I am a poor woman and have no money for the journey.'

'Oh! that will not stand in the way,' cried the man. 'In this purse are a thousand gold pieces; spend them freely. Tell me where I can find him and you shall have as many more.'

'Very well,' said she, 'it is a bargain; and now farewell, for I must make some preparations; but in a few days at furthest you shall hear from me.'

For nearly a week both the old woman and her son were careful not to leave the house till it was dark, lest they should be seen by any of the neighbours, and as they did not even kindle a fire or light a lantern, everyone supposed that the cottage was deserted. At length one fine morning, the young man got up early

and dressed himself, and put on his best turban, and after a hasty breakfast took the road to the palace.

The huge negro before the door evidently expected him, for without a word he let him pass, and another attendant who was waiting inside conducted him straight into the presence of the sultan, who welcomed him gladly.

'Ah, my son! where have you hidden yourself all this time?' said he. And the bald-headed man answered:

'Oh, Sultan! Fairly I won your daughter, but you broke your word, and would not give her to me. Then my home grew hateful to me, and I set out to wander through the world! But now that you have repented of your ill-faith, I have come to claim the wife who is mine of right. Therefore bid your wizir prepare the contract.'

So a fresh contract was prepared, and at the wish of the new bridegroom was signed by the sultan and the wizir in the chamber where they met. After this was done, the youth begged the sultan to lead him to the princess, and together they entered the big hall, where everyone was standing exactly as they were when the young man had uttered the fatal word.

'Can you remove the spell?' asked the sultan anxiously.

'I think so,' replied the young man (who, to say the truth, was a little anxious himself), and stepping forward, he cried:

'Let the victims of Madschun be free!'

No sooner were the words uttered than the statues returned to life, and the bride placed her hand joyfully in that of her new

bridegroom. As for the old one, he vanished completely, and no one ever knew what became of him.

(Adapted from *Türkische Volksmärchen aus Stambul*. Dr. Ignaz Künos. E. J. Brill, Leiden.)

THE BLUE PARROT

In a part of Arabia where groves of palms and sweet-scented flowers give the traveller rest after toilsome journeys under burning skies, there reigned a young king whose name was Lino. He had grown up under the wise rule of his father, who had lately died, and though he was only nineteen, he did not believe, like many young men, that he must change all the laws in order to show how clever he was, but was content with the old ones which had made the people happy and the country prosperous. There was only one fault that his subjects had to find with him, and that was that he did not seem in any hurry to be married, in spite of the prayers that they frequently offered him.

The neighbouring kingdom was governed by the Swan fairy, who had an only daughter, the Princess Hermosa, who was as charming in her way as Lino in his. The Swan fairy always had an ambassador at the young king's court, and on hearing the grumbles of the citizens that Lino showed no signs of taking a wife, the good man resolved that *he* would try his hand at match-making. 'For,' he said, 'if there is any one living who is worthy of the Princess Hermosa he is to be found here. At any rate, I can but try and bring them together.'

Now, of course, it was not proper to offer the princess in marriage, and the difficulty was to work upon the unconscious king so as to get the proposal to come from *him*. But the

ambassador was well used to the ways of courts, and after several conversations on the art of painting, which Lino loved, he led the talk to portraits, and mentioned carelessly that a particularly fine picture had lately been made of his own princess. 'Though, as for a likeness,' he concluded, 'perhaps it is hardly as good as this small miniature, which was painted a year ago.'

The king took it, and looked at it closely.

'Ah!' he sighed, 'that must be flattered! It cannot be possible that any woman should be such a miracle of beauty.'

'If you could only see her,' answered the ambassador.

The king did not reply, but the ambassador was not at all surprised when, the following morning, he was sent for into the royal presence.

'Since you showed me that picture,' began Lino, almost before the door was shut, 'I have not been able to banish the face of the princess from my thoughts. I have summoned you here to inform you that I am about to send special envoys to the court of the Swan fairy, asking her daughter in marriage.'

'I cannot, as you will understand, speak for my mistress in so important a matter,' replied the ambassador, stroking his beard in order to conceal the satisfaction he felt. 'But I know that she will certainly be highly gratified at your proposal.'

'If that is so,' cried the king, his whole face beaming with joy, 'then, instead of sending envoys, I will go myself, and take you with me. In three days my preparations will be made, and we will set out.'

Unluckily for Lino, he had for his neighbour on the other side a powerful magician named Ismenor, who was king of the Isle of Lions, and the father of a hideous daughter, whom he thought the most beautiful creature that ever existed. Riquette, for such was her name, had also fallen in love with a portrait, but it was of King Lino, and she implored her father to give him to her for a husband. Ismenor, who considered that no man lived who was worthy of his treasure, was about to send his chief minister to King Lino on this mission, when the news reached him that the king had already started for the court of the Swan fairy. Riquette was thrown into transports of grief, and implored her father to prevent the marriage, which Ismenor promised to do; and calling for an ugly and humpbacked little dwarf named Rabot, he performed some spells which transported them quickly to a rocky valley through which the king and his escort were bound to pass. When the tramp of horses was heard, the magician took out an enchanted handkerchief, which rendered invisible any one who touched it. Giving one end to Rabot, and holding the other himself, they walked unseen amongst the horsemen, but not a trace of Lino was to be found. And this was natural enough, because the king, tired out with the excitement and fatigue of the last few days, had bidden the heavy coaches, laden with presents for the princess, to go forwards, while he rested under the palms with a few of his friends. Here Ismenor beheld them, all sound asleep; and casting a spell which prevented their waking till he wished them to do so, he stripped the king of all his clothes and

dressed him in those of Rabot, whom he touched with his ring, saying:

'Take the shape of Lino until you have wedded the daughter of the Swan fairy.'

And so great was the magician's power that Rabot positively believed himself to be really the king!

When the groom had mounted Lino's horse, and had ridden out of sight, Ismenor aroused the king, who stared with astonishment at the dirty garments in which he was dressed; but before he had time to look about him, the magician caught him up in a cloud, and carried him off to his daughter.

Meantime Rabot had come up with the others, who never guessed for a moment that he was not their own master.

'I am hungry,' said he, 'give me something to eat at once.'

'May it please your majesty,' answered the steward, 'the tents are not even set up, and it will be at least an hour before your supper is served! We thought – '

'Who taught you to think?' interrupted the false king rudely. 'You are nothing but a fool! Get me some horse's flesh directly – it is the best meat in the world!'

The steward could hardly believe his ears. King Lino, the most polite man under the sun, to speak to his faithful servant in such a manner! And to want horse's flesh too! Why he was so delicate in his appetite that he lived mostly on fruit and cakes. Well, well, there was no knowing what people would come to; and, anyhow, he must obey at once, if he wished to keep his head on

his shoulders. Perhaps, after all, it was love which had driven him mad, and, if so, by-and-by he might come right again.

Whatever excuses his old servants might invent for their master, by the time the procession reached the Swan's fairy capital there were no more horses left, and they were forced to walk up to the palace on foot. Hiding their surprise as best they could, they begged the king to follow them, dismounting from their own horses, as he, they supposed, preferred to walk. They soon perceived the Swan fairy and her daughter awaiting them on a low balcony, under which the king stopped.

'Madam,' he said, 'you may be surprised that I have come to ask your daughter's hand in so unceremonious a fashion; but the journey is long, and I was hungry and ate my horse, which is the best meat in the world; and I forced my courtiers to eat theirs also. But for all that I am a great king, and wish to be your son-in-law. And now that is settled, where is Hermosa?'

'Sire,' answered the queen, not a little displeased as well as amazed at the king's manner, which was so different from anything she had been led to expect. 'You possess my daughter's portrait, and it can have made but little impression on you if you don't recognise her at once.'

'I don't remember any portrait,' replied Rabot; 'but perhaps it may be in my pocket after all.' And he searched everywhere, while the ladies-in-waiting looked on with astonishment, but of course found nothing. When he had finished he turned to the princess, who stood there blushing and angry, and said:

'If it is you whom I have come to marry, I think you are very beautiful, and I am sure if I had even seen your portrait I should have remembered it. Let us have the wedding as soon as possible; and, meantime, I should like to go to sleep, for your country is very different from mine, and I can assure you that after walking over stones and sand for days and days one needs a little rest.'

And without waiting for a reply he bade one of the pages conduct him to his room, where he was soon snoring so loud that he could be heard at the other end of the town.

As soon as he was out of their sight the poor princess flung herself into her mother's arms, and burst into tears. For fifteen days she had had King Lino's portrait constantly before her, while the letter from their own ambassador speaking of the young man's grace and charm had never left her pocket. True, the portrait was faithful enough, but how could that fair outside contain so rough and rude a soul? Yet this even she might have forgiven had the king shown any of the signs of love and admiration to which she had been so long accustomed. As for her mother, the poor Swan fairy was so bewildered at the extraordinary manners of her new son-in-law, that she was almost speechless.

Matters were in this state when King Lino's chamberlain begged for a private audience of her majesty, and no sooner were they alone than he told her that he feared that his master had suddenly gone mad, or had fallen under the spell of some magician.

'I had been lost in astonishment before,' said he, 'but now that he has failed to recognise the princess, and no longer possesses her portrait, which he never would part from for a single instant, my amazement knows no bounds. Perhaps, madam, your fairy gifts may be able to discover the reason of this change in one whose courtesy was the talk of the kingdom.' And with a low bow he took his departure.

The queen stood where the chamberlain left her, thinking deeply. Suddenly her face cleared, and going to an old chest which she kept in a secret room, she drew from it a small mirror. In this mirror she could see faithfully reflected whatever she wished, and at this moment she desired above all things to behold King Lino *as he really was.*

Ah! the chamberlain was right! It was not he who was lying on his bed snoring till the whole palace shook beneath him. No, *this* was her real son-in-law – the man dressed in dirty clothes, and imprisoned in one of Ismenor's strongest towers, and kissing the portrait of Hermosa, which had escaped the wizard's notice, owing to the young king having worn it, for better concealment, tied amongst his hair. Calling hastily to her daughter, she bade her also look, and Hermosa had the pleasure of gazing on Lino, who was behaving exactly as she could have wished. The mirror was still in her hand when the door of the prison opened, and there entered the hideous Riquette, who, from her upraised eyes, seemed to be begging from Lino some favour which he refused to grant. Of course Hermosa and her mother could not hear their

words, but from Riquette's angry face as she left the room, it was not difficult to guess what had happened. But the mirror had more to tell, for it appeared that in fury at her rejection by the king, Riquette had ordered four strong men to scourge him till he fainted, which was done in the sight of Hermosa, who in horror dropped the mirror, and would have fallen, had she not been caught by her mother.

'Control yourself, my child,' said the fairy. 'We have need of all our wits if we are to rescue the king from the power of those wicked people. And first it is necessary to know who the man that has taken his name and his face really is.'

Then, picking up the mirror, she wished that she might behold the false lover; and the glass gave back a vision of a dirty, greasy groom, lying, dressed as he was, on her bed of state.

'So this is the trick Ismenor hoped to play us! Well, we will have our revenge, whatever it costs us to get it. Only we must be very careful not to let him guess that he has not deceived us, for his skill in magic is greater than mine, and I shall have to be very prudent. To begin with, I must leave you, and if the false king asks why, then answer that I have to settle some affairs on the borders of my kingdom. Meanwhile, be sure you treat him most politely, and arrange fêtes to amuse him. If he shows any sign of being suspicious, you can even give him to understand that, on your marriage, I intend to give up the crown to your husband. And now farewell!' So saying, the Swan fairy waved her hand, and a cloud came down and concealed her, and nobody imagined

that the beautiful white cloud that was blown so rapidly across the sky was the chariot that was carrying the Swan fairy to the tower of Ismenor.

Now the tower was situated in the midst of a forest, so the queen thought that, under cover of the dark trees, it would be quite easy for her to drop to earth unseen. But the tower was so thoroughly enchanted that the more she tried to reach the ground the tighter something tried to hold her back. At length, by putting forth all the power she possessed, she managed to descend to the foot of the tower, and there, weak and faint as she was with her exertions, she lost no time in working her spells, and found that she could only overcome Ismenor by means of a stone from the ring of Gyges. But how was she to get this ring? for the magic book told her that Ismenor guarded it night and day among his most precious treasures. However, get it she must, and in the meantime the first step was to see the royal prisoner himself. So, drawing out her tablets, she wrote as follows:

'The bird which brings you this letter is the Swan fairy, mother of Hermosa, who loves you as much as you love her!' And after this assurance, she related the wicked plot of which he had been the victim. Then, quickly changing herself into a swallow, she began to fly round the tower, till she discovered the window of Lino's prison. It was so high up that bars seemed needless, especially as four soldiers were stationed in the passage outside, therefore the fairy was able to enter, and even to hop on his shoulder, but he was so much occupied with gazing at

the princess's portrait that it was some time before she could attract his attention. At last she gently scratched his cheek with the corner of the note, and he looked round with a start. On perceiving the swallow he knew at once that help had come, and tearing open the letter, he wept with joy on seeing the words it contained, and asked a thousand questions as to Hermosa, which the swallow was unable to answer, though, by repeated nods, she signed to him to read further. 'Must I indeed pretend to wish to marry that horrible Riquette?' he cried, when he had finished. 'Can I obtain the stone from the magician?'

Accordingly the next morning, when Riquette paid him her daily visit, he received her much more graciously than usual. The magician's daughter could not contain her delight at this change, and in answer to her expressions of joy, Lino told her that he had had a dream by which he had learned the inconstancy of Hermosa; also that a fairy had appeared and informed him that if he wished to break the bonds which bound him to the faithless princess and transfer his affections to the daughter of Ismenor, he must have in his possession for a day and a night a stone from the ring of Gyges, now in the possession of the magician. This news so enchanted Riquette, that she flung her arms round the king's neck and embraced him tenderly, greatly to his disgust, as he would infinitely have preferred the sticks of the soldiers. However, there was no help for it, and he did his best to seem pleased, till Riquette relieved him by announcing that she must lose no time in asking her father and obtaining from him the

precious stone.

His daughter's request came as a great surprise to Ismenor, whose suspicions were instantly excited; but, think as he would, he could not see any means by which the king, so closely guarded, might have held communication with the Swan fairy. Still, he would do nothing hastily, and, hiding his dismay, he told Riquette that his only wish was to make her happy, and that as she wished so much for the stone he would fetch it for her. Then he went into the closet where all his spells were worked, and in a short time he discovered that his enemy the Swan fairy was at that moment inside his palace.

'So that is it!' he said, smiling grimly. 'Well, she shall have a stone by all means, but a stone that will turn everyone who touches it into marble.' And placing a small ruby in a box, he returned to his daughter.

'Here is the talisman which will gain you the love of King Lino,' he said; 'but be sure you give him the box unopened, or else the stone will lose all its virtue.' With a cry of joy Riquette snatched the box from his hands, and ran off to the prison, followed by her father, who, holding tightly the enchanted handkerchief, was able, unseen, to watch the working of the spell. As he expected, at the foot of the tower stood the Swan fairy, who had had the imprudence to appear in her natural shape, waiting for the stone which the prince was to throw to her. Eagerly she caught the box as it fell from the prince's hands, but no sooner had her fingers touched the ruby, than a curious hardening came

over her, her limbs stiffened, and her tongue could hardly utter the words 'We are betrayed.'

'Yes, you *are* betrayed,' cried Ismenor, in a terrible voice; 'and *you*,' he continued, dragging the king to the window, 'you shall turn into a parrot, and a parrot you will remain until you can persuade Hermosa to crush in your head.'

He had hardly finished before a blue parrot flew out into the forest; and the magician, mounting in his winged chariot, set off for the Isle of Swans, where he changed everybody into statues, exactly in the positions in which he found them, not even excepting Rabot himself. Only Hermosa was spared, and her he ordered to get into his chariot beside him. In a few minutes he reached the Forest of Wonders, when the magician got down, and dragged the unhappy princess out after him.

'I have changed your mother into a stone, and your lover into a parrot,' said he, 'and you are to become a tree, and a tree you will remain until you have crushed the head of the person you love best in the world. But I will leave you your mind and memory, that your tortures may be increased a thousand-fold.'

Great magician as he was, Ismenor could not have invented a more terrible fate had he tried for a hundred years. The hours passed wearily by for the poor princess, who longed for a wood-cutter's axe to put an end to her misery. How were they to be delivered from their doom? And even supposing that King Lino *did* fly that way, there were thousands of blue parrots in the forest, and how was she to know him, or he her? As to her mother

– ah! that was too bad to think about! So, being a woman, she kept on thinking.

Meanwhile the blue parrot flew about the world, making friends wherever he went, till, one day, he entered the castle of an old wizard who had just married a beautiful young wife. Grenadine, for such was her name, led a very dull life, and was delighted to have a playfellow, so she gave him a golden cage to sleep in, and delicious fruits to eat. Only in one way did he disappoint her – he never would talk as other parrots did.

'If you only knew how happy it would make me, I'm sure you would try,' she was fond of saying; but the parrot did not seem to hear her.

One morning, however, she left the room to gather some flowers, and the parrot, finding himself alone, hopped to the table, and, picking up a pencil, wrote some verses on a piece of paper. He had just finished when he was startled by a noise, and letting fall the pencil, he flew out of the window.

Now hardly had he dropped the pencil when the wizard lifted a corner of the curtain which hung over the doorway, and advanced into the room. Seeing a paper on the table, he picked it up, and great was his surprise as he read:

'Fair princess, to win your grace,
I will hold discourse with you;
Silence, though, were more in place
Than chatt'ring like a cockatoo.'

'I half suspected it was enchanted,' murmured the wizard to himself. And he fetched his books and searched them, and found that instead of being a parrot, the bird was really a king who had fallen under the wrath of a magician, and that magician the man whom the wizard hated most in the world. Eagerly he read on, seeking for some means of breaking the enchantment, and at last, to his great joy, he discovered the remedy. Then he hurried to his wife, who was lying on some cushions under the tree on which the parrot had perched, and informed her that her favourite was really the king of a great country, and that, if she would whistle for the bird, they would all go together to a certain spot in the Forest of Marvels, 'where I will restore him to his own shape. Only you must not be afraid or cry out, whatever I do,' added he, 'or everything will be spoilt.' The wizard's wife jumped up in an instant, so delighted was she, and began to whistle the song that the parrot loved; but as he did not wish it to be known that he had been listening to the conversation he waited until she had turned her back, when he flew down the tree and alighted on her shoulder. Then they got into a golden boat, which carried them to a clearing in the forest, where three tall trees stood by themselves.

'I want these trees for my magic fire,' he said to his wife; 'put the parrot on that branch, he will be quite safe, and go yourself to a little distance. If you stay too near you may get your head crushed in their fall.'

At these words the parrot suddenly remembered the prophecy of Ismenor, and held himself ready, his heart beating at the

thought that in one of those trees he beheld Hermosa. Meanwhile the magician took a spade, and loosened the earth of the roots of the three trees so that they might fall all together. Directly the parrot observed them totter he spread his wings and flew right under the middle one, which was the most beautiful of the three. There was a crash, then Lino and Hermosa stood facing each other, clasped hand in hand.

After the first few moments, the princess's thoughts turned to her mother, and falling at the feet of the magician, who was smiling with delight at the success of his plan, she implored him to help them once more, and to give the Swan fairy back her proper shape.

'That is not so easy,' said he, 'but I will try what I can do.' And transporting himself to his palace to obtain a little bottle of poisoned water, he waited till nightfall, and started at once for Ismenor's tower. Of course, had Ismenor consulted his books he would have seen what his enemy was doing, he might have protected himself; but he had been eating and drinking too much, and had gone to bed, sleeping heavily. Changing himself into a bat, the magician flew into the room, and hiding himself in the curtains, he poured all the liquid over Ismenor's face, so that he died without a groan. At the same instant the Swan fairy became a woman again, for no magician, however powerful, can work spells which last beyond his own life.

So when the Swan fairy returned to her capital she found all her courtiers waiting at the gate to receive her, and in their midst,

beaming with happiness, Hermosa and King Lino. Standing behind them, though a long way off, was Rabot; but his dirty clothes had given place to clean ones, when his earnest desire was granted, and the princess had made him head of her stables.

And here we must bid them all farewell, feeling sure they will have many years of happiness before them after the terrible trials through which they have passed.

(Adapted and shortened from *Le Cabinet des Fées*.)

GEIRLAUG THE KING'S DAUGHTER

One day a powerful king and his beautiful wife were sitting in the gardens of their capital city, talking earnestly about the future life of their little son, who was sleeping by their side in his beautiful golden cradle. They had been married for many years without children, so when this baby came they thought themselves the happiest couple in the whole world. He was a fine sturdy little boy, who loved to kick and to strike out with his fists; but even if he had been weak and small they would still have thought him the most wonderful creature upon earth, and so absorbed were they in making plans for him, that they never noticed a huge dark shadow creeping up, till a horrible head with gleaming teeth stretched over them, and in an instant their beloved baby was snatched away.

For a while the king and queen remained where they were, speechless with horror. Then the king rose slowly, and holding out his hand to his wife, led her weeping into the palace, and for many days their subjects saw no more of them.

Meanwhile the dragon soared high into the air, holding the cradle between his teeth, and the baby still slept on. He flew so fast that he soon crossed the borders of another kingdom, and again he beheld the king and queen of the country seated in the

garden with a little girl lying in a wonderful cradle of white satin and lace. Swooping down from behind as he had done before, he was just about to seize the cradle, when the king jumped up and dealt him such a blow with his golden staff that the dragon not only started back, but in his pain let fall the boy, as he spread his wings and soared into the air away from all danger.

'That was a narrow escape,' said the king, turning to his wife, who sat pale with fright, and clasping her baby tightly in her arms. 'Frightful,' murmured the queen; 'but look, what is that glittering object that is lying out there?' The king walked in the direction of her finger, and to his astonishment beheld another cradle and another baby.

'Ah! the monster must have stolen this as he sought to steal Geirlaug,' cried he. And stooping lower, he read some words that were written on the fine linen that was wound round the boy. 'This is Grethari, son of Grethari the king!' Unfortunately it happened that the two neighbouring monarchs had had a serious quarrel, and for some years had ceased holding communication with each other. So, instead of sending a messenger at once to Grethari to tell him of the safety of his son, the king contented himself with adopting the baby, which was brought up with Geirlaug the princess.

For a while things went well with the children, who were as happy as the day was long, but at last there came a time when the queen could no more run races or play at hide-and-seek with them in the garden as she was so fond of doing, but lay and

watched them from a pile of soft cushions. By-and-by she gave up doing even that, and people in the palace spoke with low voices, and even Geirlaug and Grethari trod gently and moved quietly when they drew near her room. At length, one morning, they were sent for by the king himself, who, his eyes red with weeping, told them that the queen was dead.

Great was the sorrow of the two children, for they had loved the queen very dearly, and life seemed dull without her. But the lady-in-waiting who took care of them in the tower which had been built for them while they were still babies, was kind and good, and when the king was busy or away in other parts of his kingdom she made them quite happy, and saw that they were taught everything that a prince and princess ought to know. Thus two or three years passed, when, one day, as the children were anxiously awaiting their father's return from a distant city, there rode post haste into the courtyard of the palace a herald whom the king had sent before him, to say that he was bringing back a new wife.

Now, in itself, there was nothing very strange or dreadful in the fact that the king should marry again, but, as the old lady-in-waiting soon guessed, the queen, in spite of her beauty, was a witch, and as it was easy to see that she was jealous of everyone who might gain power over her husband, it boded ill for Geirlaug and Grethari. The faithful woman could not sleep for thinking about her charges, and her soul sank when, a few months after the marriage, war broke out with a country across the seas, and the

king rode away at the head of his troops. Then there happened what she had so long expected. One night, when, unlike her usual habit, she was sleeping soundly – afterwards she felt sure that a drug had been put into her food – the witch came to the tower. Exactly what she did there no one knew, but, when the sun rose, the beds of Grethari and Geirlaug were empty. At dawn the queen summoned some of her guards, and told them that she had been warned in a dream that some evil fate would befall her through a wild beast, and bade them go out and kill every animal within two miles of the palace. But the only beasts they found were two black foals of wondrous beauty, fitted for the king's riding; it seemed a pity to kill them, for what harm could two little foals do anyone? So they let them run away, frisking over the plain, and returned to the palace.

'Did you see *nothing*, really *nothing*?' asked the queen, when they again appeared before her.

'Nothing, your majesty,' they replied. But the queen did not believe them, and when they were gone, she gave orders to her steward that at supper the guards should be well plied with strong drink so that their tongues should be loosened, and, further, that he was to give heed to their babble, and report to her, whatever they might let fall.

'Your majesty's commands have been obeyed,' said the steward when, late in the evening, he begged admittance to the royal apartments; 'but, after all, the men have told you the truth. I listened to their talk from beginning to end, and nothing did

they see save two black foals.' He might have added more, but the look in the queen's blazing eyes terrified him, and, bowing hastily, he backed quickly out of her presence.

In a week's time the king came home, and right glad were all the courtiers to see him.

'Now, perhaps, she will find some one else to scream at,' whispered they amongst themselves. 'She' was the queen, who had vented her rage on her attendants during these days, though what had happened to make her so angry nobody knew. But whatever might be the meaning of it, things would be sure to improve with the king to rule in the palace instead of his wife. Unfortunately, their joy only lasted a short while; for the very first night after the king's arrival the queen related the evil dream she had dreamt in his absence, and begged him to go out the next morning and kill every living creature he saw within two miles of the city. The king, who always believed everything the queen said, promised to do as she wished. But before he had ridden through the lovely gardens that surrounded the palace, he was attracted by the singing of two little blue birds perched on a scarlet-berried holly, which made him think of everything beautiful that he had ever heard of or imagined. Hour after hour passed by, and still the birds sang, and still the king listened, though of course he never guessed that it was Geirlaug and Grethari whose notes filled him with enchantment. At length darkness fell; the birds' voices were hushed, and the king awoke with a start to find that for that day his promise to the queen

could not be kept.

'Well! did you see anything?' she asked eagerly, when the king entered her apartments.

'Ah, my dear, I am almost ashamed to confess to you. But the fact is that before I rode as far as the western gate the singing of two strange little blue birds made me forget all else in the world. And you will hardly believe it – but not until it grew dark did I remember where I was and what I should have been doing. However, to-morrow nothing shall hinder me from fulfilling your desires.'

'There will be no to-morrow,' muttered the queen, as she turned away with a curious glitter in her eyes. But the king did not hear her.

That night the king gave a great supper in the palace in honour of the victory he had gained over the enemy. The three men whom the queen had sent forth to slay the wild beasts held positions of trust in the household, for to them was committed the custody of the queen's person. And on the occasion of a feast their places were always next that of the king, so it was easy for the queen to scatter a slow but fatal poison in their cups without anyone being the wiser. Before dawn the palace was roused by the news that the king was dead, and that the three officers of the guards were dying also. Of course nobody's cries and laments were as loud as those of the queen. But when once the splendid funeral was over, she gave out that she was going to shut herself up in a distant castle till the year of her mourning was

over, and after appointing a regent of the kingdom, she set out attended only by a maid who knew all her secrets. Once she had left the palace she quickly began to work her spells, to discover under what form Geirlaug and Grethari lay hidden. Happily, the princess had studied magic under a former governess, so was able to fathom her step-mother's wicked plot, and hastily changed herself into a whale, and her foster-brother into its fin. Then the queen took the shape of a shark and gave chase.

For several hours a fierce battle raged between the whale and the shark, and the sea around was red with blood; first one of the combatants got the better, and then the other, but at length it became plain to the crowd of little fishes gathered round to watch, that the victory would be to the whale. And so it was. But when, after a mighty struggle, the shark floated dead and harmless on the surface of the water, the whale was so exhausted that she had only strength enough to drag her wounded body into a quiet little bay, and for three days she remained there as still and motionless as if she had been dead herself. At the end of the three days her wounds were healed, and she began to think what it was best to do.

'Let us go back to your father's kingdom,' she said to Grethari, when they had both resumed their proper shapes, and were sitting on a high cliff above the sea.

'How clever you are! I never should have thought of that!' answered Grethari, who, in truth, was not clever at all. But Geirlaug took a small box of white powder from her dress, and

sprinkled some over him and some over herself, and, quicker than lightning, they found themselves in the palace grounds from which Grethari had been carried off by the dragon so many years before.

'Now take up the band with the golden letters and bind it about your forehead,' said Geirlaug, 'and go boldly up to the castle. And, remember, however great may be your thirst, you must drink nothing till you have first spoken to your father. If you do, ill will befall us both.'

'*Why* should I be thirsty?' replied Grethari, staring at her in astonishment. 'It will not take me five minutes to reach the castle gate.' Geirlaug held her peace, but her eyes had in them a sad look. 'Good-bye,' she said at last, and she turned and kissed him.

Grethari had spoken truly when he declared that he could easily get to the castle in five minutes. At least, no one would have dreamed that it could possibly take any longer. Yet, to his surprise, the door which stood so widely open that he could see the colour of the hangings within never appeared to grow any nearer, while each moment the sun burned more hotly, and his tongue was parched with thirst.

'I don't understand! What *can* be the matter with me – and why haven't I reached the castle long ago?' he murmured to himself, as his knees began to knock under him with fatigue, and his head to swim. For a few more paces he staggered on blindly, when, suddenly, the sound of rushing water smote upon his ears; and in a little wood that bordered the path he beheld a stream falling

over a rock. At this sight his promise to Geirlaug was forgotten. Fighting his way through the brambles that tore his clothes, he cast himself down beside the fountain, and seizing the golden cup that hung from a tree, he drank a deep draught.

When he rose up the remembrance of Geirlaug and of his past life had vanished, and, instead, something stirred dimly within him at the vision of the white-haired man and woman who stood in the open door with outstretched hands.

'Grethari! Grethari! So you have come home at last,' cried they.

For three hours Geirlaug waited in the spot where Grethari had left her, and then she began to understand what had happened. Her heart was heavy, but she soon made up her mind what to do, and pushing her way out of the wood, she skirted the high wall that enclosed the royal park and gardens, till she reached a small house where the forester lived with his two daughters.

'Do you want a girl to sweep, and to milk the cows?' asked she, when one of the sisters answered her knock.

'Yes, we do, very badly; and as you look strong and clean, we will take you for a servant if you like to come,' replied the young woman.

'But, first, what is your name?'

'Lauphertha,' said Geirlaug quickly, for she did not wish anyone to know who she was; and following her new mistress into the house, she begged to be taught her work without delay.

And so clever was she, that, by-and-by, it began to be noised abroad that the strange girl who had come to live in the forester's house had not her equal in the whole kingdom for skill as well as beauty. Thus the years slipped away, during which Geirlaug grew to be a woman. Now and then she caught glimpses of Grethari as he rode out to hunt in the forest, but when she saw him coming she hid herself behind the great trees, for her heart was still sore at his forgetfulness. One day, however, when she was gathering herbs, he came upon her suddenly, before she had time to escape, though as she had stained her face and hands brown, and covered her beautiful hair with a scarlet cap, he did not guess her to be his foster-sister.

'What is your name, pretty maiden?' asked he.

'Lauphertha,' answered the girl with a low curtesy.

'Ah! it is you, then, of whom I have heard so much,' said he; 'you are too beautiful to spend your life serving the forester's daughters. Come with me to the palace, and my mother the queen will make you one of her ladies in waiting.'

'Truly, that would be a great fortune,' replied the maiden. 'And, if you really mean it, I will go with you. But how shall I know that you are not jesting?'

'Give me something to do for you, and I will do it, whatever it is,' cried the young man eagerly. And she cast down her eyes, and answered:

'Go to the stable, and bind the calf that is there so that it shall not break loose in the night and wander away, for the forester and

his daughters have treated me well, and I would not leave them with aught of my work still undone.'

So Grethari set out for the stable where the calf stood, and wound the rope about its horns. But when he had made it fast to the wall, he found that a coil of the rope had twisted itself round his wrist, and, pull as he might, he could not get free. All night he wriggled and struggled till he was half dead with fatigue. But when the sun rose the rope suddenly fell away from him, and, very angry with the maiden he dragged himself back to the palace. 'She is a witch,' he muttered crossly to himself, 'and I will have no more to do with her.' And he flung himself on his bed and slept all day.

Not long after this adventure the king and queen sent their beloved son on an embassy to a neighbouring country to seek a bride from amongst the seven princesses. The most beautiful of all was, of course, the one chosen, and the young pair took ship without delay for the kingdom of the prince's parents. The wind was fair and the vessel so swift that, in less time than could have been expected, the harbour nearest the castle was reached. A splendid carriage had been left in readiness close to the beach, but no horses were to be found, for every one had been carried off to take part in a great review which the king was to hold that day in honour of his son's marriage.

'I can't stay here all day,' said the princess, crossly, when Grethari told her of the plight they were in. 'I am perfectly worn out as it is, and you will have to find something to draw the

carriage, if it is only a donkey. If you don't, I will sail back straight to my father.'

Poor Grethari was much troubled by the words of the princess. Not that he felt so very much in love with her, for during the voyage she had shown him several times how vain and bad tempered she was; but as a prince and a bridegroom, he could not, of course, bear to think that any slight had been put upon her. So he hastily bade his attendants to go in search of some animal, and bring it at once to the place at which they were waiting.

During the long pause the princess sat in the beautiful golden coach, her blue velvet mantle powdered with silver bees drawn closely round her, so that not even the tip of her nose could be seen. At length a girl appeared driving a young ox in front of her, followed by one of the prince's messengers, who was talking eagerly.

'Will you lend me your ox, fair maiden?' asked Grethari, jumping up and going to meet them. 'You shall fix your own price, and it shall be paid ungrudgingly, for never before was king's son in such a plight.'

'My price is seats for me and my two friends behind you and your bride at the wedding feast,' answered she. And to this Grethari joyfully consented.

Six horses would not have drawn the coach at the speed of this one ox. Trees and fields flew by so fast that the bride became quite giddy, and expected, besides, that they would be upset every moment. But, in spite of her fears, nothing happened, and they

drew up in safety at the door of the palace, to the great surprise of the king and queen. The marriage preparations were hurried on, and by the end of the week everything was ready. It was, perhaps, fortunate that the princess was too busy with her clothes and her jewels during this period to pay much heed to Grethari, so that by the time the wedding day came round he had almost forgotten how cross and rude she had been on the journey.

The oldest men and women in the town agreed that nothing so splendid had ever been seen as the bridal procession to the great hall, where the banquet was to be held, before the ceremony was celebrated in the palace. The princess was in high good humour, feeling that all eyes were upon her, and bowed and smiled right and left. Taking the prince's hand, she sailed proudly down the room, where the guests were already assembled, to her place at the head of the table by the side of the bridegroom. As she did so, three strange ladies in shining dresses of blue, green, and red, glided in and seated themselves on a vacant bench immediately behind the young couple. The red lady was Geirlaug, who had brought with her the forester's daughters, and in one hand she held a wand of birch bark, and in the other a closed basket.

Silently they sat as the feast proceeded; hardly anyone noticed their presence, or, if they did, supposed them to be attendants of their future queen. Suddenly, when the merriment was at its height, Geirlaug opened the basket, and out flew a cock and hen. To the astonishment of everyone, the birds circled about in front of the royal pair, the cock plucking the feathers out of the tail of

the hen, who tried in vain to escape from him.

'Will you treat me as badly as Grethari treated Geirlaug?' cried the hen at last. And Grethari heard, and started up wildly. In an instant all the past rushed back to him; the princess by his side was forgotten, and he only saw the face of the child with whom he had played long years ago.

'Where is Geirlaug?' he exclaimed, looking round the hall; and his eyes fell upon the strange lady. With a smile she held out a ring which he had given her on her twelfth birthday, when they were still children, without a thought of the future. 'You and none other shall be my wife,' he said, taking her hand, and leading her into the middle of the company.

It is not easy to describe the scene that followed. Of course, nobody understood what had occurred, and the king and queen imagined that their son had suddenly gone mad. As for the princess her rage and fury were beyond belief. The guests left the hall as quickly as they could, so that the royal family might arrange their own affairs, and in the end it was settled that half the kingdom must be given to the despised princess, instead of a husband. She sailed back at once to her country, where she was soon betrothed to a young noble, whom, in reality, she liked much better than Grethari. That evening Grethari was married to Geirlaug, and they lived happily till they died, and made all their people happy also.

(From *Neuisländischen Volksmärchen*.)

THE STORY OF LITTLE KING LOC

Two or three miles from the coast of France, anyone sailing in a ship on a calm day can see deep, deep down, the trunks of great trees standing up in the water. Many hundreds of years ago these trees formed part of a large forest, full of all sorts of wild animals, and beyond the forest was a fine city, guarded by a castle in which dwelt the Dukes of Clarides. But little by little the sea drew nearer to the town; the foundations of the houses became undermined and fell in, and at length a shining sea flowed over the land. However, all this happened a long time after the story I am going to tell you.

The Dukes of Clarides had always lived in the midst of their people, and protected them both in war and peace.

At the period when this tale begins the Duke Robert was dead, leaving a young and beautiful duchess who ruled in his stead. Of course everyone expected her to marry again, but she refused all suitors who sought her hand, saying that, having only one soul she could have only one husband, and that her baby daughter was quite enough for her.

One day, she was sitting in the tower, which looked out over a rocky heath, covered in summer with purple and yellow flowers, when she beheld a troop of horsemen riding towards the castle. In

the midst, seated on a white horse with black and silver trappings, was a lady whom the duchess at once knew to be her friend the Countess of Blanchelande, a young widow like herself, mother of a little boy two years older than Abeille des Clarides. The duchess hailed her arrival with delight, but her joy was soon turned into weeping when the countess sank down beside her on a pile of cushions, and told the reason of her visit.

'As you know,' she said, taking her friend's hand and pressing it between her own, 'whenever a Countess of Blanchelande is about to die she finds a white rose lying on her pillow. Last night I went to bed feeling unusually happy, but this morning when I woke the rose was resting against my cheek. I have no one to help me in the world but you, and I have come to ask if you will take Youri my son, and let him be a brother to Abeille?'

Tears choked the voice of the duchess, but she flung herself on the countess's neck, and pressed her close. Silently the two women took leave of each other, and silently the doomed lady mounted her horse and rode home again. Then, giving her sleeping boy into the care of Francœur, her steward, she laid herself quietly on her bed, where, the next morning, they found her dead and peaceful.

So Youri and Abeille grew up side by side, and the duchess faithfully kept her promise, and was a mother to them both. As they got bigger she often took them with her on her journeys through her duchy, and taught them to know her people, and to pity and to aid them.

It was on one of these journeys that, after passing through meadows covered with flowers, Youri caught sight of a great glittering expanse lying beneath some distant mountains.

'What is that, godmother?' he asked, waving his hand. 'The shield of a giant, I suppose.'

'No; a silver plate as big as the moon!' said Abeille, twisting herself round on her pony.

'It is neither a silver plate nor a giant's shield,' replied the duchess; 'but a beautiful lake. Still, in spite of its beauty, it is dangerous to go near it, for in its depths dwell some Undines, or water spirits, who lure all passers-by to their deaths.'

Nothing more was said about the lake, but the children did not forget it, and one morning, after they had returned to the castle, Abeille came up to Youri.

'The tower door is open,' whispered she; 'let us go up. Perhaps we shall find some fairies.'

But they did not find any fairies; only, when they reached the roof, the lake looked bluer and more enchanting than ever. Abeille gazed at it for a moment, and then she said:

'Do you see? I mean to go there!'

'But you mustn't,' cried Youri. 'You heard what your mother said. And, besides, it is so far; how could we get there?'

'*You* ought to know that,' answered Abeille scornfully. 'What is the good of being a man, and learning all sorts of things, if you have to ask me. However, there are plenty of other men in the world, and I shall get one of them to tell me.'

Youri coloured; Abeille had never spoken like this before, and, instead of being two years younger than himself, she suddenly seemed many years older. She stood with her mocking eyes fixed on him, till he grew angry at being outdone by a girl, and taking her hand he said boldly:

'Very well, we will *both* go to the lake.'

The next afternoon, when the duchess was working at her tapestry surrounded by her maidens, the children went out, as usual, to play in the garden. The moment they found themselves alone, Youri turned to Abeille, and holding out his hand, said:

'Come.'

'Come where?' asked Abeille, opening her eyes very wide.

'To the lake, of course,' answered the boy.

Abeille was silent. It was one thing to pretend you meant to be disobedient some day, a long time off, and quite another to start for such a distant place without anyone knowing that you had left the garden. 'And in satin shoes, too! How stupid boys were to be sure.'

'Stupid or not, I am going to the lake, and you are going with me!' said Youri, who had not forgotten or forgiven the look she had cast on him the day before. 'Unless,' added he, 'you are afraid, and in that case I shall go alone.'

This was too much for Abeille. Bursting into tears, she flung herself on Youri's neck, and declared that wherever he went she would go too. So, peace having been made between them, they set out.

It was a hot day, and the townspeople were indoors waiting till the sun was low in the sky before they set out either to work or play, so the children passed through the streets unperceived, and crossed the river by the bridge into the flowery meadows along the road by which they had ridden with the duchess. By-and-by Abeille began to feel thirsty, but the sun had drunk up all the water, and not a drop was left for her. They walked on a little further, and by good luck found a cherry-tree covered with ripe fruit, and after a rest and a refreshing meal, they were sure that they were strong enough to reach the lake in a few minutes. But soon Abeille began to limp and to say that her foot hurt her, and Youri had to untie the ribbons that fastened her shoe and see what was the matter. A stone had got in, so this was easily set right, and for a while they skipped along the path singing and chattering, till Abeille stopped again. This time her shoe had come off, and turning to pick it up she caught sight of the towers of the castle, looking such a long way off that her heart sank, and she burst into tears.

'It is getting dark, and the wolves will eat us,' sobbed she. But Youri put his arms round her and comforted her.

'Why we are close to the lake now. There is nothing to be afraid of! We shall be home again to supper,' cried he. And Abeille dried her eyes, and trotted on beside him.

Yes, the lake was there, blue and silvery with purple and gold irises growing on its banks, and white water-lilies floated on its bosom. Not a trace was there of a man, or of one of the great

beasts so much feared by Abeille, but only the marks of tiny forked feet on the sand. The little girl at once pulled off her torn shoes and stockings and let the water flow over her, while Youri looked about for some nuts or strawberries. But none were to be found.

'I noticed, a little way back, a clump of blackberry bushes,' said he. 'Wait here for me, and I will go and gather some fruit, and after that we will start home again.' And Abeille, leaning her head drowsily against a cushion of soft moss, murmured something in reply, and soon fell asleep. In her dream a crow, bearing the smallest man that ever was seen, appeared hovering for a moment above her, and then vanished. At the same instant Youri returned and placed by her side a large leaf-full of strawberries.

'It is a pity to wake her just yet,' thought he, and wandered off beyond a clump of silvery willows to a spot from which he could get a view of the whole lake. In the moonlight, the light mist that hung over the surface made it look like fairyland. Then gradually the silver veil seemed to break up, and the shapes of fair women with outstretched hands and long green locks floated towards him. Seized with a sudden fright, the boy turned to fly. But it was too late.

Unconscious of the terrible doom that had befallen her foster-brother, Abeille slept on, and did not awake even when a crowd of little men with white beards down to their knees came and stood in a circle round her.

'What shall we do with her?' asked Pic, who seemed older than

any of them, though they were all very old.

'Build a cage and put her into it,' answered Rug.

'No! No! What should such a beautiful princess do in a cage?' cried Dig. And Tad, who was the kindest of them all, proposed to carry her home to her parents. But the other gnomes were too pleased with their new toy to listen to this for a moment.

'Look, she is waking,' whispered Pau. And as he spoke Abeille slowly opened her eyes. At first she imagined she was still dreaming; but as the little men did not move, it suddenly dawned upon her that they were real, and starting to her feet, she called loudly:

'Youri! Youri! Where are you?'

At the sound of her voice the gnomes only pressed more closely round her, and, trembling with fear, she hid her face in her hands. The gnomes were at first much puzzled to know what to do; then Tad, climbing on a branch of the willow tree that hung over her, stooped down, and gently stroked her fingers. The child understood that he meant to be kind, and letting her hands fall, gazed at her captors. After an instant's pause she said:

'Little men, it is a great pity that you are so ugly. But, all the same, I will love you if you will only give me something to eat, as I am dying of hunger.'

A rustle was heard among the group as she spoke. Some were very angry at being called ugly, and said she deserved no better fate than to be left where she was. Others laughed, and declared that it did not matter what a mere mortal thought about them;

while Tad bade Bog, their messenger, fetch her some milk and honey, and the finest white bread that was made in their ovens under the earth. In less time than Abeille would have taken to tie her shoe he was back again, mounted on his crow. And by the time she had eaten the bread and honey and drunk the milk, Abeille was not frightened any more, and felt quite ready to talk.

'Little men,' she said, looking up with a smile, 'your supper was very good, and I thank you for it. My name is Abeille, and my brother is called Youri. Help me to find him, and tell me which is the path that leads to the castle, for mother must think something dreadful has happened to us!'

'But your feet are so sore that you cannot walk,' answered Dig. 'And we may not cross the bounds into your country. The best we can do is to make a litter of twigs and cover it with moss, and we will bear you into the mountains, and present you to our king.'

Now, many a little girl would have been terrified at the thought of being carried off alone, she did not know where. But Abeille, when she had recovered from her first fright, was pleased at the notion of her strange adventure.

'How much she would have to tell her mother and Youri on her return. Probably *they* would never go inside a mountain, if they lived to be a hundred.' So she curled herself comfortably on her nest of moss, and waited to see what would happen.

Up, and up, and up they went; and by-and-by Abeille fell asleep again, and did not wake till the sun was shining. Up, and up, and up, for the little men could only walk very slowly,

though they could spring over rocks quicker than any mortal. Suddenly the light that streamed through the branches of the litter began to change. It seemed hardly less bright, but it was certainly different; then the litter was put down, and the gnomes crowded round and helped Abeille to step out of it.

Before her stood a little man not half her size, but splendidly dressed and full of dignity. On his head was a crown of such huge diamonds that you wondered how his small body could support it. A royal mantle fell from his shoulders, and in his hand he held a lance.

'King Loc,' said one of the forest gnomes, 'we found this beautiful child asleep by the lake, and have brought her to you. She says that her name is Abeille, and her mother is the Duchess des Clarides.'

'You have done well,' answered the king; 'she shall be one of us.' And standing on tiptoe, so that he could kiss her hand, he told her that they would all take care of her and make her happy, and that anything she wished for she should have at once.

'I want a pair of shoes,' replied Abeille.

'Shoes!' commanded the king, striking the ground with his lance; and immediately a lovely pair of silver shoes embroidered with pearls were slipped on her feet by one of the gnomes.

'They are beautiful shoes,' said Abeille rather doubtfully; 'but do you think they will carry me all the way back to my mother?'

'No, they are not meant for rough roads,' replied the king, 'but for walking about the smooth paths of the mountain, for we have

many wonders to show you.'

'Little King Loc,' answered Abeille, 'take away these beautiful slippers and give me a pair of wooden shoes instead, and let me go back to my mother.' But King Loc only shook his head.

'Little King Loc,' said Abeille again – and this time her voice trembled – 'let me go back to my mother and Youri, and I will love you with all my heart, nearly as well as I love them.'

'Who is Youri?' asked King Loc.

'Why – Youri – who has lived with us since I was a baby,' replied Abeille; surprised that he did not know what everyone else was aware of, and never guessing that by mentioning the boy she was sealing her own fate. For King Loc had already thought what a good wife she would make him in a few years' time, and he did not want Youri to come between them. So he was silent, and Abeille, seeing he was not pleased, burst into tears.

'Little King Loc,' she cried, taking hold of a corner of his mantle, 'think how unhappy my mother will be. She will fancy that wild beasts have eaten me, or that I have got drowned in the lake.'

'Be comforted,' replied King Loc; 'I will send her a dream, so that she shall know that you are safe.'

At this Abeille's sad face brightened. 'Little King Loc,' she said, smiling, 'how clever you are! But you must send her a dream every night, so that she shall see *me*– and *me* a dream, so that I may see her.'

And this King Loc promised to do.

When Abeille grew accustomed to do without her mother and Youri, she made herself happy enough in her new home. Everyone was kind to her, and petted her, and then there were such quantities of new things for her to see. The gnomes were always busy, and knew how to fashion beautiful toys as well or better than the people who lived on the earth; and now and then, wandering with Tad or Dig in the underground passages, Abeille would catch a glimpse of blue sky through a rent in the rocks, and this she loved best of all. In this manner six years passed away.

'His Highness King Loc wishes to see you in his presence chamber,' said Tad, one morning, to Abeille, who was singing to herself on a golden lute; and Abeille, wondering why the king had grown so formal all of a sudden, got up obediently. Directly she appeared, King Loc opened a door in the wall which led into his treasure chamber. Abeille had never been there before, and was amazed at the splendid things heaped up before her. Gold, jewels, brocades, carpets, lay round the walls, and she walked about examining one glittering object after another, while King Loc mounted a throne of gold and ivory at one end of the hall, and watched her. 'Choose whatever you wish,' he said at last. A necklace of most lovely pearls was hanging from the wall, and after hesitating for a moment between that and a circlet of diamonds and sapphires, Abeille stretched up her hand towards it. But before she touched it her eyes lighted on a tiny piece of sky visible through a crack of the rock, and her hand dropped by her side. 'Little King Loc, let me go up to the earth once again,'

she said.

Then King Loc made a sign to the treasurer, who opened a coffer full of nothing but precious stones, larger and more dazzling than were worn by any earthly monarch. 'Choose what you will, Abeille,' whispered King Loc.

But Abeille only shook her head.

'A drop of dew in the garden at Clarides is brighter to me than the best of those diamonds,' she answered, 'and the bluest of the stones are not as blue as the eyes of Youri.' And as she spoke a sharp pain ran through the heart of King Loc. For an instant he said nothing, then he lifted his head and looked at her. 'Only those who despise riches should possess them. Take this crown, from henceforth you are the Princess of the Gnomes.'

During thirty days no work was done in those underground regions, for a feast was held in honour of the new princess. At the end of that period, the king appeared before Abeille, clad in his most splendid garments, and solemnly asked her to be his wife.

'Little King Loc,' answered the girl, 'I love you as you are, for your goodness and kindness to me; but never, never can I love you as anything else.'

The king sighed. It was only what he had expected; still, his disappointment was great, though he tried bravely to hide it, and even to smile as he said: 'Then, Abeille, will you promise me one thing? If there should come a day when you find that there is somebody whom you *could* love, will you tell me?'

And in her turn Abeille promised.

After this, in spite of the fact that everyone was just as kind to her as before, Abeille was no longer the merry child who passed all her days playing with the little gnomes. People who dwell under the earth grow up much faster than those who live on its surface, and, at thirteen, the girl was already a woman. Besides, King Loc's words had set her thinking; she spent many hours by herself, and her face was no longer round and rosy, but thin and pale. It was in vain that the gnomes did their best to entice her into her old games, they had lost their interest, and even her lute lay unnoticed on the ground.

But one morning a change seemed to come over her. Leaving the room hung with beautiful silks, where she usually sat alone, she entered the king's presence, and taking his hand she led him through long corridors till they came to a place where a strip of blue sky was to be seen.

'Little King Loc,' she said, turning her eyes upon him, 'let me behold my mother again, or I shall surely die.' Her voice shook, and her whole body trembled. Even an enemy might have pitied her; but the king, who loved her, answered nothing. All day long Abeille stayed there, watching the light fade, and the sky grow pale. By-and-by the stars came out, but the girl never moved from her place. Suddenly a hand touched her. She looked round with a start, and there was King Loc, covered from head to foot in a dark mantle, holding another over his arm. 'Put on this and follow me,' was all he said. But Abeille somehow knew that she was going to see her mother.

On, and on, and on they went, through passages where Abeille had never been before, and at length she was out in the world again. Oh! how beautiful it all was! How fresh was the air, and how sweet was the smell of the flowers! She felt as if she should die with joy, but at that moment King Loc lifted her off the ground, and, tiny though he was, carried her quite easily across the garden and through an open door into the silent castle.

'Listen, Abeille,' he whispered softly. 'You have guessed where we are going, and you know that every night I send your mother a vision of you, and she talks to it in her dream, and smiles at it. To-night it will be no vision she sees, but you yourself; only remember, that if you touch her or speak to her my power is lost, and never more will she behold either you or your image.'

By this time they had reached the room which Abeille knew so well, and her heart beat violently as the gnome carried her over the threshold. By the light of a lamp hanging over the bed Abeille could see her mother, beautiful still, but with a face that had grown pale and sad. As she gazed the sadness vanished, and a bright smile came in its stead. Her mother's arms were stretched out towards her, and the girl, her eyes filled with tears of joy, was stooping to meet them, when King Loc hastily snatched her up, and bore her back to the realm of the gnomes.

If the king imagined that by granting Abeille's request he would make her happy, he soon found out his mistake, for all day long the girl sat weeping, paving no heed to the efforts of her friends to comfort her.

'Tell me what is making you so unhappy?' said King Loc, at last. And Abeille answered:

'Little King Loc, and all my friends here, you are so good and kind that I know that you are miserable when I am in trouble. I would be happy if I could, but it is stronger than I. I am weeping because I shall never see again Youri de Blanchelande, whom I love with all my heart. It is a worse grief than parting with my mother, for at least I know where she is and what she is doing; while, as for Youri, I cannot tell if he is dead or alive.'

The gnomes were all silent. Kind as they were, they were not mortals, and had never felt either great joys or deep sorrows. Only King Loc dimly guessed at something of both, and he went away to consult an old, old gnome, who lived in the lowest depth of the mountain, and had spectacles of every sort, that enabled him to see all that was happening, not only on the earth, but under the sea.

Nur, for such was his name, tried many of these spectacles before he could discover anything about Youri de Blanchelande.

'There he is!' he cried at last. 'He is sitting in the palace of the Undines, under the great lake; but he does not like his prison, and longs to be back in the world, doing great deeds.'

It was true. In the seven years that had passed since he had left the castle of Clarides to go with Abeille to the blue lake, Youri in his turn had become a man.

The older he grew the more weary he got of the petting and spoiling he received at the hands of the green-haired maidens,

till, one day, he flung himself at the feet of the Undine queen, and implored permission to return to his old home.

The queen stooped down and stroked his hair.

'We cannot spare you,' she murmured gently. 'Stay here, and you shall be king, and marry me.'

'But it is Abeille I want to marry,' said the youth boldly. But he might as well have talked to the winds, for at last the queen grew angry, and ordered him to be put in a crystal cage which was built for him round a pointed rock.

It was here that King Loc, aided by the spectacles of Nur, found him after many weeks' journey. As we know, the gnomes walk slowly, and the way was long and difficult. Luckily, before he started, he had taken with him his magic ring, and the moment it touched the wall the crystal cage split from top to bottom.

'Follow that path, and you will find yourself in the world again,' he said to Youri; and without waiting to listen to the young man's thanks, set out on the road he had come.

'Bog,' he cried, to the little man on the crow, who had ridden to meet him. 'Hasten to the palace and inform the Princess Abeille that Youri de Blanchelande, for seven years a captive in the kingdom of the Undines, has now returned to the castle of Clarides.'

The first person whom Youri met as he came out of the mountain was the tailor who had made all his clothes from the time that he came to live at the castle. Of this old friend, who was nearly beside himself with joy at the sight of the little master,

lost for so many years, the count begged for news of his foster-mother and Abeille.

'Alas! my lord, where can you have been that you do not know that the Princess Abeille was carried off by the gnomes on the very day that you disappeared yourself? At least, so we guess. Ah! that day has left many a mark on our duchess! Yet she is not without a gleam of hope that her daughter is living yet, for every night the poor mother is visited by a dream which tells her all that the princess is doing.'

The good man went on to tell of all the changes that seven years had brought about in the village, but Youri heard nothing that he said, for his mind was busy with thoughts of Abeille.

At length he roused himself, and ashamed of his delay, he hastened to the chamber of the duchess, who held him in her arms as if she would never let him go. By-and-by, however, when she became calmer, he began to question her about Abeille, and how best to deliver her from the power of the gnomes. The duchess then told him that she had sent out men in all directions to look for the children directly they were found to be missing, and that one of them had noticed a troop of little men far away on the mountains, evidently carrying a litter. He was hastening after them, when, at his feet, he beheld a tiny satin slipper, which he stooped to pick up. But as he did so a dozen of the gnomes had swarmed upon him like flies, and beat him about the head till he dropped the slipper, which they took away with them, leaving the poor man dizzy with pain. When he recovered his senses the

group on the mountain had disappeared.

That night, when everyone was asleep, Youri and his old servant Francœur, stole softly down into the armoury, and dressed themselves in light suits of chain armour, with helmets and short swords, all complete. Then they mounted two horses that Francœur had tied up in the forest, and set forth for the kingdom of the gnomes. At the end of an hour's hard riding, they came to the cavern which Francœur had heard from childhood led into the centre of the earth. Here they dismounted, and entered cautiously, expecting to find darkness as thick as what they had left outside. But they had only gone a few steps when they were nearly blinded by a sudden blaze of light, which seemed to proceed from a sort of portcullis door, which barred the way in front of them.

'Who are you?' asked a voice. And the count answered:

'Youri de Blanchelande, who has come to rescue Abeille des Clarides.' And at these words the gate slowly swung open, and closed behind the two strangers.

Youri listened to the clang with a spasm of fear in his heart; then the desperate position he was in gave him courage. There was no retreat for him now, and in front was drawn up a large force of gnomes, whose arrows were falling like hail about him. He raised his shield to ward them off, and as he did so his eyes fell on a little man standing on a rock above the rest, with a crown on his head and a royal mantle on his shoulders. In an instant Youri had flung away his shield and sprung forward, regardless

of the arrows that still fell about him.

'Oh, is it you, is it *really* you, my deliverer? And is it your subjects who hold as a captive Abeille whom I love?'

'I am King Loc,' was the answer. And the figure with the long beard bent his eyes kindly on the eager youth. 'If Abeille has lived with us all these years, for many of them she was quite happy. But the gnomes, of whom you think so little, are a just people, and they will not keep her against her will. Beg the princess to be good enough to come hither,' he added, turning to Rug.

Amidst a dead silence Abeille entered the vast space and looked around her. At first she saw nothing but a vast host of gnomes perched on the walls and crowding on the floor of the big hall. Then her eyes met those of Youri, and with a cry that came from her heart she darted towards him, and threw herself on his breast.

'Abeille,' said the king, when he had watched her for a moment, with a look of pain on his face, 'is this the man that you wish to marry?'

'Yes, Little King Loc, this is he and nobody else! And see how I can laugh now, and how happy I am!' And with that she began to cry.

'Hush, Abeille! there must be no tears to-day,' said Youri, gently stroking her hair. 'Come, dry your eyes, and thank King Loc, who rescued me from the cage in the realm of the Undines.'

As Youri spoke Abeille lifted her head, and a great light came into her face. At last she understood.

'You did that for me?' she whispered. 'Ah, Little King Loc – !'

So, loaded with presents, and followed by regrets, Abeille went home. In a few days the marriage took place; but however happy she was, and however busy she might be, never a month passed by without a visit from Abeille to her friends in the kingdom of the gnomes.

(Adapted and shortened from the story of *Abeille*, by M. Anatole France.)

‘A LONG-BOW STORY’

One day a bunniah,[1] or banker, was walking along a country road when he overtook a farmer going in the same direction. Now the bunniah was very grasping, like most of his class, and was lamenting that he had had no chance of making any money that day; but at the sight of the man in front he brightened up wonderfully.

‘That is a piece of luck,’ he said to himself. ‘Let me see if this farmer is not good for something’; and he hastened his steps.

After they had bid one another good day very politely, the bunniah said to the farmer:

‘I was just thinking how dull I felt, when I beheld you, but since we are going the same way, I shall find the road quite short in such agreeable company.’

‘With all my heart,’ replied the farmer; ‘but what shall we talk about? A city man like you will not care to hear about cattle and crops.’

‘Oh,’ said the bunniah, ‘I’ll tell you what we will do. We will each tell the other the wildest tale we can imagine, and he who first throws doubt on the other’s story shall pay him a hundred rupees.’

To this the farmer agreed, and begged the bunniah to begin,

[1] Grain merchant and banker, and generally a very greedy man.

as he was the bigger man of the two; and privately he made up his mind that, however improbable it might be, nothing should induce him to hint that he did not believe in the bunniah's tale. Thus politely pressed the great man started:

'I was going along this road one day, when I met a merchant travelling with a great train of camels laden with merchandise – '

'Very likely,' murmured the farmer; 'I've seen that kind of thing myself.'

'No less than one hundred and one camels,' continued the bunniah, 'all tied together by their nose strings – nose to tail – and stretching along the road for almost half a mile – '

'Well?' said the farmer.

'Well, a kite swooped down on the foremost camel and bore him off, struggling, into the air, and by reason of them all being tied together the other hundred camels had to follow – '

'Amazing, the strength of that kite!' said the farmer. 'But – well – yes, doubtless; yes – well – one hundred and one camels – and what did he do with them?'

'You doubt it?' demanded the bunniah.

'Not a bit!' said the farmer heartily.

'Well,' continued the bunniah, 'it happened that the princess of a neighbouring kingdom was sitting in her private garden, having her hair combed by her maid, and she was looking upward, with her head thrown back, whilst the maid tugged away at the comb, when that wretched kite, with its prey, went soaring overhead; and, as luck would have it, the camels gave an extra kick just

then, the kite lost his hold, and the whole hundred and one camels dropped right into the princess's left eye!'

'Poor thing!' said the farmer; 'it's so painful having anything in one's eye.'

'Well,' said the bunniah, who was now warming to his task, 'the princess shook her head, and sprang up, clapping her hand on her eye. "Oh dear!" she cried, "I've got something in my eye, and how it *does* smart!"'

'It always does,' observed the farmer, 'perfectly true. Well, what did the poor thing do?'

'At the sound of her cries, the maid came running to her assistance. "Let me look," said she; and with that she gave the princess's eyelid a twitch, and out came a camel, which the maid put in her pocket – ' ('Ah!' grunted the farmer) – 'and then she just twisted up the corner of her headcloth and fished a hundred more of them out of the princess's eye, and popped them all into her pocket with the other.'

Here the bunniah gasped as one who is out of breath, but the farmer looked at him slowly. 'Well?' said he.

'I can't think of anything more now,' replied the bunniah. 'Besides, that is the end; what do you say to it?'

'Wonderful,' replied the farmer, 'and no doubt perfectly true!'

'Well, it is your turn,' said the bunniah. 'I am so anxious to hear your story. I am sure it will be very interesting.'

'Yes, I think it will,' answered the farmer, and he began:

'My father was a very prosperous man. Five cows he had,

and three yoke of oxen, and half a dozen buffaloes, and goats in abundance; but of all his possessions the thing he loved best was a mare. A well bred mare she was – oh, a very fine mare!'

'Yes, yes,' interrupted the bunniah, 'get on!'

'I'm getting on,' said the farmer, 'don't you hurry me! Well, one day, as ill-luck would have it, he rode that mare to market with a torn saddle, which galled her so, that when they got home she had a sore on her back as big as the palm of your hand.'

'Yes,' said the bunniah impatiently, 'what next?'

'It was June,' said the farmer, 'and you know how, in June, the air is full of dust-storms with rain at times? Well, the poor beast got dust in that wound, and what's more, with the dust some grains of wheat, and, what with the dust and the heat and the wet, that wheat sprouted and began to grow!'

'Wheat does when it gets a fair chance,' said the bunniah.

'Yes; and the next thing we knew was that there was a crop of wheat on that horse's back as big as anything you ever saw in a hundred-acre field, and we had to hire twenty men to reap it!'

'One generally has to hire extra hands for reaping,' said the bunniah.

'And we got four hundred maunds of wheat off that mare's back!' continued the farmer.

'A good crop!' murmured the bunniah.

'And your father,' said the farmer, 'a poor wretch, with hardly enough to keep body and soul together – (the bunniah snorted, but was silent) – came to my father, and he said, putting his hands

together as humble as could be – '

The bunniah here flashed a furious glance at his companion, but bit his lips and held his peace.

"'I haven't tasted food for a week. Oh! great master, let me have the loan of sixteen maunds of wheat from your store, and I will repay you.'"

"'Certainly, neighbour," answered my father; "take what you need, and repay it as you can.'"

'Well?' demanded the bunniah with fury in his eye.

'Well, he took the wheat away with him,' replied the farmer; 'but he never repaid it, and it's a debt to this day. Sometimes I wonder whether I shall not go to law about it.'

Then the bunniah began running his thumb quickly up and down the fingers of his right hand, and his lips moved in quick calculation.

'What is the matter?' asked the farmer.

'The wheat is the cheaper; I'll pay you for the wheat,' said the bunniah, with the calmness of despair, as he remembered that by his own arrangement he was bound to give the farmer a hundred rupees.

And to this day they say in those parts, when a man owes a debt: 'Give me the money; or, if not that, give me at least the wheat.'

(This is from oral tradition.)

JACKAL OR TIGER?

One hot night, in Hindustan, a king and queen lay awake in the palace in the midst of the city. Every now and then a faint air blew through the lattice, and they hoped they were going to sleep, but they never did. Presently they became more broad awake than ever at the sound of a howl outside the palace.

'Listen to that tiger!' remarked the king.

'Tiger?' replied the queen. 'How should there be a tiger inside the city? It was only a jackal.'

'I tell you it was a tiger,' said the king.

'And I tell you that you were dreaming if you thought it was anything but a jackal,' answered the queen.

'I say it was a tiger,' cried the king; 'don't contradict me.'

'Nonsense!' snapped the queen. 'It was a jackal.' And the dispute waxed so warm that the king said at last:

'Very well, we'll call the guard and ask; and if it was a jackal I'll leave this kingdom to you and go away; and if it was a tiger then you shall go, and I will marry a new wife.'

'As you like,' answered the queen, 'there isn't any doubt which it was.'

So the king called the two soldiers who were on guard outside and put the question to them. But, whilst the dispute was going on, the king and queen had got so excited and talked so loud that the guards had heard nearly all they said, and one man observed

to the other:

'Mind you declare that the king is right. It certainly was a jackal, but, if we say so, the king will probably not keep his word about going away, and we shall get into trouble, so we had better take his side.'

To this the other agreed; therefore, when the king asked them what animal they had seen, both the guards said it was certainly a tiger, and that the king was right of course, as he always was. The king made no remark, but sent for a palanquin, and ordered the queen to be placed in it, bidding the four bearers of the palanquin to take her a long way off into the forest and there leave her. In spite of her tears, she was forced to obey, and away the bearers went for three days and three nights until they came to a dense wood. There they set down the palanquin with the queen in it, and started home again.

Now the queen thought to herself that the king could not mean to send her away for good, and that as soon as he had got over his fit of temper he would summon her back; so she stayed quite still for a long time, listening with all her ears for approaching footsteps, but heard none. After a while she grew nervous, for she was all alone, and put her head out of the palanquin and looked about her. Day was just breaking, and birds and insects were beginning to stir; the leaves rustled in a warm breeze; but, although the queen's eyes wandered in all directions, there was no sign of any human being. Then her spirit gave way, and she began to cry.

It so happened that close to the spot where the queen's palanquin had been set down, there dwelt a man who had a tiny farm in the midst of the forest, where he and his wife lived alone far from any neighbours. As it was hot weather the farmer had been sleeping on the flat roof of his house, but was awakened by the sound of weeping. He jumped up and ran downstairs as fast as he could, and into the forest towards the place the sound came from, and there he found the palanquin.

'Oh, poor soul that weeps,' cried the farmer, standing a little way off, 'who are you?' At this salutation from a stranger the queen grew silent, dreading she knew not what.

'Oh, you that weep,' repeated the farmer, 'fear not to speak to me, for you are to me as a daughter. Tell me, who are you?'

His voice was so kind that the queen gathered up her courage and spoke. And when she had told her story, the farmer called his wife, who led her to their house, and gave her food to eat, and a bed to lie on. And in the farm, a few days later, a little prince was born, and by his mother's wish named Ameer Ali.

Years passed without a sign from the king. His wife might have been dead for all he seemed to care, though the queen still lived with the farmer, and the little prince had by this time grown up into a strong, handsome, and healthy youth. Out in the forest they seemed far from the world; very few ever came near them, and the prince was continually begging his mother and the farmer to be allowed to go away and seek adventures and to make his own living. But she and the wise farmer always counselled him

to wait, until, at last, when he was eighteen years of age, they had not the heart to forbid him any longer. So he started off one early morning, with a sword by his side, a big brass pot to hold water, a few pieces of silver, and a galail[2] or two-stringed bow in his hand, with which to shoot birds as he travelled.

Many a weary mile he tramped day after day, until, one morning, he saw before him just such a forest as that in which he had been born and bred, and he stepped joyfully into it, like one who goes to meet an old friend. Presently, as he made his way through a thicket, he saw a pigeon which he thought would make a good dinner, so he fired a pellet at it from his galail, but missed the pigeon which fluttered away with a startled clatter. At the same instant he heard a great clamour from beyond the thicket, and, on reaching the spot, he found an ugly old woman streaming wet and crying loudly as she lifted from her head an earthen vessel with a hole in it from which the water was pouring. When she saw the prince with his galail in his hand, she called out:

'Oh, wretched one! why must you choose an old woman like me to play your pranks upon? Where am I to get a fresh pitcher instead of this one that you have broken with your foolish tricks? And how am I to go so far for water twice when one journey wearies me?'

'But, mother,' replied the prince, 'I played no trick upon you!

[2] A galail is a double-stringed bow from which bullets or pellets of hard dried clay can be fired with considerable force and precision.

I did but shoot at a pigeon that should have served me for dinner, and as my pellet missed it, it must have broken your pitcher. But, in exchange, you shall have my brass pot, and that will not break easily; and as for getting water, tell me where to find it, and I'll fetch it while you dry your garments in the sun, and carry it whither you will.'

At this the old woman's face brightened. She showed him where to seek the water, and when he returned a few minutes later with his pot filled to the brim, she led the way without a word, and he followed. In a short while they came to a hut in the forest, and as they drew near it Ameer Ali beheld in the doorway the loveliest damsel his eyes had ever looked on. At the sight of a stranger she drew her veil about her and stepped into the hut, and much as he wished to see her again Ameer Ali could think of no excuse by which to bring her back, and so, with a heavy heart, he made his salutation, and bade the old woman farewell. But when he had gone a little way she called after him:

'If ever you are in trouble or danger, come to where you now stand and cry: "Fairy of the Forest! Fairy of the forest, help me now!" And I will listen to you.'

The prince thanked her and continued his journey, but he thought little of the old woman's saying, and much of the lovely damsel. Shortly afterwards he arrived at a city; and, as he was now in great straits, having come to the end of his money, he walked straight to the palace of the king and asked for employment. The king said he had plenty of servants and wanted

no more; but the young man pleaded so hard that at last the rajah was sorry for him, and promised that he should enter his bodyguard on the condition that he would undertake any service which was especially difficult or dangerous. This was just what Ameer Ali wanted, and he agreed to do whatever the king might wish.

Soon after this, on a dark and stormy night, when the river roared beneath the palace walls, the sound of a woman weeping and wailing was heard above the storm. The king ordered a servant to go and see what was the matter; but the servant, falling on his knees in terror, begged that he might not be sent on such an errand, particularly on a night so wild, when evil spirits and witches were sure to be abroad. Indeed, so frightened was he, that the king, who was very kind-hearted, bade another to go in his stead, but each one showed the same strange fear. Then Ameer Ali stepped forward:

'This is my duty, your majesty,' he said, 'I will go.'

The king nodded, and off he went. The night was as dark as pitch, and the wind blew furiously and drove the rain in sheets into his face; but he made his way down to the ford under the palace walls and stepped into the flooded water. Inch by inch, and foot by foot he fought his way across, now nearly swept off his feet by some sudden swirl or eddy, now narrowly escaping being caught in the branches of some floating tree that came tossing and swinging down the stream. At length he emerged, panting and dripping wet, on the other side. Close by the bank stood

a gallows, and on the gallows hung the body of some evildoer, whilst from the foot of it came the sound of sobbing that the king had heard.

Ameer Ali was so grieved for the one who wept there that he thought nothing of the wildness of the night or of the roaring river. As for ghosts and witches, they had never troubled him, so he walked up towards the gallows where crouched the figure of the woman.

'What ails you?' he said.

Now the woman was not really a woman at all, but a horrid kind of witch who really lived in Witchland, and had no business on earth. If ever a man strayed into Witchland the ogresses used to eat him up, and this old witch thought she would like to catch a man for supper, and that is why she had been sobbing and crying in hopes that someone out of pity might come to her rescue.

So when Ameer Ali questioned her, she replied:

'Ah, kind sir, it is my poor son who hangs upon that gallows; help me to get him down and I will bless you for ever.'

Ameer Ali thought that her voice sounded rather eager than sorrowful, and he suspected that she was not telling the truth, so he determined to be very cautious.

'That will be rather difficult,' he said, 'for the gallows is high, and we have no ladder.'

'Ah, but if you will just stoop down and let me climb upon your shoulders,' answered the old witch, 'I think I could reach him.' And her voice now sounded so cruel that Ameer Ali was

sure that she intended some evil. But he only said:

'Very well, we will try.' With that he drew his sword, pretending that he needed it to lean upon, and bent so that the old woman could clamber on to his back, which she did very nimbly. Then, suddenly, he felt a noose slipped over his neck, and the old witch sprang from his shoulders on to the gallows, crying:

'Now, foolish one, I have got you, and will kill you for my supper.'

But Ameer Ali gave a sweep upwards with his sharp sword to cut the rope that she had slipped round his neck, and not only cut the cord but cut also the old woman's foot as it dangled above him; and with a yell of pain and anger she vanished into the darkness.

Ameer Ali then sat down to collect himself a little, and felt upon the ground by his side an anklet that had evidently fallen off the old witch's foot. This he put into his pocket, and as the storm had by this time passed over he made his way back to the palace. When he had finished his story, he took the anklet out of his pocket and handed it to the king, who, like everyone else, was amazed at the glory of the jewels which composed it. Indeed, Ameer Ali himself was astonished, for he had slipped the anklet into his pocket in the dark and had not looked at it since. The king was delighted at its beauty, and having praised and rewarded Ameer Ali, he gave the anklet to his daughter, a proud and spoiled princess.

Now in the women's apartments in the palace there hung two

cages, in one of which was a parrot and in the other a starling, and these two birds could talk as well as human beings. They were both pets of the princess who always fed them herself, and the next day, as she was walking grandly about with her treasure tied round her ankle, she heard the starling say to the parrot:

'Oh, Toté' (that was the parrot's name), 'how do you think the princess looks in her new jewel?'

'Think?' snapped the parrot, who was cross because they hadn't given him his bath that morning, 'I think she looks like a washerwoman's daughter, with one shoe on and the other off! Why doesn't she wear two of them, instead of going about with one leg adorned and the other empty?'

When the princess heard this she burst into tears; and sending for her father she declared that he must get her another such an anklet to wear on the other leg, or she would die of shame. So the king sent for Ameer Ali and told him that he must get a second anklet exactly like the first within a month, or he should be hanged, for the princess would certainly die of disappointment.

Poor Ameer Ali was greatly troubled at the king's command, but he thought to himself that he had, at any rate, a month in which to lay his plans. He left the palace at once, and inquired of everyone where the finest jewels were to be got; but though he sought night and day he never found one to compare with the anklet. At last only a week remained, and he was in sore difficulty, when he remembered the Fairy of the forest, and determined to go without loss of time and seek her. Therefore

away he went, and after a day's travelling he reached the cottage in the forest, and, standing where he had stood when the old woman called to him, he cried:

'Fairy of the forest! Fairy of the forest! Help me! help me!'

Then there appeared in the doorway the beautiful girl he had seen before, whom in all his wanderings he had never forgotten.

'What is the matter?' she asked, in a voice so soft that he listened like one struck dumb, and she had to repeat the question before he could answer. Then he told her his story, and she went within the cottage and came back with two wands, and a pot of boiling water. The two wands she planted in the ground about six feet apart, and then, turning to him, she said:

'I am going to lie down between these two wands. You must then draw your sword and cut off my foot, and, as soon as you have done that, you must seize it and hold it over the cauldron, and every drop of blood that falls from it into the water will become a jewel. Next you must change the wands so that the one that stood at my head is at my feet, and the one at my feet stands at my head, and place the severed foot against the wound and it will heal, and I shall become quite well again as before.'

At first Ameer Ali declared that he would sooner be hanged twenty times over than treat her so roughly; but at length she persuaded him to do her bidding. He nearly fainted himself with horror when he found that, after the cruel blow which lopped her foot off, she lay as one lifeless; but he held the severed foot over the cauldron, and, as drops of blood fell from it, and he saw each

turn in the water into shining gems, his heart took courage. Very soon there were plenty of jewels in the cauldron, and he quickly changed the wands, placed the severed foot against the wound, and immediately the two parts became one as before. Then the maiden opened her eyes, sprang to her feet, and drawing her veil about her, ran into the hut, and would not come out or speak to him any more. For a long while he waited, but, as she did not appear, he gathered up the precious stones and returned to the palace. He easily got some one to set the jewels, and found that there were enough to make, not only one, but three rare and beautiful anklets, and these he duly presented to the king on the very day that his month of grace was over.

The king embraced him warmly, and made him rich gifts; and the next day the vain princess put two anklets on each foot, and strutted up and down in them admiring herself in the mirrors that lined her room.

'Oh, Toté,' asked the starling, 'how do you think our princess looks now in these fine jewels?'

'Ugh!' growled the parrot, who was really always cross in the mornings, and never recovered his temper until after lunch, 'she's got all her beauty at one end of her now; if she had a few of those fine gew-gaws round her neck and wrists she would look better; but now, to my mind, she looks more than ever like the washerwoman's daughter dressed up.'

Poor princess! she wept and stormed and raved until she made herself quite ill; and then she declared to her father that, unless

she had bracelets and necklace to match the anklets she would die.

Again the king sent for Ameer Ali, and ordered him to get a necklace and bracelets to match those anklets within a month, or be put to a cruel death.

And again Ameer Ali spent nearly the whole month searching for the jewels, but all in vain. At length he made his way to the hut in the forest, and stood and cried:

'Fairy of the forest! Fairy of the forest! Help me! help me!'

Once more the beautiful maiden appeared at his summons and asked what he wanted, and when he had told her she said he must do exactly as he had done the first time, except that now he must cut off both her hands and her head. Her words turned Ameer Ali pale with horror; but she reminded him that no harm had come to her before, and at last he consented to do as she bade him. From her severed hands and head there fell into the cauldron bracelets and chains of rubies and diamonds, emeralds and pearls that surpassed any that ever were seen. Then the head and hands were joined on to the body, and left neither sign nor scar. Full of gratitude, Ameer Ali tried to speak to her, but she ran into the house and would not come back, and he was forced to leave her and go away laden with the jewels.

When, on the day appointed, Ameer Ali produced a necklace and bracelets each more beautiful and priceless than the last, the king's astonishment knew no bounds, and as for his daughter she was nearly mad with joy. The very next morning she put on all

her finery, and thought that now, at least, that disagreeable parrot could find no fault with her appearance, and she listened eagerly when she heard the starling say:

'Oh, Toté, how do you think our princess is looking *now*?'

'Very fine, no doubt,' grumbled the parrot; 'but what is the use of dressing up like that for oneself only? She ought to have a husband – why doesn't she marry the man who got her all these splendid things?'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.