LANG ANDREW

# THE PRINCESS NOBODY

# Andrew Lang
# The Princess Nobody

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*The Princess Nobody / A Tale of Fairyland:*

# Содержание

BALLADE OF DEDICATION 4
CHAPTER I. 6
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 11

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## BALLADE OF DEDICATION

o all you babes at Branxholm Park,
This book I dedicate;
A book for winter evenings dark,
Too dark to ride or skate.
I made it up out of my pate,
And wasted midnight oil,
Interpreting each cut and plate —
The works of Dicky Doyle!

When weary winter comes, and hark!
The Teviot roars in “spate”;
When half you think you’ll need the Ark,
The flood’s so fierce and great;
Think of the Prince and of his mate,
Their triumph and their toil,
And mark them drawn in all their state —
The works of Dicky Doyle!

Now, if my nonsense hits the mark —
If Wynnie, Pop, and Kate,
Think tales of Fays and Giants stark,
Not wholly out of date —
Another time, perchance, I'll prate,
And keep a merry coil,
Though ne'er I'll match the drawings great —
The works of Dicky Doyle!

## ENVOY

Girls, may you ne'er know fear nor hate;
Boys, field like Mr. Royle!
And, please, don't say I desecrate
The works of Dicky Doyle!

# CHAPTER I.
# THE PRINCESS NOBODY

ONCE upon a time, when Fairies were much more common than they are now, there lived a King and a Queen. Their country was close to Fairy Land, and very often the little Elves would cross over the border, and come into the King's fields and gardens. The girl-fairies would swing out of the bells of the fuschias, and loll on the leaves, and drink the little drops of dew that fell down the stems. Here you may see all the Fairies making themselves merry at a picnic on a fuschia, and an ugly little Dwarf is climbing up the stalk.

> Here's the King, in mournful mood,
> They'd amuse him, if they could!

Now the King and Queen of the country next to Fairy Land were very rich, and very fond of each other; but one thing made them unhappy. They had no child, neither boy nor girl, to sit on the Throne when they were dead and gone. Often the Queen said she wished she had a child, even if it were no bigger than her thumb; and she hoped the Fairies might hear her and help her. But they never took any notice. One day, when the King had been counting out his money all day (the day when the tributes were paid in), he grew very tired. He took off his crown, and went

into his garden. Then he looked all round his kingdom, and said, "Ah! I would give it all for a BABY!"

No sooner had the King said this, than he heard a little squeaking voice near his foot: "You shall have a lovely Baby, if you will give me what I ask."

The King looked down, and there was the funniest little Dwarf that ever was seen. He had a high red cap like a flower. He had a big moustache, and a short beard that curled outwards. His cloak was red, like his cap, and his coat was green, and he rode on a green Frog. Many people would have been frightened, but the King was used to Fairies.

"You shall have a beautiful Baby, if you will give me what I ask," said the Dwarf again.

"I'll give you anything you like," said the King.

"Then promise to give me NIENTE," said the Dwarf.

"Certainly," said the King (who had not an idea what NIENTE meant). "How will you take it?"

"I will take *it*," said the Dwarf, "in my own way, on my own day."

> Here you see a Fairy host,
> Fit to fight with Dwarf or Ghost.

With that he set spurs to his Frog, which cleared the garden path at one bound, and he was soon lost among the flowers.

Well, next day, a dreadful war broke out between the Ghosts

and the Giants, and the King had to set forth and fight on the side of his friends the Giants.

A long, long time he was away; nearly a year. At last he came back to his own country, and he heard all the church bells ringing merrily. "What *can* be the matter?" said the King, and hurried to his Palace, where all the Courtiers rushed out and told him the Queen had got a BABY.

"Girl or a boy?" says the King.

"A Princess, your Majesty," says the Nurse, with a low curtsey, correcting him.

Well, you may fancy how glad the King was, though he would have *preferred* a boy.

> Here are little Birds in plenty,
> Singing to their Queen, Niente!

"What have you called her?" he asked.

"Till your Majesty's return, we thought it better not to christen the Princess," said the Nurse, "so we have called her by the Italian name for *Nothing*: Niente; the Princess Niente, your Majesty."

When the King heard *that*, and remembered that he had promised to give NIENTE to the Dwarf, he hid his face in his hands and groaned. Nobody knew what he meant, or why he was sad, so he thought it best to keep it to himself. He went in and kissed the Queen, and comforted her, and looked at the BABY. Never was there a BABY so beautiful; she was like a Fairy's

child, and so light, she could sit on a flower and not crush it. She had little wings on her back; and all the birds were fond of her. The peasants and common people (who said they "could not see why the *first* Royal baby should be called 'Ninety' ") always spoke of her as the Princess Nobody. Only the Courtiers called her Niente. The Water Fairy was her Godmother, but (for a Fairy reason) they concealed her *real* name, and of course, she was not *christened* Niente. Here you may see her sitting teaching the little Birds to sing. They are all round her in a circle, each of them singing his very best. Great fun she and all her little companions had with the Birds; here they are, riding on them, and tumbling off when the Bird kicks. And here, again, you may observe the baby Princess riding a Parrot, while one of her Maids of Honour teases an Owl. Never was there such a happy country; all Birds and Babies, playing together, singing, and as merry as the day was long.

Well, this joyful life went on till the Princess Niente was growing quite a big girl; she was nearly fourteen. Then, one day, came a tremendous knock at the Palace gates. Out rushed the Porter, and saw a little Dwarf, in a red cap, and a red cloak, riding a green Frog.

> What a Baby: how absurd
> To be bullied by a Bird!

"Tell the King he is wanted," said the Dwarf.

The Porter carried this rude message, and the King went trembling to the door.

"I have come to claim your promise; you give me NIENTE," said the Dwarf, in his froggy voice.

Now the King had spoken long ago about his foolish promise, to the Queen of the Water Fairies, a very powerful person, and Godmother of his child.

"The Dwarf must be one of *my* people, if he rides a Frog," the Queen of the Water Fairies had said. "Just send him to *me*, if he is troublesome."

The King remembered this when he saw the Dwarf, so he put a bold face on it.

"That's you, is it?" said the King to the Dwarf. "Just you go to the Queen of the Water Fairies; she will have a word to say to you."

When the Dwarf heard that, it was *his* turn to tremble. He shook his little fist at the King; he half-drew his sword.

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