

NINE UNLIKELY TALES



BY
E. Nesbit

Illustrated by
H. R. Millar
&
Claude A. Shepperson

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UNLIKELY TALES ***

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By
E. NESBIT

Illustrated by
H. R. MILLAR
AND
CLAUDE A. SHEPPERSON

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NINE UNLIKELY TALES

THE COCKATOUCAN OR GREAT AUNT WILLOUGHBY

MATILDA'S ears were red and shiny. So were her cheeks. Her hands were red too. This was because Pridmore had washed her. It was not the usual washing, which makes you clean and comfortable, but the "thorough good wash," which makes you burn and smart till you wish you could be like the poor little savages who do not know anything, and run about bare in the sun, and only go into the water when they are hot.

Matilda wished she could have been born in a savage tribe instead of at Brixton.

"Little savages," she said, "don't have their ears washed thoroughly, and they don't have new dresses that are prickly in the insides round their arms, and cut them round the neck. Do they, Pridmore?"

But Pridmore only said, "Stuff and nonsense," and then she said, "don't wriggle so, child, for goodness' sake."

Pridmore was Matilda's nursemaid. Matilda sometimes found her trying. Matilda was quite right in believing that savage children do not wear frocks that hurt. It is also true that savage children are not over-washed, over-brushed, over-combed, gloved, booted, and hatted and taken in an omnibus to Streatham to see their Great-aunt Willoughby. This was intended to be Matilda's fate. Her mother had arranged it. Pridmore had prepared her for it. Matilda, knowing resistance to be vain, had submitted to it.

But Destiny had not been consulted, and Destiny had plans of its own for Matilda.

When the last button of Matilda's boots had been fastened (the button-hook always had a nasty temper, especially when it was hurried, and that day it bit a little piece of Matilda's leg quite spitefully) the wretched child was taken downstairs and put on a chair in the hall to wait while Pridmore popped her own things on.

"I shan't be a minute," said Pridmore. Matilda knew better. She seated herself to wait, and swung her legs miserably. She had been to her Great-aunt Willoughby's before, and she knew exactly what to expect. She would be asked about her lessons, and how many marks she had, and whether she had been a good girl. I can't think why grown-up people don't see how impertinent these questions are. Suppose you were to answer, "I'm top of my class, Auntie, thank you, and I'm very good. And now let's have a little talk about you. Aunt, dear, how much money have you got, and have you been scolding the servants again, or have you tried to be good and patient as a properly brought up aunt should be, eh, dear?"

Matilda on fancy chair
**MATILDA SWUNG HER LEGS
MISERABLY.**

Try this method with one of your aunts next time she begins asking you questions, and write and tell me what she says.

Matilda knew exactly what the Aunt Willoughby's questions would be, and she knew how, when they were answered, her aunt would give her a small biscuit with carraway seeds in it, and then tell her to go with Pridmore and have her hands and face washed again.

Then she would be sent to walk in the garden—the garden had a gritty path, and geraniums and calceolarias and lobelias in the beds. You might not pick anything. There would be minced veal at dinner, with three-cornered bits of toast round the dish, and a tapioca pudding. Then the long afternoon with a book, a bound volume of the "Potterer's Saturday Night"—nasty small print—and all the stories about children who died young because they were too good for this world.

Matilda wriggled wretchedly. If she had been a little less uncomfortable she would have cried, but her new frock was too tight and prickly to let her forget it for a moment, even in tears.

When Pridmore came down at last, she said, “Fie, for shame! What a sulky face!”

And Matilda said, “I’m not.”

“Oh, yes you are,” said Pridmore, “you know you are, you don’t appreciate your blessings.”

“I wish it was your Aunt Willoughby,” said Matilda.

“Nasty, spiteful little thing!” said Pridmore, and she shook Matilda.

Then Matilda tried to slap Pridmore, and the two went down the steps not at all pleased with each other. They went down the dull road to the dull omnibus, and Matilda was crying a little.

Now Pridmore was a very careful person, though cross, but even the most careful persons make mistakes sometimes—and she must have taken the wrong omnibus, or this story could never have happened, and where should we all have been then? This shows you that even mistakes are sometimes valuable, so do not be hard on grown-up people if they are wrong sometimes. You know after all, it hardly ever happens.

It was a very bright green and gold omnibus, and inside the cushions were green and very soft. Matilda and her nursemaid had it all to themselves, and Matilda began to feel more comfortable, especially as she had wriggled till she had burst one of her shoulder-seams and got more room for herself inside her frock.

So she said, “I’m sorry I was cross, Priddy dear.”

Pridmore said, “So you ought to be.” But she never said *she* was sorry for being cross. But you must not expect grown-up people to say that.

It was certainly the wrong omnibus because instead of jolting slowly along dusty streets, it went quickly and smoothly down a green lane, with flowers in the hedges, and green trees overhead. Matilda was so delighted

that she sat quite still, a very rare thing with her. Pridmore was reading a penny story called “The Vengeance of the Lady Constantia,” so she did not notice anything.

“I don’t care. I shan’t tell her,” said Matilda, “she’d stop the ’bus as likely as not.”

At last the ’bus stopped of its own accord. Pridmore put her story in her pocket and began to get out.

“Well, I never!” she said, and got out very quickly and ran round to where the horses were. They were white horses with green harness, and their tails were very long indeed.

“Hi, young man!” said Pridmore to the omnibus driver, “you’ve brought us to the wrong place. This isn’t Streatham Common, this isn’t.”

The driver was the most beautiful omnibus driver you ever saw, and his clothes were like him in beauty. He had white silk stockings and a ruffled silk shirt of white, and his coat and breeches were green and gold. So was the three-cornered hat which he lifted very politely when Pridmore spoke to him.

woman and girl at cart
HE WAVED AWAY THE EIGHTPENCE.

“I fear,” he said kindly, “that you must have taken, by some unfortunate misunderstanding, the wrong omnibus.”

“When does the next go back?”

“The omnibus does not go back. It runs from Brixton here once a month, but it doesn’t go back.”

“But how does it get to Brixton again, to start again, I mean,” asked Matilda.

“We start a new one every time,” said the driver, raising his three-cornered hat once more.

“And what becomes of the old ones?” Matilda asked.

“Ah,” said the driver, smiling, “that depends. One never knows beforehand, things change so nowadays. Good morning. Thank you so much for your patronage. No, on no account, Madam.”

He waved away the eightpence which Pridmore was trying to offer him for the fare from Brixton, and drove quickly off.

When they looked round them, no, this was certainly not Streatham Common. The wrong omnibus had brought them to a strange village—the neatest, sweetest, reddest, greenest, cleanest, prettiest village in the world. The houses were grouped round a village green, on which children in pretty loose frocks or smocks were playing happily.

Not a tight armhole was to be seen, or even imagined in that happy spot. Matilda swelled herself out and burst three hooks and a bit more of the shoulder seam.

The shops seemed a little queer, Matilda thought. The names somehow did not match the things that were to be sold. For instance, where it said “Elias Groves, Tinsmith,” there were loaves and buns in the window, and the shop that had “Baker” over the door, was full of perambulators—the grocer and the wheelwright seemed to have changed names, or shops, or something—and Miss Skimpling, Dressmaker or Milliner, had her shop window full of pork and sausage meat.

“What a funny, nice place,” said Matilda. “I am glad we took the wrong omnibus.”

A little boy in a yellow smock had come up close to them.

“I beg your pardon,” he said very politely, “but all strangers are brought before the king at once. Please follow me.”

“Well, of all the impudence,” said Pridmore. “Strangers, indeed! And who may you be, I should like to know?”

“I,” said the little boy, bowing very low, “am the Prime Minister. I know I do not look it, but appearances are deceitful. It’s only for a short time. I shall probably be myself again by to-morrow.”

Pridmore muttered something which the little boy did not hear. Matilda caught a few words. “Smacked,” “bed,” “bread and water”—familiar words all of them.

“If it’s a game,” said Matilda to the boy, “I should like to play.”

He frowned.

“I advise you to come at once,” he said, so sternly that even Pridmore was a little frightened. “His Majesty’s Palace is in this direction.” He walked away, and Matilda made a sudden jump, dragged her hand out of Pridmore’s, and ran after him. So Pridmore had to follow, still grumbling.

The Palace stood in a great green park dotted with white-flowered may-bushes. It was not at all like an English palace, St. James’s or Buckingham Palace, for instance, because it was very beautiful and very clean. When they got in they saw that the Palace was hung with green silk. The footmen had green and gold liveries, and all the courtiers’ clothes were the same colours.

Matilda and Pridmore had to wait a few moments while the King changed his sceptre and put on a clean crown, and then they were shown into the Audience Chamber. The King came to meet them.

“It is kind of you to have come so far,” he said. “Of *course* you’ll stay at the Palace?” He looked anxiously at Matilda.

“Are you *quite* comfortable, my dear?” he asked doubtfully.

Matilda was very truthful—for a girl.

“No,” she said, “my frock cuts me round the arms——”

“Ah,” said he, “and you brought no luggage—some of the Princess’s frocks—her old ones perhaps—yes—yes—this person—your maid, no doubt?”

A loud laugh rang suddenly through the hall. The King looked uneasily round, as though he expected something to happen. But nothing seemed likely to occur.

“Yes,” said Matilda, “Pridmore is—Oh, dear!”

For before her eyes she saw an awful change taking place in Pridmore. In an instant all that was left of the original Pridmore were the boots and the hem of her skirt—the top part of her had changed into painted iron and glass, and even as Matilda looked the bit of skirt that was left got flat and hard and square. The two feet turned into four feet, and they were iron feet, and there was no more Pridmore.

The king looking at Pridmore's transformation
**THE TOP PART OF PRIDMORE TURNED INTO PAINTED IRON AND
GLASS.**

“Oh, my poor child,” said the King, “your maid has turned into an Automatic Machine.”

It was too true. The maid had turned into a machine such as those which you see in a railway station—greedy, grasping things which take your pennies and give you next to nothing in chocolate and no change.

But there was no chocolate to be seen through the glass of the machine that once had been Pridmore. Only little rolls of paper.

The King silently handed some pennies to Matilda. She dropped one into the machine and pulled out the little drawer. There was a scroll of paper. Matilda opened it and read—

“Don’t be tiresome.”

She tried again. This time it was—

“If you don’t give over I’ll tell your Ma first thing when she comes home.”

The next was—

“Go along with you do—always worrying;” so then Matilda *knew*.

“Yes,” said the King sadly, “I fear there’s no doubt about it. Your maid has turned into an Automatic Nagging Machine. Never mind, my dear, she’ll be all right to-morrow.”

“I like her best like this, thank you,” said Matilda quickly. “I needn’t put in any more pennies, you see.”

“Oh, we mustn’t be unkind and neglectful,” said the King gently, and he dropped in a penny. *He* got—

“You tiresome boy, you. Leave me be this minute.”

“I can’t help it,” said the King wearily; “you’ve no idea how suddenly things change here. It’s because—but I’ll tell you all about it at tea-time. Go with nurse now, my dear, and see if any of the Princess’s frocks will fit you.”

Then a nice, kind, cuddly nurse led Matilda away to the Princess’s apartments, and took off the stiff frock that hurt, and put on a green silk gown, as soft as birds’ breasts, and Matilda kissed her for sheer joy at being so comfortable.

“And now, dearie,” said the nurse, “you’d like to see the Princess, wouldn’t you? Take care you don’t hurt yourself with her. She’s rather sharp.”

Matilda did not understand this then. Afterwards she did.

Girl in garden looking at thin, tall princess
**THE PRINCESS WAS LIKE A YARD AND A HALF OF
WHITE TAPE.**

The nurse took her through many marble corridors and up and down many marble steps, and at last they came to a garden full of white roses, and in the middle of it, on a green satin-covered eiderdown, as big as a feather bed, sat the Princess in a white gown.

She got up when Matilda came towards her, and it was like seeing a yard and a half of white tape stand up on one end and bow—a yard and a half of broad white tape, of course; but what is considered broad for tape is very narrow indeed for princesses.

“How are you?” said Matilda, who had been taught manners.

“Very slim indeed, thank you,” said the Princess. And she was. Her face was so white and thin that it looked as though it were made of an oyster-shell. Her hands were thin and white, and her fingers reminded Matilda of fish-bones. Her hair and eyes were black, and Matilda thought she might have been pretty if she had been fatter. When she shook hands with Matilda her bony fingers hurt quite hard.

The Princess seemed pleased to see her visitor, and invited her to sit with Her Highness on the satin cushion.

“I have to be very careful or I should break,” said she; “that’s why the cushion is so soft, and I can’t play many games for fear of accidents. Do you know any sitting-down games?”

The only thing Matilda could think of was Cat’s-cradle, so they played that with the Princess’s green hair-ribbon. Her fish-bony fingers were much cleverer than Matilda’s little fat, pink paws.

Matilda looked about her between the games and admired everything very much, and asked questions, of course. There was a very large bird chained to a perch in the middle of a very large cage. Indeed the cage was so big that it took up all one side of the rose-garden. The bird had a yellow crest like a cockatoo and a very large bill like a toucan. (If you do not know what a toucan is you do not deserve ever to go to the Zoological Gardens again.)

“What is that bird?” asked Matilda.

“Oh,” said the Princess, “that’s my pet Cockatoucan; he’s very valuable. If he were to die or be stolen the Green Land would wither up and grow like New Cross or Islington.”

“How horrible!” said Matilda.

“I’ve never been to those places, of course,” said the Princess, shuddering, “but I hope I know my geography.”

“All of it?” asked Matilda.

“Even the exports and imports,” said the Princess. “Goodbye, I’m so thin I have to rest a good deal or I should wear myself out. Nurse, take her

away.”

So nurse took her away to a wonderful room, where she amused herself till tea-time with all the kind of toys that you see and want in the shop when some one is buying you a box of bricks or a puzzle map—the kind of toys you never get because they are so expensive.

Matilda had tea with the King. He was full of true politeness and treated Matilda exactly as though she had been grown up—so that she was extremely happy and behaved beautifully.

The King told her all his troubles.

“You see,” he began, “what a pretty place my Green Land was once. It has points even now. But things aren’t what they used to be. It’s that bird, that Cockatoucan. We daren’t kill it or give it away. And every time it laughs something changes. Look at my Prime Minister. He was a six-foot man. And look at him now. I could lift him with one hand. And then your poor maid. It’s all that bad bird.”

“Why *does* it laugh?” asked Matilda.

“I can’t think,” said the King; “I can’t see anything to laugh at.”

“Can’t you give it lessons, or something nasty to make it miserable?”

“I have, I do, I assure you, my dear child. The lessons that bird has to swallow would choke a Professor.”

“Does it eat anything else besides lessons?”

“Christmas pudding. But there—what’s the use of talking—that bird would laugh if it were fed on dog-biscuits.”

His Majesty sighed and passed the buttered toast.

“You can’t possibly,” he went on, “have any idea of the kind of things that happen. That bird laughed one day at a Cabinet Council, and all my ministers turned into little boys in yellow socks. And we can’t get any laws made till they come right again. It’s not their fault, and I must keep their situations open for them, of course, poor things.”

“Of course,” said Matilda.

“There was a Dragon, now,” said the King. “When he came I offered the Princess’s hand and half my kingdom to any one who would kill him. It’s an offer that is always made, you know.”

“Yes,” said Matilda.

“Well, a really respectable young Prince came along, and every one turned out to see him fight the Dragon. As much as ninepence each was paid for the front seats, I assure you. The trumpet sounded and the Dragon came hurrying up. A trumpet is like a dinner-bell to a Dragon, you know. And the Prince drew his bright sword and we all shouted, and then that wretched bird laughed and the Dragon turned into a pussy-cat, and the Prince killed it before he could stop himself. The populace was furious.”

“What happened then?” asked Matilda.

“Well, I did what I could. I said, ‘You shall marry the Princess just the same.’ So I brought the Prince home, and when we got there the Cockatoucan had just been laughing again, and the Princess had turned into a very old German governess. The Prince went home in a great hurry and an awful temper. The Princess was all right in a day or two. These are trying times, my dear.”

“I am so sorry for you,” said Matilda, going on with the preserved ginger.

“Well you may be,” said the miserable Monarch; “but if I were to try to tell you all that that bird has brought on my poor kingdom I should keep you up till long past your proper bedtime.”

“I don’t mind,” said Matilda kindly. “Do tell me some more.”

“Why,” the King went on, growing now more agitated, “why, at one titter from that revolting bird the long row of ancestors on my Palace wall grew red-faced and vulgar; they began to drop their H’s and to assert that their name was Smith from Clapham Junction.”

“How dreadful!”

“And once,” said the King in a whimper, “it laughed so loudly that two Sundays came together and next Thursday got lost, and went prowling away and hid itself on the other side of Christmas.”

“And now,” he said suddenly, “it’s bedtime.”

“Must I go?” asked Matilda.

“Yes please,” said the King. “I tell all strangers this tragic story because I always feel that perhaps some stranger might be clever enough to help me. You seem a very nice little girl. Do you think you are clever?”

It is very nice even to be *asked* if you are clever. Your Aunt Willoughby knows well enough that you are not. But kings do say nice things. Matilda was very pleased.

“I don’t think I am clever,” she was saying quite honestly, when suddenly the sound of a hoarse laugh rang through the banqueting hall. Matilda put her hands to her head.

“Oh, dear!” she cried, “I feel so different. Oh! wait a minute. Oh! whatever is it? Oh!”

Then she was silent for a moment. Then she looked at the King and said, “I was wrong, your Majesty, I *am* clever, and I know it is not good for me to sit up late. Good-night. Thank you so much for your nice party. In the morning I think I shall be clever enough to help you, unless the bird laughs me back into the other kind of Matilda.”

But in the morning Matilda’s head felt strangely clear; only when she came down to breakfast full of plans for helping the King, she found that the Cockatoucan must have laughed in the night, for the beautiful Palace had turned into a butcher’s shop, and the King, who was too wise to fight against Fate, had tucked up his royal robes, and was busy in the shop weighing out six ounces of the best mutton-chops for a child with a basket.

“I don’t know how ever you can help me now,” he said, despairingly; “as long as the Palace stays like this, it’s no use trying to go on with being a king, or anything. I can only try to be a good butcher. You shall keep the accounts if you like, till that bird laughs me back into my Palace again.”

So the King settled down to business, respected by his subjects, who had all, since the coming of the Cockatoucan, had their little ups and downs. And Matilda kept the books and wrote out the bills, and really they were both rather happy. Pridmore, disguised as the automatic machine, stood in the shop and attracted many customers. They used to bring their children, and make the poor innocents put their pennies in, and then read Pridmore's good advice. Some parents are so harsh. And the Princess sat in the back garden with the Cockatoucan, and Matilda played with her every afternoon. But one day, as the King was driving through another kingdom, the King of that kingdom looked out of one of his Palace windows, and laughed as the King went by, and shouted, "Butcher!"

King sitting on top tall ladder held up by four men
overlooking his vast army
THE KING SENT HIS ARMY, AND THE ENEMY WERE CRUSHED.

The Butcher-King did not mind this, because it was true, however rude. But when the other King called out, "What price cat's meat!" the King was very angry indeed, because the meat he sold was always of the best quality. When he told Matilda all about it, she said, "Send the Army to crush him."

So the King sent his Army, and the enemy were crushed. The Bird laughed the King back into his throne, and laughed away the butcher's shop just in time for his Majesty to proclaim a general holiday, and to organise a magnificent reception for the Army. Matilda now helped the King to manage everything. She wonderfully enjoyed the new delightful feeling of being clever, so that she felt it was indeed too bad when the Cockatoucan laughed just as the reception was beautifully arranged. It laughed, and the general holiday was turned into an income tax; the magnificent reception changed itself to a royal reprimand, and the Army itself suddenly became a discontented Sunday-school treat, and had to be fed with buns and brought home in brakes, crying.

"Something must be done," said the King.

"Well," said Matilda, "I've been thinking if you will make me the Princess's governess, I'll see what I can do. I'm quite clever enough."

“I must open Parliament to do that,” said the King; “it’s a Constitutional change.”

So he hurried off down the road to open Parliament. But the bird put its head on one side and laughed at him as he went by. He hurried on, but his beautiful crown grew large and brassy, and was set with cheap glass in the worst possible taste. His robe turned from velvet and ermine to flannelette and rabbit’s fur. His sceptre grew twenty feet long and extremely awkward to carry. But he persevered, his royal blood was up.

“No bird,” said he, “shall keep me from my duty and my Parliament.”

But when he got there, he was so agitated that he could not remember which was the right key to open Parliament with, and in the end he hampered the lock and so could not open Parliament at all, and members of Parliament went about making speeches in the roads to the great hindrance of the traffic.

The poor King went home and burst into tears.

“Matilda,” he said, “this is too much. You have always been a comfort to me. You stood by me when I was a butcher; you kept the books; you booked the orders; you ordered the stock. If you really are clever enough, now is the time to help me. If you won’t, I’ll give up the business. I’ll leave off being a King. I’ll go and be a butcher in the Camberwell New Road, and I will get another little girl to keep my books, not you.”

This decided Matilda. She said, “Very well, your Majesty, then give me leave to prowl at night. Perhaps I shall find out what makes the Cockatoucan laugh; if I can do that, we can take care he never gets it, whatever it is.”

“Ah!” said the poor King, “if you could only do that.”

When Matilda went to bed that night, she did not go to sleep. She lay and waited till all the Palace was quiet, and then she crept softly, pussily, mousily to the garden, where the Cockatoucan’s cage was, and she hid behind a white rosebush, and looked and listened. Nothing happened till it was gray dawn, and then it was only the Cockatoucan who woke up. But when the sun was round and red over the Palace roof, something came

creeping, creeping, pussily, mousily out of the Palace; and it looked like a yard and a half of white tape creeping along; and it was the Princess herself.

She came quietly up to the cage, and squeezed herself between the bars; they were very narrow bars, but a yard and a half of white tape can go through the bars of any birdcage I ever saw. And the Princess went up to the Cockatoucan and tickled him under his wings till he laughed aloud. Then, quick as thought, the Princess squeezed through the bars, and was back in her room before the bird had finished laughing. Matilda went back to bed. Next day all the sparrows had turned into cart horses, and the roads were impassable.

That day when she went, as usual, to play with the Princess, Matilda said to her suddenly, "Princess, what makes you so thin?"

The Princess caught Matilda's hand and pressed it with warmth.

"Matilda," she said simply, "you have a noble heart. No one else has ever asked me that, though they tried to cure it. And I couldn't answer till I was asked, could I? It's a sad, a tragic tale, Matilda. I was once as fat as you are."

The king is now a sad, small house with a fence
around him. Matilda, holding Beeton's cookbook
is looking at him
THE KING HAD TURNED INTO A VILLA RESIDENCE.

"I'm not so very fat," said Matilda, indignantly.

"Well," said the Princess impatiently, "I was quite fat enough anyhow. And then I got thin—"

"But how?"

"Because they would not let me have my favourite pudding every day."

"What a shame!" said Matilda, "and what is your favourite pudding?"

"Bread and milk, of course, sprinkled with rose leaves—and with pear-drops in it."

Of course, Matilda went at once to the King, and while she was on her way the Cockatoucan happened to laugh. When she reached the King, he was in no condition for ordering dinner, for he had turned into a villa-residence, replete with every modern improvement. Matilda only recognised him, as he stood sadly in the Park, by the crown that stuck crookedly on one of the chimney-pots, and the border of ermine along the garden path. So she ordered the Princess's favourite pudding on her own responsibility, and the whole Court had it every day for dinner, till there was no single courtier but loathed the very sight of bread and milk, and there was hardly one who would not have run a mile rather than meet a pear-drop. Even Matilda herself got rather tired of it, though being clever, she knew how good bread and milk was for her.

But the Princess got fatter and fatter, and rosier and rosier. Her thread-paper gowns had to be let out, and let out, till there were no more turnings in left to be let out, and then she had to wear the old ones that Matilda had been wearing, and then to have new ones. And as she got fatter she got kinder, till Matilda grew quite fond of her.

And the Cockatoucan had not laughed for a month.

When the Princess was as fat as any Princess ought to be, Matilda went to her one day, and threw her arms round her and kissed her. The Princess kissed her back, and said, "Very well, I *am* sorry then, but I didn't want to say so, but now I will. And the Cockatoucan never laughs except when he's tickled. So there! He hates to laugh."

"And you won't do it again," said Matilda, "will you?"

"No, of course not," said the Princess, very much surprised, "why should I? I was spiteful when I was thin, but now I'm fat again I want every one to be happy."

"But how can any one be happy?" asked Matilda, severely, "when every one is turned into something they weren't meant to be? There's your dear father—he's a desirable villa—the Prime Minister was a little boy, and he got back again, and now he's turned into a Comic Opera. Half the Palace housemaids are breakers, dashing themselves against the Palace crockery: the Navy, to a man, are changed to French poodles, and the Army to

German sausages. Your favourite nurse is now a flourishing steam laundry, and I, alas! am too clever by half. Can't that horrible bird do anything to put us all right again?"

"No," said the Princess, dissolved in tears at this awful picture, "he told me once himself that when he laughed he could only change one or two things at once, and then, as often as not, it turned out to be something he didn't expect. The only way to make everything come right again would be—but it can't be done! If we could only make him laugh on the wrong side of his mouth. That's the secret. He told me so. But I don't know what it *is*, let alone being able to do it. Could *you* do it, Matilda?"

"No," said Matilda, "but let me whisper. He's listening. Pridmore could. She's often told me she'd do it to me. But she never has. Oh, Princess, I've got an idea."

The two were whispering so low that the Cockatoucan could not hear, though he tried his hardest. Matilda and the Princess left him listening.

Presently he heard a sound of wheels. Four men came into the rose-garden wheeling a great red thing in a barrow. They set it down in front of the Cockatoucan, who danced on his perch with rage.

"Oh," he said, "if only some one would make me laugh, that horrible thing would be the one to change. I know it would. It would change into something much horridier than it is now. I feel it in all my feathers."

The Princess opened the cage-door with the Prime Minister's key, which a tenor singer had found at the beginning of his music. It was also the key of the comic opera. She crept up behind the Cockatoucan and tickled him under both wings. He fixed his baleful eye on the red Automatic Machine and laughed long and loud; he saw the red iron and glass change before his eyes into the form of Pridmore. Her cheeks were red with rage and her eyes shone like glass with fury.

Parrot in cage looking at two men pulling a
thing in a cart
**FOUR MEN CAME WHEELING A GREAT RED THING
ON A BARROW.**

“Nice manners!” said she to the Cockatoucan, “what are you laughing at, I should like to know—I’ll make you laugh on the wrong side of your mouth, my fine fellow!”

She sprang into the cage, and then and there, before the astonished Court, she shook that Cockatoucan till he really and truly did laugh on the wrong side of his mouth. It was a terrible sight to witness, and the sound of that wrong-sided laughter was horrible to hear.

But instantly all the things changed back as if by magic to what they had been before. The laundry became a nurse, the villa became a king, the other people were just what they had been before, and all Matilda’s wonderful cleverness went out like the snuff of a candle.

The Cockatoucan himself fell in two—one half of him became a common, ordinary Toucan, such as you must have seen a hundred times at the Zoo, unless you are unworthy to visit that happy place, and the other half became a weathercock, which, as you know, is always changing and makes the wind change too. So he has not quite lost his old power. Only now he is in halves, any power he may have has to be used without laughing. The poor, broken Cockatoucan, like King you-know-who in English history, has never since that sad day smiled again.

The grateful King sent an escort of the whole Army, now no longer dressed in sausage skins, but in uniforms of dazzling beauty, with drums and banners, to see Matilda and Pridmore home. But Matilda was very sleepy. She had been clever for so long that she was quite tired out. It is indeed a very fatiguing thing, as no doubt you know. And the soldiers must have been sleepy too, for one by one the whole Army disappeared, and by the time Pridmore and Matilda reached home there was only one left, and he was the policeman at the corner.

The next day Matilda began to talk to Pridmore about the Green Land and the Cockatoucan and the Villa-residence-King, but Pridmore only said

“Pack of nonsense! Hold your tongue, do!”

So Matilda naturally understood that Pridmore did not wish to be reminded of the time when she was an Automatic Nagging Machine, so of

course, like a kind and polite little girl, she let the subject drop.

Matilda did not mention her adventures to the others at home because she saw that they believed her to have spent the time with her Great-aunt Willoughby.

And she knew if she had said that she had not been there she would be sent at once—and she did not wish this.

She has often tried to get Pridmore to take the wrong omnibus again, which is the only way she knows of getting to the Green Land; but only once has she been successful, and then the omnibus did not go to the Green Land at all, but to the Elephant and Castle.

But no little girl ought to expect to go to the Green Land more than once in a lifetime. Many of us indeed are not even so fortunate as to go there once.

WHEREYOUWANTOGO. or THE BOUNCIBLE BALL

IT is very hard, when you have been accustomed to go to the seaside every summer ever since you were quite little, to be made to stay in London just because an aunt and an uncle choose to want to come and stay at your house to see the Royal Academy and go to the summer sales.

Selim and Thomasina felt that it was very hard indeed. And aunt and uncle were not the nice kind, either. If it had been Aunt Emma, who dressed dolls and told fairy-tales—or Uncle Reggie, who took you to the Crystal Palace, and gave you five bob at a time, and never even asked what you spent it on, it would have been different. But it was Uncle Thomas and Aunt Selina.

Aunt Selina was all beady, and sat bolt upright, and told you to mind what you were told, and Selim had been named after her—as near as they could get. And Uncle Thomas was the one Thomasina had been named after: he was deaf, and he always told you what the moral of everything was, and the housemaid said he was “near.”

“I know he is, worse luck,” said Thomasina.

“I mean, miss,” explained the housemaid, “he’s none too free with his chink.”

Selim groaned. “He never gave me but a shilling in his life,” said he, “and that turned out to be bad when I tried to change it at the ginger-beer shop.”

The children could not understand why this aunt and uncle were allowed to interfere with everything as they did: and they quite made up their minds that when they were grown up they would never allow an aunt or an uncle to cross their doorsteps. They never thought—poor, dear little things—that some day they would grow up to be aunts and uncles in their turn, or, at least, one of each.

It was very hot in London that year: the pavement was like hot pie, and the asphalt was like hot pudding, and there was a curious wind that

collected dust and straw and dirty paper, and then got tired of its collection, and threw it away in respectable people's areas and front gardens. The blind in the nursery had never been fixed up since the day when the children took it down to make a drop-scene for a play they were going to write and never did. So the hot afternoon sun came burning in through the window, and the children got hotter and hotter, and crosser and crosser, till at last Selim slapped Thomasina's arms till she cried, and Thomasina kicked Selim's legs till he screamed.

Then they sat down in different corners of the nursery and cried, and called each other names, and said they wished they were dead. This is very naughty indeed, as, of course, you know; but you must remember how hot it was.

When they had called each other all the names they could think of, Thomasina said, suddenly, "All right, Silly," (that was Selim's pet name) —"cheer up."

"It's too hot to cheer up," said Selim, gloomily.

"We've been very naughty," said Thomasina, rubbing her eyes with the paint rag, "but it's all the heat. I heard Aunt Selina telling mother the weather wore her nerves to fiddle-strings. That just meant she was cross."

"Then it's not *our* fault," said Selim. "People say be good and you'll be happy. Uncle Reggy says, 'Be happy, and perhaps you'll be good.' *I* could be good if I was happy."

"So could I," said Thomasina.

"What *would* make you happy?" said a thick, wheezy voice from the toy cupboard, and out rolled the big green and red india-rubber ball that Aunt Emma had sent them last week. They had not played with it much, because the garden was so hot and sunny—and when they wanted to play with it in the street, on the shady side, Aunt Selina had said it was not like respectable children, so they weren't allowed.

Now the Ball rolled out very slowly—and the bright light on its new paint seemed to make it wink at them. You will think that they were surprised to hear a ball speak. Not at all. As you grow up, and more and

more strange things happen to you, you will find that the more astonishing a thing is the less it surprises you. (I wonder why this is. Think it over, and write and tell me what you think.)

Selim stood up, and said, “Halloa”; but that was only out of politeness. Thomasina answered the Ball’s question.

“We want to be at the seaside—and no aunts—and none of the things we don’t like—and no uncles, of course,” she said.

“Well,” said the Ball, “if you think you can be good, why not set me bouncing?”

“We’re not allowed in here,” said Thomasina, “because of the crinkly ornaments people give me on my birthdays.”

“Well, the street then,” said the Ball; “the nice shady side.”

“It’s not like respectable children,” said Selim sadly.

The Ball laughed. If you have never heard an india-rubber ball laugh you won’t understand. It’s the sort of quicker, quicker, quicker, softer, softer, softer chuckle of a bounce that it gives when it’s settling down when you’re tired of bouncing it.

“The garden, then,” it said.

“I don’t mind, if you’ll go on talking,” said Selim kindly.

So they took the Ball down into the garden and began to bounce it in the sun, on the dry, yellowy grass of the lawn.

“Come on,” said the Ball. “You do like me!”

“What?” said the children.

“Why, do like I do—bounce!” said the Ball. “That’s right—higher, higher, higher!”

For then and there the two children had begun bouncing as if their feet were india-rubber balls, and you have no idea what a delicious sensation that gives you.

“Higher, higher,” cried the green and red ball, bouncing excitedly. “Now, follow me, higher, higher.” And off it bounced down the blackened gravel of the path, and the children bounced after it, shrieking with delight at the new feeling. They bounced over the wall—all three of them—and the children looked back just in time to see Uncle Thomas tapping at the window, and saying, “Don’t.”

You have not the least idea how glorious it is to feel full of bouncibleness; so that, instead of dragging one foot after the other, as you do when you feel tired or naughty, you bounce along, and every time your feet touch the ground you bounce higher, and all without taking any trouble or tiring yourself. You have, perhaps, heard of the Greek gentleman who got new strength every time he fell down. His name was Antæus, and I believe he was an india-rubber ball, green on one side where he touched the earth, and red on the other where he felt the sun. But enough of classical research.

Thomasina and Selim bounced away, following the Bouncible Ball. They went over fences and walls, and through parched, dry gardens and burning-hot streets; they passed the region where fields of cabbages and rows of yellow brick cottages mark the division between London and the suburbs. They bounced through the suburbs, dusty and neat, with geraniums in the front gardens, and all the blinds pulled half-way down; and then the lamp-posts in the road got fewer and fewer, and the fields got greener and the hedges thicker—it was real, true country—with lanes instead of roads; and down the lanes the green and red Ball went bouncing, bouncing, bouncing, and the children after it. Thomasina, in her white, starched frock, very prickly round the neck, and Selim, in his every-day sailor-suit, a little tight under the arms. His Sunday one was a size larger. No one seemed to notice them, but they noticed and pitied the children who were being “taken for a walk” in the gritty suburban roads.

“Where are we going?” they asked the Ball, and it answered, with a sparkling green and red smile—

“To the most delightful place in the world.”

“What’s it called?” asked Selim.

“It’s called Whereyouwantogoto,” the Ball answered, and on they went. It was a wonderful journey—up and down, looking through the hedges and over them, looking in at the doors of cottages, and then in at the top windows, up and down—bounce—bounce—bounce.

And at last they came to the sea. And the Bouncing Ball said, “Here you are! Now be good, for there’s nothing here but the things that make people happy.” And with that he curled himself up like a ball in the shadow of a wet sea-weedy rock, and went to sleep, for he was tired out with his long journey. The children stopped bouncing, and looked about them.

“Oh, Tommy;” said Selim.

Bouncing after the ball under a train bridge with the
sign: Frequent trains during the year, city and west end
Loungest route to London bridge
THEY BOUNCED THROUGH THE SUBURBS.

“Oh, Silly!” said Thomasina. And well they might! In the place to which the Ball had brought them was all that your fancy can possibly paint, and a great deal more beside.

The children feel exactly as you do when you’ve had the long, hot, dirty train journey—and every one has been so cross about the boxes and the little brown portmanteau that was left behind at the junction—and then when you get to your lodgings you are told that you may run down and have a look at the sea if you’re back by tea time, and mother and nurse will unpack.

Only Thomasina and her brother had not had a tiresome journey—and there were no nasty, stuffy lodgings for them, and no tea with oily butter and a new pot of marmalade.

“There’s silver-sand,” said she—“miles of it.”

“And rocks,” said he.

“And cliffs.”

“And caves in the cliffs.”

“And how cool it is,” said Thomasina.

“And yet it’s nice and warm too,” said Selim.

“And what shells!”

“And seaweed.”

“And the downs behind!”

“And trees in the distance!”

“And here’s a dog, to go after sticks. Here, Rover, Rover.”

A big black dog answered at once to the name, because he was a retriever, and they are all called Rover.

“And spades!” said the girl.

“And pails!” said the boy.

“And what pretty sea-poppies,” said the girl.

“And a basket—and grub in it!” said the boy. So they sat down and had lunch.

It was a lovely lunch. Lobsters and ice-creams (strawberry and pineapple), and toffee and hot buttered toast and ginger-beer. They ate and ate, and thought of the aunt and uncle at home, and the minced veal and sago pudding, and they were very happy indeed.

Just as they were finishing their lunch they saw a swirling, swishing, splashing commotion in the green sea a little way off, and they tore off their clothes and rushed into the water to see what it was. It was a seal. He was very kind and convenient. He showed them how to swim and dive.

“But won’t it make us ill to bathe so soon after meals? Isn’t it wrong?” asked Thomasina.

Two children in swimsuits talking to seal at shore
THE SEAL WAS VERY KIND AND CONVENIENT.

“Not at all,” said the seal. “Nothing is wrong here—as long as you’re good. Let me teach you water-leapfrog—a most glorious game, so cool, yet so exciting. You try it.”

At last the seal said: “I suppose you wear man-clothes. They’re very inconvenient. My two eldest have just outgrown their coats. If you’ll accept them——”

And it dived, and came up with two golden sealskin coats over its arm, and the children put them on.

“Thank you very much,” they said. “You *are* kind.”

I am almost sure that it has never been your luck to wear a fur coat that fitted you like a skin, and that could not be spoiled with sand or water, or jam, or bread and milk, or any of the things with which you mess up the nice new clothes your kind relations buy for you. But if you like, you may try to imagine how jolly the little coats were.

Thomasina and Selim played all day on the beach, and when they were tired then went into a cave, and found supper—salmon and cucumber, and welsh-rabbit and lemonade—and then they went to bed in a great heap of straw and grass and fern and dead leaves, and all the delightful things you have often wished to sleep in. Only you have never been allowed to.

In the morning there were plum-pudding for breakfast, and roast duck and lemon jelly, and the day passed like a happy dream, only broken by surprising and delightful meals. The Ball woke up and showed them how to play water-polo; and they bounced him on the sand, with shrieks of joy and pleasure. You know, a Ball likes to be bounced by people he is fond of—it is like slapping a friend on the shoulder.

There were no houses in “Whereyouwantogoto,” and no bathing machines or bands, no nursemaids or policemen or aunts or uncles. You could do exactly what you liked as long as you were good.

“What will happen if we’re naughty?” Selim asked. The Ball looked very grave, and answered—

“I must not tell you; and I very strongly advise you not to try to find out.”

“We won’t—indeed, we won’t,” said they, and went off to play rounders with the rabbits on the downs—who were friendly fellows, and very keen on the game.

On the third evening Thomasina was rather silent, and the Ball said, “What’s the matter, girl-bouncer? Out with it.”

So she said, “I was wondering how mother is, and whether she has one of her bad headaches.”

The Ball said, “Good little girl! Come with me and I’ll show you something.”

He bounced away, and they followed him, and he flopped into a rocky pool, frightening the limpets and sea-anemones dreadfully, though he did not mean to.

“Now look,” he called from under the water, and the children looked, and the pool was like a looking-glass, only it was not their own faces they saw in it.

They saw the drawing-room at home, and father and mother, who were both quite well, only they looked tired—and the aunt and uncle were there—and Uncle Thomas was saying, “What a blessing those children are away.”

“Then they know where we are?” said Selim to the Ball.

“They think they know,” said the Ball, “or you think they think they know. Anyway, they’re happy enough. Good-night.”

And he curled himself up like a ball in his favourite sleeping-place. The two children crept into their pleasant, soft, sweet nest of straw and leaves and fern and grass, and went to sleep. But Selim was vexed with Thomasina because she had thought of mother before he had, and he said she had taken all the fern—and they went to sleep rather cross. They woke crosser. So far they had both helped to make the bed every morning, but to-day neither wanted to.

“I don’t see why I should make the beds,” said he; “it’s a girl’s work, not a boy’s.”

“I don’t see why I should do it,” said Thomasina; “it’s a servant’s place, not a young lady’s.”

And then a very strange and terrible thing happened. Quite suddenly, out of nothing and out of nowhere, appeared a housemaid—large and stern and very neat indeed, and she said—

“You are quite right, miss; it is my place to make the beds. And I am instructed to see that you are both in bed by seven.”

Think how dreadful this must have been to children who had been going to bed just when they felt inclined. They went out on to the beach.

“You see what comes of being naughty,” said Thomasina; and Selim said, “Oh, shut up, do!”

Children now sitting in shade at shore with stern maid
before them with her hands on her hips
**SUDDENLY, OUT OF NOTHING AND NOWHERE, APPEARED A
LARGE, STERN HOUSEMAID.**

They cheered up towards dinner-time—it was roast pigeons that day and bread sauce, and whitebait and syllabubs—and for the rest of the day they were as good as gold, and very polite to the Ball. Selim told it all about the dreadful apparition of the housemaid, and it shook its head (I know *you’ve* never seen a ball do that, and very likely you never will) and said—

“My Bouncible Boy, you may be happy here for ever and ever if you’re contented and good. Otherwise—well, it’s a quarter to seven—you’ve got to go.”

And, sure enough, they had to. And the housemaid put them to bed, and washed them with yellow soap, and some of it got in their eyes. And she lit a night-light, and sat with them till they went to sleep, so that they couldn’t talk, and were ever so much longer getting to sleep than they would have been if she had not been there. And the beds were iron, with mattresses and hot, stuffy, fluffy sheets and many more new blankets than they wanted.

The next day they got out as early as they could and played water football with the seal and the Bouncible Ball, and when dinner-time came it was lobster and ices. But Thomasina was in a bad temper. She said, "I wish it was duck." And before the words had left her lips it was cold mutton and rice-pudding, and they had to sit up to table and eat it properly too, and the housemaid came round to see that they didn't leave any bits on the edges of their plates, or talk with their mouths full.

There were no more really nice meals after that, only the sort of things you get at home. But it is possible to be happy even without really nice meals. But you have to be very careful. The days went by pleasantly enough. All the sea and land creatures were most kind and attentive. The seal taught them all it knew, and was always ready to play with them. The star-fish taught them astronomy, and the jelly-fish taught them fancy cooking. The limpets taught them dancing as well as they could for their lameness. The sea-birds taught them to make nests—a knowledge they have never needed to apply—and if the oysters did not teach them anything it was only because oysters are so very stupid, and not from any lack of friendly feeling.

The children bathed every day in the sea, and if they had only been content with this all would have been well. But they weren't.

a bathing house rising out of the sand with a sign: YOU MUST
NOT BATHE ANY MORE EXCEPT THROUGH ME!
A LONG, POINTED THING CAME SLOWLY UP OUT OF THE SAND.

"Let's dig a bath," said Selim, "and the sea will come in and fill it, and then we can bathe in it."

So they fetched their spades and dug—and there was no harm in that, as you very properly remark.

But when the hole was finished, and the sea came creep, creep, creeping up—and at last a big wave thundered up the sand and swirled into the hole, Thomasina and Selim were struggling on the edge, fighting which should go in first, and the wave drew sandily back into the sea, and neither of them had bathed in the new bath. And now it was all wet and sandy, and its nice sharp edges rounded off, and much shallower. And as they looked at it

angrily, the sandy bottom of the bath stirred and shifted and rose up, as if some great sea-beast were heaving underneath with his broad back. The wet sand slipped back in slabs at each side, and a long pointed thing like a thin cow's back came slowly up. It showed broader and broader, and presently the flakes of wet sand were dropping heavily off the top of a brand-new bathing machine that stood on the sand over where their bath had been.

"Well," said Selim, "we've done it this time."

They certainly had, for on the door of the bathing machine was painted: "You must not bathe any more except through me."

So there was no more running into the sea just when and how they liked. They had to use the bathing machine, and it smelt of stale salt water and other people's wet towels.

After this the children did not seem to care so much about the seaside, and they played more on the downs, where the rabbits were very kind and hospitable, and in the woods, where all sorts of beautiful flowers grew wild—and there was nobody to say "Don't" when you picked them. The children thought of what Uncle Thomas would have said if he had been there, and they were very, very happy.

But one day Thomasina had pulled a lot of white convolvulus and some pink geraniums and calceolarias—the kind you are never allowed to pick at home—and she had made a wreath of them and put it on her head.

Then Selim said, "You *are* silly! You look like a Bank Holiday."

And his sister said, "I can't help it. They'd look lovely on a hat, if they were only artificial. I wish I had a hat."

And she had. A large stiff hat that hurt her head just where the elastic was sewn on, and she had her stiff white frock that scratched, her tiresome underclothing, all of it, and stockings and heavy boots; and Selim had his sailor suit—the every-day one that was too tight in the arms; and they had to wear them always, and their fur coats were taken away.

They went sadly, all stiff and uncomfortable, and told the Bouncible Ball. It looked very grave, and great tears of salt water rolled down its red

and green cheeks as it sat by the wet, seaweed-covered rock.

“Oh, you silly children,” it said, “haven’t you been warned enough? You’ve everything a reasonable child could wish for. Can’t you be contented?”

“Of course we can,” they said—and so they were—for a day and a half. And then it wasn’t exactly discontent but real naughtiness that brought them to grief.

They were playing on the downs by the edge of the wood under the heliotrope tree. A hedge of camellia bushes cast a pleasant shadow, and out in the open sunlight on the downs the orchids grew like daisies, and the carnations like buttercups. All about was that kind of turf on which the gardener does not like you to play, and they had pulled armfuls of lemon verbenas and made a bed of it. But Selim’s blouse was tight under the arms. So when Thomasina said—

“Oh, Silly dear, how beautiful it is, just like fairyland,” he said—

“Silly yourself. There’s no such thing as fairyland.”

Just then a fairy, with little bright wings the colour of a peacock’s tail, fluttered across the path, and settled on a magnolia flower.

“Oh! Silly darling,” cried Thomasina, “it *is* fairyland, and there’s a fairy, such a beautiful dear. Look—there she goes.”

But Selim would not look—he turned over and hid his eyes.

“There’s no such thing as fairyland, I tell you,” he grunted, “and I don’t believe in fairies.”

And then, quite suddenly and very horribly the fairy turned into a policeman—because every one knows there are such things as policemen, and any one can believe in *them*.

And all the rare and beautiful flowers withered up and disappeared, and only thorns and thistles were left, and the misty, twiny trim little grass path that led along the top of the cliffs turned into a parade, and the policeman walked up and down it incessantly, and watched the children at their play,

and you know how difficult it is to play when any one is watching you, especially a policeman. Selim was extremely vexed: that was why, he said, there couldn't possibly be glow-worms as big as bicycle lamps, which, of course, there were in "Whereyouwantogoto." It was after that that the gas-lamps were put all along the parade, and a pier sprang up on purpose to be lighted with electricity, and a band played, because it is nonsense to have a pier without a band.

Children now fully dressed building a sand castle while a
policeman struts by
**IT IS DIFFICULT TO PLAY WHEN ANY ONE IS WATCHING YOU,
ESPECIALLY A POLICEMAN.**

"Oh, you naughty, silly children," said the Bouncible Ball, turning red with anger, except in the part where he was green with disgust; "it makes me bounce with rage to see how you've thrown away your chances, and what a seaside resort you're making of 'Whereyouwantogoto.'"

And he did bounce, angrily, up and down the beach till the housemaid looked out of the cave and told the children not to be so noisy, and the policeman called out—

"Now then, move along there, move along. You're obstructing of the traffic."

And now I have something to tell you which you will find it hard to make any excuses for. I can't make any myself. I can only ask you to remember how hard it is to be even moderately good, and how easy it is to be extremely naughty.

When the Bouncible Ball stopped bouncing, Selim said—

"I wonder what makes him bounce."

"Oh no, *don't!*" cried Thomasina, for she had heard her brother wonder that about balls before, and she knew all too well what it ended in.

"Oh, *don't,*" she said, "oh, Silly, he brought us here, he's been so kind." But Selim said, "Nonsense; balls can't feel, and it will be almost as good to play with after I've looked inside it."

And then, before Thomasina could prevent him, he pulled out the knife Uncle Reggy gave him last holiday but one, and catching the Ball up, he plunged the knife into its side. The Bouncible Ball uttered one whiffing squeak of pain and grief, then with a low, hissing sigh its kindly spirit fled, and it lay, a lifeless mass of paint and india-rubber in the hands of its assassin. Thomasina burst into tears—but the heartless Selim tore open the Ball, and looked inside. You know well enough what he found there. Emptiness; the little square patch of india-rubber that makes the hard lump on the outside of the ball which you feel with your fingers when the ball is alive and his own happy, bouncing, cheerful self.

The children stood looking at each other.

“I—I almost wish I hadn’t,” said Selim at last; but before Thomasina could answer he had caught her hand.

“Oh, look,” he cried, “look at the sea.”

It was, indeed, a dreadful sight. The beautiful dancing, sparkling blue sea was drying up before their eyes—in less than a moment it was quite flat and dusty. It hurriedly laid down a couple of railway lines, ran up a signal-box and telegraph-poles, and became the railway at the back of their house at home.

The children, gasping with horror, turned to the downs. From them tall, yellow brick houses were rising, as if drawn up by an invisible hand. Just as treacle does in cold weather if you put your five fingers in and pulled them up. But, of course, you are never allowed to do this. The beach got hard—it was a pavement. The green downs turned grey—they were slate roofs—and Thomasina and Selim found themselves at the iron gate of their own number in the terrace—and there was Uncle Thomas at the window knocking for them to come in, and Aunt Selina calling out to them how far from respectable it was to play in the streets.

They were sent to bed at once—that was Aunt Selina’s suggestion—and Uncle Thomas arranged that they should have only dry bread for tea.

Selim and Thomasina have never seen “Whereyouwantogoto” again, nor the Bouncible Ball—not even his poor body—and they don’t deserve to either. Of course, Thomasina was not so much to blame as Selim, but she

was punished just the same. I can't help that. This is really the worst of being naughty. You not only have to suffer for it yourself, but some one else always has to suffer too, generally the person who loves you best.

You are intelligent children, and I will not insult you with a moral. I am not Uncle Thomas. Nor will I ask you to remember what I have told you. I am not Aunt Selina.

THE BLUE MOUNTAIN

TONY was young Tony, and old Tony was his grandfather. This story is about young Tony, and no human being believes a word of it, unless young Tony does.

Tony was born in the town of Antioch. This is not the same Antioch that you read about in history, but quite a different place. It was a place where nearly every one was very dark as to the complexion, and rather short as to the temper and figure. People who were fair in the face and easy in the temper were not thought much of in Antioch. When Tony's mother saw that her baby was as fair as a daffodil and as good as gold, and laughed all day, she said, "Oh dear, oh dear, I suppose he takes after his grandfather, he is not in the least like *my* family," and the matter annoyed her so much that she died.

Then there was only old Tony left to look after young Tony, because his father had been killed in the wars—only a few weeks before.

The people of Antioch were always fighting the neighbouring tribes, red-faced savages who deserved no better fate than to be killed, only, of course, sometimes a few Antiochians had to be killed too, because that is part of the game, and if there were no danger there would be no glory, would there?

Little Tony's hair remained yellow, and his habit of laughing grew with his years, and he learned his lessons and he learned his play. He was excellent company, and if it had not been for the yellowness of his hair and the gentleness of his nature, he would have been quite popular among his schoolmates.

His grandfather called him "gentle," but the people of Antioch called him "lazy," for they, as I said, were very black, and generally angry. They scurried up and down in their rocky little city, and always they seemed to be driven by most urgent affairs, hurrying to keep important appointments. They ran about all day long, attending to their business, and hardly stopping even for their dinner or their tea, and no one ever saw any of them asleep.

“Why is it, Grandfather?” young Tony asked one day, “what is it all about? why do they never sit down quietly like you and me?”

grumpy people rushing up and down street
**THE PEOPLE OF ANTIOCH WERE ALWAYS IN A HURRY AND
GENERALLY ANGRY.**

“It is the great heart of the Nation, my boy,” said old Tony, “it cannot be still; it is in the breed, you know, they can’t help it. They are all alike too, except you and me. Why, bless your heart, look at the King, he is more in a hurry than all the rest, and more—and more noble and active, bless him.”

The old man ended his speech in quite a different voice from the one he had begun with. This was because he suddenly caught the glitter of the King’s crown as the Monarch popped round the corner.

The King of Antioch was always in a hurry, always running somewhere or other, consequently he was seldom on his throne, and his loyal subjects had to look out very sharply, for he was always sure to be where they least expected him. You may think that they could have got over this little difficulty by always looking for the King where they least expected him, but if you try this simple experiment for yourself with your governess or tutor, or even your nurse, I think you will find that it is not so easy as it looks.

“Ha!” said the King, standing in the doorway and laughing cheerfully, “talking treason, eh? well, you know what the punishment for that is. Pinching with black pincers, you know, till—well—till you don’t feel the pinching any more.”

“Aha! your Majesty always has such a pleasant way with you,” said old Tony politely; and young Tony decided that when he grew up he would try not to have any pleasant ways at all.

The King rustled quickly round the little house, and looked at everything—dresser, chairs, plates and pots. He was sorry that there was nothing that he could find fault with, so he said, “Beware of Luxury,” and hurried off to make his presence felt in some other humble home. There was no pride about King Anthony XXIII. He just dropped in without an invitation and took his subjects as he found them.

“King Anthony XXIII. is the noblest of monarchs,” said old Tony, as he and his grandson sat down to their plain supper.

“It’s all right, grandfather, he has quite gone, he’s not listening—for a wonder!” said young Tony.

Meantime the King was hurrying in and out and up and down the crowded streets of his city, picking up little bits of information, and making his subjects feel that his kingship was not a mere matter of form, but that he was really interested in the most humble life among his people.

It was a strange town, all up-hill and down-hill, with steep rocks and precipices all mixed up with the public streets. The people, for all their busy habits, had no trade, or rather they did not manufacture anything. They built houses, and brought up their families. They wrapped their children up very snugly and carried them about at an earlier age than we consider safe, and they milked their cows, which were large and green and had wings, and they drank the milk, and they gathered the fruit of the trees that grew on the plain below the town, and they got on very well indeed. There was only one drawback to life in Antioch, and that was its uncertainty. At any moment an earthquake might occur, then down would go half the town, and the busy citizens had it all to build again. They soon did it, for they were nothing if not industrious. A much more awful thing was the storm of hot rain that now and then fell on the town, a blighting rain that killed all it touched. This was more dreaded than even the earthquakes, but fortunately it very seldom happened.

Old Tony was beadle and sexton and keeper of the town records; and very nicely he kept them too. There was not a speck of dirt on one of them. He used to spend hours and hours polishing the records, and he scoured the tombstones till they shone again; and he had most of the inscriptions by heart. After an earthquake he was always most careful to put the tombstones back in their proper places, and one day, when he was doing this, he came on a stone he did not remember to have seen before. He called to young Tony, who had had a Board School education, to see if he could read the bits of words that were carved upon it.

“It seems like a foreign language,” said he.

“I can’t make it out,” said young Tony, “it is not carved, it is in the stone somehow. Looks as if it were coming through from the other side.”

He turned the stone over, and there, on the other side, was an inscription which both of them had read a hundred times.

“HERE LIES HENRY BIRKBECK,
MAGICIAN TO THE INSTITUTE,

However humble he seems to you,
His last foretelling is going to come true.

P.S.—You see if it doesn’t.”

“Dear me,” said old Tony. “Poor old Henry Birkbeck, it seems like yesterday; yes, he was very respectable, but only in a small way of business. A magician he was by trade, but no one thought much of him, except perhaps the King, and *he* never gave him a lift. He used to do things with eggs and a hat. He broke the eggs as often as not. And the goldfish and handkerchief he hardly ever brought off.”

Old Tony began to lay down the tombstone, but young Tony held it up with one hand and tried to scrape the back of it with the other.

“There’s something here,” he said, “let’s set it upright instead of laying it down, and I will scrub it and see what the letters are. Poor old Mr. Birkbeck, I wonder what his last foretelling was. Was he good at prophesying, grandfather?”

“Not a bit,” said the sexton, “and to do him justice he almost gave it up in his later years. You see people laughed at him so, because the things that he foretold never happened. Towards the end he grew very feeble—hardly prophesied a single prophecy from one year’s end to another. Sometimes he would say, ‘I should not wonder if it rained before Sunday,’ but then he never wondered at anything. He was a calm old man, was poor Henry. It took a good deal to astonish him.”

Young Tony tried to interest his boy friends in the back of poor old Henry Birkbeck’s tombstone, but nobody cared. They were all in too much

of a hurry to care for an occupation so slow as cleaning tombstones, but Tony worked away perseveringly. He cleaned it with soap, and he cleaned it with soda, with brickdust and vinegar, with rotten stone and washleather, with patience and elbow grease, and the last two, as you know, will clean almost anything. So after a time a few letters began to show distinctly here and there, and presently Tony found he could read whole words.

There was “milk” and “mountain,” and a word that looked like “Jilk,” only of course it could not be that. And the last word of all was “reign,” and the second word of all was “Tony.”

“It must be something to do with me,” said young Tony, “because of my name being in it.”

“It must have something to do with the King,” said old Tony, “because it says ‘reign,’ so you’d better cut off to the Palace, and look sharp about it, or His Majesty will know the reason why.”

So Tony looked sharp about it, and got to the Palace in less than five minutes. For a wonder the King was not engaged in dropping in on his subjects, but was on his throne amid his fussy black courtiers, who were all busy trying to make themselves as small as they could.

This was because the King was very short, though he did not like to say so. He always had himself described in the Census and the Palace Reports as a “powerful man of middle height,” though he was nowhere near the middle height, and no more powerful than other people.

“Well, boy,” said King Anthony XXIII., “what have you come here for?”

“There is a prophecy,” said Tony.

“There are a good many,” said King Anthony, “but they don’t amount to much since poor Henry Birkbeck died. He was something like a prophet,” he went on, turning to his courtiers; “he foretold, when I was only a baby, that if I grew up I should perhaps be king. The late King, my father, was very pleased, I remember.”

The courtiers all bowed, and said it was really wonderful. Tony said,

“Well, then you’d better come and have a look at this prophecy, because it is the late Mr. Birkbeck’s last one, and he said it’ll come true.”

“Bring it here, can’t you?” said the King.

“No, I can’t,” said the boy. “It’s on his tombstone, so there. I can’t carry tombstones about.”

“No,” said the King thoughtfully, “of course you are not powerfully built. You are nowhere near the medium height.”

“Come and look at it if you want to,” said Tony. “I’m in no hurry.”

“Well,” said King Anthony, “I don’t care if I do. I’m tired of sitting still.”

So off they all went, King, Court, heralds, men-at-arms, banner-bearers and spearmen, down the narrow, dark, crooked town streets, till they came to the churchyard where the tombstones were—both the upright and the flat kind.

Tony ran on ahead and knelt in front of the tombstone. Then he jumped up and called out,

“You hurry up, it’s as plain now as the nose on your face.”

“You should say the royal nose on your Majesty’s royal face,” said old Tony anxiously.

But the King was too interested to care about even his subjects’ manners.

King and everyone striding down street
**OFF THEY ALL WENT, KING, COURT, AND MEN-
AT-ARMS.**

He came up to the tombstone, and on it he read, and Tony read, and all the courtiers read:—

“When Tony drinks the Blue Mountain’s milk
He shall wear a Sunday suit of silk.
He shall be tallest in all the Land,
And hold the town under his command.
He shall have greatness and we shall have grain;

Soon may it happen and long may he reign!
Hurrah.

H. T. BIRKBECK."

The King read this, and said—

"Well, I never!"

And all the courtiers said the same.

"Tony means Me," said the King.

The courtiers said that of course it did.

"I am King Tony XXIII.," said he.

And the courtiers said of course he was.

They all spoke at once like a chorus.

"I was christened Anthony, of course," his restless Majesty went on, fidgeting with his gold collar; "but I know that my subjects have always spoken of me behind my back by the endearing diminutive."

The courtiers assured the King that this was so.

"I suppose there's no one else called Tony?" The King turned a threatening glance on the crowd, and every one hastened to say "No, there wasn't." But old Tony turned extremely pale, and hurrying into the vestry, he tampered with the register of births, and altered his own name to Sydney Cecil Ernest Watchett.

But young Tony spoke up. "My name's Tony," said he.

"Oh, is it?" said His Majesty. "We'll soon see about that. Guards, seize him! Now, what is your name?"

"Tony," said he.

"Your name is not Tony," said the King, "your name is——" he could not think of a name at the moment, so he stopped.

Tony said, "My name is Tony."

"Take him to the Parliament House," said the King, beside himself with rage. "Give him a taste of the Mace," and Tony tasted the Mace and was stamped on by the Great Seal, who was very fierce and lived in a cage at the Parliament House, until he was stiff and sore and sorry enough to be glad to say that his name was anything the King liked, except Tony, which of course it never, never could have been. He admitted at last that his name was William Waterbury Watchett, and was discharged with a caution.

Seal in robe and wig sitting on Tony
TONY WAS STAMPED ON BY THE GREAT
SEAL, WHO WAS VERY FIERCE.

"But my name *is* Tony after all," he said to himself as he went home, full of sad memories of the Mace and the Great Seal. "I wonder where the Blue Mountain is?"

Young Tony thought a good deal about poor Henry Birkbeck's prophecy. Perhaps the Great Seal had stamped it on his memory. Anyway he could not forget it, and all the next day he was wandering about on the steep edge of the town, looking out over the landscape below. It was not an interesting landscape. All round the brown hill where the town was lay the vast forests of green trees, something like bamboos, whose fruit the people ate; and beyond that one could see the beginnings of a still larger forest, where none of the people of Antioch had ever dared to go—the forest, whose leaves were a hundred times as big as the King himself, and the trunks of the trees as big as whole countries. Above all was the blue sky—but, look as Tony would, he could see no blue mountain.

Then suddenly he saw the largest forest shake and shiver—its enormous leaves swaying this way and that.

"It must be an earthquake," said Tony, trembling, but he did not run away. And his valour was rewarded as valour deserves to be. The next moment the vast branches of the enormous forest parted, and a giant figure came out into the forest of bamboo-like trees. It was a figure more gigantic than Tony had ever imagined possible. It had long yellow hair. In its hand it carried a great white bowl, big enough to float a navy in. If such an expression did not sound rather silly, I should say that this figure gave Tony

the idea of a little-girl-giant. It sat down among the bamboo forest, crushing millions of trees as it sat. With a spoon twice the length of the King's banquet hall, it began to eat out of the tremendous basin. Tony saw great lumps, like blocks of soft marble, balanced on the vast spoon, and he knew that the giant-little-girl was eating giant-bread-and-milk. And she wore a giant frock, and the frock was blue. Then Tony understood. This was the "Blue Mountain," and in that big big sea of a basin there was milk—the Blue Mountain's milk.

Tony stood still for a moment, then turned and ran as hard as he could straight into the Royal presence. To be more exact, he ran into the Royal waistcoat, for the King, in a hurry, as usual, was coming out of his palace gates with a rush. The King was extremely annoyed. He refused to listen to a word Tony had to say until Parliament had been called together, and had passed a Bill strengthening the enactments against cheek. Then he allowed Tony to tell his tale. And when the tale was told every one ran to the battlements of the town to look. There was no blue mountain to be seen.

Girl holding large bowl
THE GIANT-LITTLE-GIRL.

Then his Majesty told Tony what he thought of him, and it was not pleasant hearing.

"I am not a liar," said Tony; "I am very sorry I told you anything about it; I might jolly well have gone and got it for myself. *My* name is——William——Waterbury——Watchett." He stopped in confusion.

"I should think it was," said the King; "if there is any mountain, which I don't for a moment believe, you had better go and fetch me some of the milk (not that I think there is any) out of the mountain's basin (which I cannot believe exists outside of your imagination). If you bring it to this address you will be suitably rewarded."

"All right," said Tony; "shall I fetch it in a jug, or will they lend me a can?"

"I will lend you my mug," said the King; "and mind you bring it back full."

So Tony took the mug. It had “For a good little King. A present from Antwerp,” on it. And he kissed his grandfather, and started off on his long, perilous journey.

“I suppose he will give me a reward if I get it,” he thought, “and if not, well, it’s an adventure, anyway.”

He passed through the crowded streets, where every one was rushing about in the usual frantic haste, and out at the town gates, and down the road into the forest. The trunks of the trees towered tall and straight above, and a subdued green light shone all about him.

The ground was very broken and uneven, and often Tony had to go a long way round to avoid some great rock or chasm. But he travelled fast, for he was a quick walker, and he did not miss the way once, although, of course, it was quite a strange country to him.

There had been evening classes at his school to teach the boys the art of finding their way in strange places, and Tony had attended all the lectures and taken notice as well as notes. And now he was able to practise what he had learned, and he was glad he had not wasted his time in drawing pictures of the masters, or playing nibs with the boys next him, and throwing ink pellets at more studious boys.

But the journey was longer than he expected, and the mug was rather in his way. He was very much afraid of breaking that mug: it is an awkward thing to break a mug with “A present for a good King” on it. It is so difficult to replace. There are very few of those mugs made nowadays. There is little or no demand for them.

But at last the green light of the forest began to grow brighter, and Tony saw that he was approaching a sort of clearing among the trees, so he put his best foot foremost, without stopping to think which was his worst foot—always a mistake when you are tired and footsore.

And now he came out from under the tall branches, and saw a round open space in the forest, where millions of fallen trees lay on the ground. And he knew that this was the spot where the mountain had sat down to eat its unimaginable enormous breakfast. But there was no mountain to be seen, and Tony knew that he could do nothing but sit down and wait, in the hope

that the Blue Mountain would come next morning to eat its breakfast in the same place.

So he looked about for a place to rest safely in, and presently found just what he wanted—a little cave, whose walls and roof were of dried earth—and there he stayed all that day and night, eating the fruit of the fallen trees.

And next morning there was a rustling and a swaying of the trees, and the Blue Mountain came striding over the tall tree-tops, bending down the forest as she came on colossal black legs and massive shoes with monstrous ankle straps. Each shoe was big enough to have crushed a hundred Tonys at one step. So he hid in his cave, and presently knew by the shaking of the ground, like an earthquake, that the mountain had sat down.

Then he came out. He was too near to see the mountain properly, but he saw a great blue-fold of giant frock near him, and far above him towered the blue heights of the giant-little-girl's knees. On the summit of these shone a vast white round—the great bread-and-milk basin.

Tony started to climb the blue-fold. It was stiff, starched—with giant starch, I suppose—and it bore his weight easily. But it was a long climb, and he drew a deep breath of thankfulness when he reached the broad table-land of the giant-little-girl's knees—and now the smooth china roundness of the big basin was before him. He tried its polished surface again and again, and always fell back baffled. Then he saw that he might climb up the sleeve of the gigantic arm whose hand held the basin. With his heart in his mouth he began the ascent, slowly and carefully, holding the precious mug closely to his breast. His breath came faster and faster as he went up and up, and at last stood triumphantly on the edge of the great blue sleeve. From there to the edge of the basin it was easy to crawl, and now at last he stood on the giddy verge of the monstrous basin, and looked down at the lake of milk with the rocks of bread in it, many feet below. The great height made him giddy. He lost his footing, and still clasping the mug, he fell headlong into the giant-bread-and-milk. The bread rocks were fortunately soft. Tony picked himself up. He was wet, but no bones were broken, and the mug—oh, joy! the mug was safe. Tony looked it over anxiously as he sat on a rock, a sloppy and uncertain resting place. There was only one small crack near the handle, and Tony was almost sure that that had been there before.

“I don’t know however I shall get out again,” said Tony; “perhaps I never shall, but in case I do, I suppose I had better fill the mug”; so he stooped from the rocks and filled the mug from the lake of milk, which was much thicker than the milk of the green cows with wings, the only milk Tony was used to. He had just filled the mug and tied it down with a piece of parchment which he had taken from the Town Records and brought with him for the purpose, when a noise like thunder suddenly broke on his ear. And indeed it very nearly broke the ear itself, and so startled Tony that the precious mug all but slipped from his grasp. Then a wave of milk swept up almost over his head. The whole of the massive basin was moved sideways. Then came a shock like an earthquake. The basin was being set on the ground. Tony felt that the Blue Mountain had seen him and had screamed. What would the giant-little-girl do? Would she kill him? If so, how?

These questions afforded Tony food for some interesting reflections during the next few moments.

He looked round him for a way of escape. Everywhere towered the smooth white walls. The tremendous spoon which he had seen the Blue Mountain use had, unfortunately, not been left in the basin, or he could have climbed out by that. He gave himself up for lost. Then suddenly he saw the trunk of a slender tree appear at the edge of the basin. It was pushed down towards him. Yes on to the very bread-rock on which he crouched. Would it crush him? No! The end of it rested on the rock by his side; it gently moved towards him. He saw now that the Blue Mountain was not cruel. She was not bent on destroying him. She was offering him a way of escape. He eagerly climbed the tree. When he was half-way up, however, the giant-little-girl flung the tree aside, and with Tony still clinging to it, it fell crashing into the forest. When he came to himself he almost shouted for joy to find the mug still whole.

Tony wading in milk surrounded by rocks of bread
TONY AMONG THE ROCKS IN THE BREAD-AND-MILK BASIN.

He never knew how he got home.

When he took the mug to the King the monarch looked at it, and said—

“The milk’s very thick.”

“It’s giant cow’s milk,” said Tony, “you drink it up and let’s see what happens.”

“I don’t know,” said the King, suspiciously, “suppose it’s poison; I shall have it analysed.”

“Well, you promised me a reward,” said Tony, “and you wouldn’t grudge it if you knew what a time I’ve had of it. I might have been killed, you know.”

“*Reward!*” said the King, who had been looking at the mug, “*reward!* when you have cracked my mug—my own only mug, with ‘A present for a good King’ on it. Reward indeed! a stamp from the Great Seal would be more——”

But Tony was gone. He ran home to tell his grandfather—but his grandfather was not there—only a letter lay on the kitchen table.

“Dear grandson,” it said, “the King has found out that my name was entered in the register as Anthony Antrobus, and he refuses to believe that the alteration to Sydney Cecil Ernest Watchett was made at my birth. So I am seeking safety at a distance. I have only one piece of advice to give you. *Do so too.*—Your loving Grandfather.”

This seemed such good advice to Tony, whose name was also in the register, that he was just going to take it when the door was flung open, and in rushed the King and the Army. They hustled and bustled and rustled round the house, breaking and tearing everything, and when there was nothing more to spoil they carried Tony off to prison.

“So this is my reward for getting the milk for him,” said poor Tony to himself, as he sat in prison, loaded with chains, and waiting for his trial. “I wish I had drunk the milk myself. This is what comes of loyalty. But I don’t care, my name is Tony, and his is not, and I will say so too, if I hang for it.”

Acting on this resolution next day, at his trial, Tony said so, and what is more, he came very near indeed to hanging for it. For King Anthony XXIII. was furious. He absolutely danced with rage, and it took six Prime Ministers to restrain his emotion while the trial went on. Tony was tried for an attempt to murder the King. The whole thing, said the Public Persecutor,

was nothing but a plot. The prophecy of Henry Birkbeck, which nobody had seen, till Tony found it; the Blue Mountain, which nobody but Tony had seen at all; the thick milk so mysteriously obtained, all pointed to dark treason and villainy. The crack in the mug was a peculiarly incriminating circumstance. (I cannot help the long words—Public Persecutors will use them.) It was a vile plot, the Persecutor said, but it had failed. The Public Analyst gave evidence that the milk was not milk at all, but some explosive substance too dangerous to analyse.

Tony looked at the Jury and he looked round the Court, and he saw that the case did indeed look black against himself. When he was asked what was his defence, he said—

“There is no pleasing some people.”

“It is my duty to caution you,” said the Persecutor, “that everything you say will be used against you.”

“I am sure it will,” said Tony, wearily, “but I can’t help that, everything I do is used against me too. I needn’t have told any one anything about it. I might have got the milk myself and been King, but I got it for him, and I did not crack the mug. At least, I am almost sure not. I only wish I had drunk the milk.”

“Make him drink it now,” shouted a thousand voices from the crowded Court.

“Don’t!” said the King, hastily, “it might not be poison after all.”

“You can’t have it both ways, your Majesty,” said the Persecutor bravely; “either it is poison, in which case the Prisoner deserves to drink it, or it is not poison, in which case the Prisoner leaves the Court without a stain upon his character.”

“It is poison!”

boy in court

**“EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE USED AGAINST YOU,” SAID THE
PUBLIC PERSECUTOR.**

“It isn’t!”

“It is!”

“It is not!”

The shouts rose louder and louder.

“It is not poison, it is milk!” cried Tony, and suddenly seizing the mug of milk, which had been brought into the Court to give its evidence, he lifted it to his lips, and before the Jailer could prevent it, he drained the milk to the last drop and ran out of the Court. For every one was too astonished to stop him.

The moment he was outside, he felt a sudden and awful change in himself. He was growing, growing, growing. He hurried out of the town. He felt that it would soon be too small to hold him. Outside he got bigger and bigger till the trees of the nearer forest were like grass under his feet, and the mug ran out of his hand like a little grain of rape-seed. And there beside him stood the Mountain—a little girl in a blue dress—and he was taller than she was.

“Hullo!” said the Blue Mountain, “where did you spring from?”

“From the town down there,” said Tony.

“There?” said the Mountain, stooping, “that’s not a town, silly, you know it’s only an ant-heap, really.”

“It is my town,” said Tony, “and its name is Antioch, and——”

And then he told her the whole story. In the middle of it she sat down to listen better, crushing millions of trees as she sat. And Tony sat down, crushing other millions, only now it seemed to him that he had sat down on the grass. It makes a great deal of difference what size you are.

“And that is where I used to live,” said Tony, pointing to the town, “and my name is Tony.”

“I know that,” said the Blue Mountain, “but you live next door to us, you know you do, you always did, and that is only an ant-heap.”

And when Tony looked down again it seemed to him that perhaps it really was only an ant-heap.

All the same he knew the King when he saw him hurrying along the ramparts, and he picked the King up and put him on a cow's ear. And the cow scratched its ear with its hind foot. And that was the end of the King.

"Don't tease the ants," said the Blue Mountain. "People pour boiling water sometimes, or dig up the heaps, but I think it's cruel."

Boy in field
HE WAS GROWING, GROWING, GROWING.

Tony remembered the hot rain and the earthquakes.

"It is a nice story," she said, "of course the grass is like a forest to the ants, and the big forest is the hedge. Your Sunday suit is silk velvet, your aunt told mother so. Yes, it is a nice story, and an ant did drop into my bread and milk yesterday, though I don't know how you knew."

"You mayn't believe it," said Tony, "but I shall give them corn because it says so in Mr. Birkbeck's prophecy, only I won't ever give them any milk in case they grow big. They are too bad-tempered. Just think if the King had been our size!"

"Oh, come along home, do," said the Blue Mountain, a little crossly. "I am tired. It is dinner time, it's no use pretending about Kings and things. You know well enough you are only Tony-next-door."

And whatever he may have been before, it is quite certain that since then he has been "Tony-next-door," and nothing else whatever.

THE PRINCE, TWO MICE, AND SOME KITCHEN-MAIDS

WHEN the Prince was born the Queen said to the King, “My dear, do be very, very careful about the invitations. You know what fairies are. They always come to the christening whether you invite them or not, and if you forget to invite one of them she always makes herself so terribly unpleasant.”

“My love,” said the King, “I will invite them all,” and he took out his diamond-pointed pen and wrote out the cards on the spot.

But just then a herald came in to bring news of war. So the King had to go off in a hurry. The invitations were sent out, but the christening had to be put off for a year. At the end of this time the King had subdued all his enemies, so he was very pleased with himself. The Prince was a year old, and he also was pleased with himself, as all good babies are, and found the little royal fingers and toes a fresh and ever-delightful mystery. And the Queen was pleased with herself, as all good mothers should be—so everything went merrily. The Palace was hung with cloth of silver and strewn with fresh daisies, in honour of the great day, and after all had eaten and drunk to their hearts’ content the fairies came near with the gifts they had brought to their godson the Prince.

“He shall have beauty,” said the first.

“And wit,” said the second.

“And a pretty sweetheart,” said the third; “who loves him,” said the fourth.

And so they went on, foretelling for him all sorts of happy and desirable things. And as each fairy gave her gift she stooped and kissed the baby Prince, and then spreading her fine gossamer-gauze wings, fluttered away across the rosy garden. The crowd of fairies grew less and less, and there

were only three left when the Queen pulled the King's sleeve and whispered, "My dear, where's Malevola?"

"I sent her a card," said the King, casting an anxious look round him.

"Then it must have been lost on the way," said the Queen, "or she'd have been here——"

"She *is* here," said a low voice in the Queen's ear. Suddenly the room grew dark, grey clouds hid the sun, and all the daisies on the floor shut up quite close. The poor Queen gave a start and a scream, and the King, brave as he was, turned pale, for Malevola was a terrible fairy, and the dress she wore was not at all the thing for a christening. It was made of spiders' webs matted together, dark and dank with the damp of the tomb and the dust of dungeons. Her wings were the wings of a great bat; spiders and newts crawled round her neck; a serpent coiled about her waist and little snakes twisted and writhed in her straight black hair.

She looked at the Queen so terribly that her poor Mother-Majesty cried out without meaning to.

"Oh don't!" she cried, and flung both arms round the cradle. The Prince was quite happy, playing with his new coral and bells, and looking at the Palace cat, who sat at the foot of the cradle washing herself.

"Now listen," said Malevola, still speaking in the low, even voice that was so terrible. "You did not invite me to the christening. I've read my fairy tales, and I know what's expected of a fairy who is left out on an occasion like this. I intend to curse your son."

Then all the Kings and Queens who had come to the christening wished they had stayed away, and they and all the Court fell on their knees and begged Malevola for mercy. As for the three good fairies who were left, they hid behind the window-curtains, and the Court ladies, peeping between their fingers, said—

"Fancy deserting their godson like this! How unfairy-like!"

But the Queen and the King only wept, and the Prince played with his rattle and looked at the cat.

Then Malevola said mockingly: "Great King and mighty Sovereign, Malevola was not good enough to be asked to your tea-party. But your family shall come down in the world; your son shall marry a kitchen-maid and marry a lady with four feet and no hands."

A shiver of horror ran through the room, and Malevola vanished. Then, suddenly, the sun came out, and people lifted up their heads, and dared again to look at each other. And the daisies, too, opened their eyes again.

fairies gathered; cherub on turtle
MALEVOLA'S DRESS WAS NOT AT ALL THE THING
FOR A CHRISTENING.

Then the good fairies came out from behind the window-curtains, and the poor Queen fell on her knees before them.

"Can't you do *anything*?" she asked. "Can't you undo what she says, and make it untrue?"

"Not even a fairy can make a true thing untrue," said the good fairies sadly. "Malevola's words will come true; but the Prince has already many gifts, and our gifts are yet to give, and these you shall choose. Whatever you wish shall be his."

Then the King, recovering a little from the terror into which the fairy Malevola had thrown him, and remembering how well he and his royal line had always borne them in battle, said at once—

"Let the boy be brave."

"He is brave," said one of the good fairies; "he fears nothing."

And at this the Prince ceased to feel any fear of the Palace cat. He put out his hand and pulled her tail so merrily that Pussy turned and clawed the little arm till the blood ran.

"Oh, dear!" cried his mother, "he is fearless, as you say. I wish he were afraid of cats, poor darling."

"He is," said the second fairy; "you have your wish." And, indeed, the Prince screamed, and hid his face, and shrank from the Palace cat with such

horror that the King pulled out his pencil and note-book and wrote an edict then and there banishing all cats from his dominions. But, all the same, he was very angry.

“Your Majesty has wasted one wish,” he said very politely to the Queen; “let us now leave the last gift in the hands of the last fairy.”

The last fairy came and kissed the Prince, who was now sobbing sleepily.

“He shall be happy,” she said; “he shall have his heart’s desire.”

Then she too vanished; and the Kings and Queens took their leave when their gold coaches came for them. And presently the King and Queen were left alone with the silver hangings and the strewn daisies and the baby.

“Oh dear! oh dear!” said the Queen; “this is dreadful! A kitchen-maid!—and a lady with four feet and no hands!”

“At least we are not likely to have a kitchen-maid with less than two hands,” said the King.

“We might arrange only to have *titled* kitchen-maids,” said the Queen timidly.

“The very thing,” the King answered: “that would make the love affair all that one could wish. But there’s still the marriage.”

“Of course he’ll marry the lady he loves.”

“It’s not the way of the world,” said the King. “At any rate, let’s hope he’ll love the lady he marries. Otherwise——”

“Otherwise what?” said the Queen.

“We know nothing about otherwise, do we, my Queen?” he said, catching her round the waist. And in his love for his wife and his son the King felt almost happy again, for here they were all three together, and when your son is in his cradle his marriage seems very far off indeed.

But the Queen was anxious and frightened, and while the Prince was still a child she sent messengers to the Courts of all the neighbouring Kings and

Queens to tell them what had been foretold, which, indeed, most of them knew, having been at the christening. And she begged such of them as had daughters to send them as kitchen-maids, that so the Prince might at least fall in love with a real Princess. And as the Prince grew up he was so handsome and so brave, fearing nothing but cats, which, of course, he never saw, though he dreamed of them often and woke screaming, and also so brilliant and good, that, his father's kingdom, being beyond compare the finest in all the round world, the young daughters of Kings vied with each other as to who should find favour in the eyes of the Queen-Mother, and so get leave to serve in the kitchen, each nursing the hope that some day the Prince would see her and love her, and perhaps even marry her. And he was very good friends with all the noble kitchen-maids, but he loved none of them, till one day he saw, at a window of the tower where the kitchen was, a bright face and bright hair tied round with a scarlet kerchief. And as he looked at the face it was withdrawn—but the Prince had lost his heart. He kept his secret safe in the place where his heart had been, and schemed and plotted to see this fair lady again; for when he went among the royal kitchen-maids she was not there with them. And he looked morning, noon, and evening, but he never could see her. So then he said—

“I must watch o' nights—perhaps she is kept in prison in the tower above the kitchen, and at night those who watch her may sleep, and so I shall be able to talk to her.”

So he dressed in dark clothes and hid in the shadow of the palace courtyard and watched all one night. And he saw nothing. But in the early morning, when the setting moon and the rising sun were mixing their lights in the sky, he heard a heavy bolt shot back, and the door of the kitchen tower opened slowly. The Prince crouched behind a buttress and watched, and he saw the fair maid with the bright hair under the red kerchief. She swept the doorstep, and she drew water from the well in the middle of the courtyard; and presently he crept to the kitchen window and saw her light the fire and wash the dishes, and make all neat and clean within. And the Prince's eyes followed her in all she did, and the more he looked at her the more he loved her. And at last he heard sounds as of folks stirring above, so he crept away, keeping close to the wall, and so back to his own rooms. And this he did again on the next morning, and on the next. And on the third morning, as he stood looking through the window at the girl with the bright

hair and the bright kerchief, the gold chain he wore clinked against the stone of the window-sill. The maid started, and the bowl she held dropped on to the brick floor of the kitchen and broke into twenty pieces; and then and there she sat down on the floor beside it, and began to cry bitterly.

The Prince ran in and knelt beside her.

“Don’t cry, dear,” he said, “I’ll get you another bowl.”

“It isn’t that,” she sobbed, “but now they’ll send me away.”

“Who will?”

“The noble Kitchen-Maids. They keep me to do the work because, being Kings’ daughters, they don’t know how to do anything; but the Queen doesn’t know that there is a Real Kitchen-maid here, and now you have found out they will send me away.”

And she went on crying.

“Then you are a Real Kitchen-maid, and not noble at all?” said the Prince.

She stopped crying for a minute to say “No.”

“Never mind,” said the Prince. “You are twice as pretty as all the Kings’ daughters put together and twenty times as dear.”

At that she stopped crying for good and all, and looked up at him from the floor where she sat.

“Yes you are,” he said, “and I love you with all my heart.”

And with that he caught her in his arms and kissed her; and the Real Kitchen-Maid laid her face against his, and her heart beat wildly, for she knew what the Prince did not, and what, indeed, all the folk knew except the Prince, that this had been foretold at his christening; but she knew also that though he loved her, he was not to marry her, since it was his dreadful destiny to marry some one with four feet and no hands.

“I wish I had no hands and four feet,” said the Real Kitchen-maid to herself. “I wouldn’t mind a bit, since it is me he loves.”

“What are you saying?” asked the Prince.

“I am saying that you must go,” said she. “If their Kitchen Highnesses find you here with me they’ll tear me into little pieces, for they all love you—to a Highness.”

“And you,” he whispered, “how much do you love me?”

“Oh,” she answered, “I love you better than my right hand and my left.”

And the Prince thought that a very strange answer. He went through that day in a happy dream; but he did not tell his dream to any one, lest some harm should come to the Real Kitchen-Maid. For he meant to marry her, and he had a feeling that his parents would not approve of the match.

Now that night, when the whole palace was asleep, the Real Kitchen-Maid got up and crept out past the sleepy sentinel and went home to her father the farmer and got one of his great white cart horses and rode away through the woods to the cavern where the Great White Rat sits sleeplessly guarding the Magic Cat’s-eye.

And every one wondered why he guarded it so carefully, for it seemed to have no great value. But the Great White Rat watched it constantly, without ever closing one of those round bright rat’-eyes of his, and when folk sought to lay hands on it he said—

“Be careful: it has the power to change you into a mouse.”

On which folk dropped it hastily and went their ways, leaving him still on guard.

To him now went the little Kitchen-Maid, and asked for help, for he was thousands of years old, and had more wisdom between his nose and ears than all the books in all the world. She told him all that had happened.

“Now what shall I do?” she said. And the Great White Rat, never shifting his eyes from the Magic Cat’s-eye, answered—

“Keep your own counsel and be contented. The Prince loves you.”

“But,” said the Real Kitchen-Maid, “he is not to marry me, but a horrible creature with four feet and no hands.”

“Keep your secret and be content,” the Great White Rat repeated, “and if ever you see him in danger from a lady with four feet and no hands, come straight to me.”

So the Real Kitchen-Maid went back to the Palace, and set to work to clean pots and pans, for now it was bright dewy daylight, and the night had gone. And before the rest were awake again her Prince came to her and vowed he loved her more than life; so she kept her secret and was content.

At the time of the Prince’s christening the King had banished all cats from the kingdom, because he could not bear to see his son show fear of anything. But now and then strangers, not knowing of the edict, brought cats to that country, and if the Prince saw one of these cats he was taken with a trembling and a paleness, standing like stone awhile, and presently, with shrieks of terror, fleeing the spot. And it was now a long time since he had seen a cat.

Now, soon after the Prince had found out how he loved the Real Kitchen-Maid, his father and mother died suddenly as they were sitting hand in hand, for they loved each other so much that it was not possible for either to stay here without the other.

So then the Prince wept bitterly, and would not be comforted, and the Court stood about him with a long face, wearing its new mourning. And as he sat there with his face hidden Something came through the Palace gate and up the marble stairs and into the great hall where the Prince sat on the steps of his father’s throne weeping. And, before the courtiers could draw breath or decide whether it was Court etiquette for them to do anything while the Prince was crying except to stand still and look sad, the creature came up to the Prince and began to rub itself against his arm. And he, still hiding his face, reached out his hand and stroked it!

Then all the Court drew a deep breath, for they saw that the thing that had come in was a great black Cat.

And the Prince raised his eyes, and they looked to see him shrink and shriek; but instead he passed his hand over the black fur and said—

“Poor Pussy, then!”

And at these words the whole Court fled—by window and door. The courtiers took horse, those who had carriages went away in them, those who had none went on foot, and in less than a minute the Prince and the Cat were left alone together.

For the Court was learned in witch law, and knowing the Prince’s horror of cats it saw at once that a cat he was not afraid of was no cat at all, but a witch in that shape. Therefore the courtiers and the whole Royal household fled trembling and hid themselves.

All but the little Real Kitchen-Maid. She saw with terror that the Cat, or rather the witch in Cat’s shape, had done what no one else could do—roused the Prince from his dull dream of grief. And then she remembered the fate which Malevola had foretold for him—that he should marry a lady with four feet and no hands.

“Alack-a-day!” she cried. “This witch has four feet and no hands; but she can have hands whenever she chooses, and be a woman by her magic arts as easily as she can be a cat. And then he will love her—and what will become of me? Or, worse, she may marry him only to torment him. She may shut him up in some enchanted dungeon far from the light of day. Such things have happened before now.”

So she stood, hidden by the blue arras, and wrung her hands, and the tears ran down her cheeks. And all the time the black Cat purred to the Prince, and the Prince stroked the black Cat, and any one could have seen that he was every moment becoming more deeply bewitched. And still the Real Kitchen-Maid crouched behind the arras, and her heart ached that it knew no way to save him. Then suddenly she remembered the words of the Great White Rat—

“If ever you see him in danger from a lady with four feet and no hands come straight to me.”

Now surely was the time, for the Prince, she knew, was in desperate danger.

The Real Kitchen-Maid crept silently down the marble stairs, but once she was out of the Palace she ran like the wind to the stable. No men were about there—all had followed the example of the Court, and had run away when they heard of the strange coming of the witch-Cat. And of all the many horses that had stood in the stable only one remained, for each man in his fright had saddled the first horse that came to hand and ridden off on it. And the one that still stayed there was the Prince's own black charger. He had had no mind to be saddled in haste by a stranger, and had turned and bitten the stranger who had attempted it. So he was there alone.

Now the little Kitchen-Maid lifted the Prince's gold-broided saddle from its perch, and the weight of it was such that she could not have carried it but for the heavy heart she bore because of her love to the Prince and his danger, and that made all else seem light. She put the saddle on the charger, and the jewelled bridle. And he neighed with pleasure, for he understood, being a horse who could see as far into a stone wall as most people. And when he was saddled he knelt for her to mount, and then up and away like the wind, and she had no need to guide him with the reins, for he found the way and kept it. He galloped steadily on, and the sun went down and the night grew dark, and he went on, and on, and on without stumble or pause, till at moonrise he halted before the house of the Great White Rat.

Then, as the Real Kitchen-Maid sprang down, the Great White Rat came out from his house and spoke. "You've come for it, then?"

"For what?"

"The Magic Cat's-eye. I've guarded it some thousands of years. I knew there would be a use for it at last. He may be saved yet, if some one should love him well enough to die for him."

"I do that," said the little Kitchen-Maid, and took the Cat's-eye in her hands.

"Swallow it," said the White Rat, "and you'll turn into a mouse."

The little maid swallowed it at once, and, behold! she was a little mouse.

"What am I to do?" she asked.

“I can’t tell you,” said the Great White Rat, “but Love will tell you.”

So the little Kitchen-Maid, in the form of the mouse, ran up one of the horse’s legs, and held tight on to the saddle with all her little claws.

And as the great horse galloped back towards the palace in the moonlight, she thought and thought, and at last she said to herself—

“The witch is in cat’s shape, and she must have cat nature, so she will run after a mouse. She will run after *me*, and if I can lead her to a running stream she will leap across it, and then she will have to take her own shape again. That must be what the Great White Rat meant me to do. And if the Cat catches me—well, at least if I can’t save my Prince I can die for him.”

And the thought warmed her heart as the great horse thundered on through the dawn-light.

When at last, creeping softly on little noiseless feet, the Mouse-Kitchen-Maid re-entered the great hall, she saw that she was only just in time, for the black Cat was purring and looking back at the Prince as she walked, waving her black tail towards the further door of the hall, and the Prince, more bewitched than ever, was slowly following her.

Then the Real-Kitchen-Maid-Mouse uttered a squeak, and rushed across the porphyry floor, and the black Cat, true to its cat nature, left purring at the Prince and sprang after the Mouse, and the Mouse at its best speed, made for the garden where ran the stream that fed the marble basins where the royal gold-fish lived. The Prince understood nothing save that the enchanting black furry creature was leaving him, and in an instant he was alone. He followed to the door, and saw the Cat springing along the passage down the stairs—he followed fast—then along another passage that passed the foot of the back stairs, and he saw that the back stairs were like a water-fall—water was running down in a torrent and meandering away down the brick passage and out into the faint new sunshine.

When the Mouse saw this stream, she thought, “I’m saved.” She never thought of wondering how a stream came to be running down the back stairs of the palace. When she came to think of it afterwards she always believed that the Great White Rat had managed it somehow. She never knew that it was really a great flood from the royal bathroom, where the

royal housemaid, in her eagerness to run away from the witch, had left all the royal bath-taps full on.

The Mouse bounded across the stream—the Cat saw the danger, but she could not stop herself. She, too, crossed the stream, and as she crossed it she turned into the wicked fairy Malevola—cobwebs, and snakes, and newts, and bat’s-wings, and all.

The Prince put his hand to his head like one awakening from sleep, and the horrible fairy vanished suddenly and for ever.

Then the Mouse ran trembling to the Prince, and in its thin little mouse’s voice told him all.

“My love and my lady,” he said, holding the Mouse against his cheek. “I will marry you now. That will carry out the wicked fairy’s prophecy. Then we will go back to the Great White Rat, and you shall be changed into a Princess.”

So the Prince rang the church bells till all the people came out of their holes where they had been hiding, to see the strange spectacle of a Prince married to a Mouse.

And directly they were married they set off on the black charger, and when they reached the Great White Rat they told their tale.

“And now,” said the Prince joyously, “if you will change her into a lady again we will go home at once and begin living happily ever after.”

The Great White Rat looked at them gravely.

“It’s impossible,” he said. “I am sorry, but the effects of the Magic Cat’s-eye are *permanent*. Once a mouse, always a mouse, if you get moused by the Magic Cat’s-eye.”

The Prince and the Mouse looked sadly at each other. This was the last thing they had expected. The Great White Rat looked at them earnestly. Then he said—

“If it would be of any use to you, I’ve got another Magic Cat’s-eye.”

He held it out. The Prince took it gladly. Kingdom and the life of a king were nothing to him compared with the love and happiness of a Real-Kitchen-Maid disguised as a mouse. He put the stone to his lips.

“You know what’ll happen if you do,” said the Great White Rat.

“I shall change into a mouse and live happy ever after,” said the Prince gaily.

“Perhaps,” said the Great White Rat, “nothing is impossible if people love each other enough.”

“You mustn’t,” cried the Mouse, trying to get between his lips and the Cat’s-eye.

The prince and princess gazing into
each other's eyes
**THERE STOOD UP A PRINCE AND A
PRINCESS.**

“My dear little Real Kitchen-Maid,” said the Prince tenderly, “you have saved my life—and you *are* my life. I would rather be a mouse with you than a king without you!” And with that he swallowed the Cat’s-eye, and two small mice stood side by side before the Great White Rat. Very kindly he looked at them. Then he pulled a hair from his left whisker and laid it across their little brown backs. And on the instant there stood up a Prince and a Princess and at their feet lay the little empty mouse-skins.

“It’s lucky for you,” said the Great White Rat, “that you chose to swallow the Cat’s-eye, because people who have been moused by that means can never be un-moused except *in pairs*. Nothing is impossible if people only love each other enough.”

So the Prince and his bride returned to the palace and lived happy ever after. They were as happy as if they had been mice—which, in a country where there are no cats, is saying a good deal. Of course the Prince is still afraid of cats. But the curious thing is that now his wife is afraid of them too. Perhaps she learnt that lesson when she was a mouse for his sake. He, when he was a mouse for hers, learned this lesson, which is also the moral

of this story: “Nothing is impossible if people only love each other enough.”

MELISANDE

OR, LONG AND SHORT DIVISION

WHEN the Princess Melisande was born, her mother, the Queen, wished to have a christening party, but the King put his foot down and said he would not have it.

“I’ve seen too much trouble come of christening parties,” said he. “However carefully you keep your visiting-book, some fairy or other is sure to get left out, and you know what *that* leads to. Why, even in my own family, the most shocking things have occurred. The Fairy Malevola was not asked to my great-grandmother’s christening—and you know all about the spindle and the hundred years’ sleep.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said the Queen. “My own cousin by marriage forgot some stuffy old fairy or other when she was sending out the cards for her daughter’s christening, and the old wretch turned up at the last moment, and the girl drops toads out of her mouth to this day.”

“Just so. And then there was that business of the mouse and the kitchen-maids,” said the King; “we’ll have no nonsense about it. I’ll be her godfather, and you shall be her godmother, and we won’t ask a single fairy; then none of them can be offended.”

“Unless they all are,” said the Queen.

And that was exactly what happened. When the King and the Queen and the baby got back from the christening the parlourmaid met them at the door, and said—

“Please, your Majesty, several ladies have called. I told them you were not at home, but they all said they’d wait.”

“Are they in the parlour?” asked the Queen.

“I’ve shown them into the Throne Room, your Majesty,” said the parlourmaid. “You see, there are several of them.”

There were about seven hundred. The great Throne Room was crammed with fairies, of all ages and of all degrees of beauty and ugliness—good fairies and bad fairies, flower fairies and moon fairies, fairies like spiders and fairies like butterflies—and as the Queen opened the door and began to say how sorry she was to have kept them waiting, they all cried, with one voice, “Why didn’t you ask *me* to your christening party?”

“I haven’t had a party,” said the Queen, and she turned to the King and whispered, “I told you so.” This was her only consolation.

“You’ve had a christening,” said the fairies, all together.

“I’m very sorry,” said the poor Queen, but Malevola pushed forward and said, “Hold your tongue,” most rudely.

Malevola is the oldest, as well as the most wicked, of the fairies. She is deservedly unpopular, and has been left out of more christening parties than all the rest of the fairies put together.

“Don’t begin to make excuses,” she said, shaking her finger at the Queen. “That only makes your conduct worse. You know well enough what happens if a fairy is left out of a christening party. We are all going to give our christening presents *now*. As the fairy of highest social position, I shall begin. The Princess shall be bald.”

The Queen nearly fainted as Malevola drew back, and another fairy, in a smart bonnet with snakes in it, stepped forward with a rustle of bats’ wings. But the King stepped forward too.

“No you don’t!” said he. “I wonder at you, ladies, I do indeed. How can you be so unfairylike? Have none of you been to school—have none of you studied the history of your own race? Surely you don’t need a poor, ignorant King like me to tell you that this is *no go*?”

“How dare you?” cried the fairy in the bonnet, and the snakes in it quivered as she tossed her head. “It is my turn, and I say the Princess shall be——”

The King actually put his hand over her mouth.

“Look here,” he said; “I won’t have it. Listen to reason—or you’ll be sorry afterwards. A fairy who breaks the traditions of fairy history goes out—you know she does—like the flame of a candle. And all tradition shows that only *one* bad fairy is ever forgotten at a christening party and the good ones are always invited; so either this is not a christening party, or else you were all invited except one, and, by her own showing, that was Malevola. It nearly always is. Do I make myself clear?”

Several of the better-class fairies who had been led away by Malevola’s influence murmured that there was something in what His Majesty said.

“Try it, if you don’t believe me,” said the King; “give your nasty gifts to my innocent child—but as sure as you do, out you go, like a candle-flame. Now, then, will you risk it?”

No one answered, and presently several fairies came up to the Queen and said what a pleasant party it had been, but they really must be going. This example decided the rest. One by one all the fairies said goodbye and thanked the Queen for the delightful afternoon they had spent with her.

“It’s been quite too lovely,” said the lady with the snake-bonnet; “*do* ask us again soon, dear Queen. I shall be so *longing* to see you again, and the *dear* baby,” and off she went, with the snake-trimming quivering more than ever.

When the very last fairy was gone the Queen ran to look at the baby—she tore off its Honiton lace cap and burst into tears. For all the baby’s downy golden hair came off with the cap, and the Princess Melisande was as bald as an egg.

“Don’t cry, my love,” said the King. “I have a wish lying by, which I’ve never had occasion to use. My fairy godmother gave it me for a wedding present, but since then I’ve had nothing to wish for!”

“Thank you, dear,” said the Queen, smiling through her tears.

“I’ll keep the wish till baby grows up,” the King went on. “And then I’ll give it to her, and if she likes to wish for hair she can.”

“Oh, won’t you wish for it *now*?” said the Queen, dropping mixed tears and kisses on the baby’s round, smooth head.

“No, dearest. She may want something else more when she grows up. And besides, her hair may grow by itself.”

But it never did. Princess Melisande grew up as beautiful as the sun and as good as gold, but never a hair grew on that little head of hers. The Queen sewed her little caps of green silk, and the Princess’s pink and white face looked out of these like a flower peeping out of its bud. And every day as she grew older she grew dearer, and as she grew dearer she grew better, and as she grew more good she grew more beautiful.

Now, when she was grown up the Queen said to the King—

“My love, our dear daughter is old enough to know what she wants. Let her have the wish.”

So the King wrote to his fairy godmother and sent the letter by a butterfly. He asked if he might hand on to his daughter the wish the fairy had given him for a wedding present.

“I have never had occasion to use it,” said he, “though it has always made me happy to remember that I had such a thing in the house. The wish is as good as new, and my daughter is now of an age to appreciate so valuable a present.”

To which the fairy replied by return of butterfly:—

“DEAR KING,—Pray do whatever you like with my poor little present. I had quite forgotten it, but I am pleased to think that you have treasured my humble keepsake all these years.

“Your affectionate godmother,

“FORTUNA F.”

So the King unlocked his gold safe with the seven diamond-handled keys that hung at his girdle, and took out the wish and gave it to his daughter.

And Melisande said: "Father, I will wish that all your subjects should be quite happy."

But they were that already, because the King and Queen were so good. So the wish did not go off.

So then she said: "Then I wish them all to be good."

But they were that already, because they were happy. So again the wish hung fire.

Then the Queen said: "Dearest, for my sake, wish what I tell you."

"Why, of course I will," said Melisande. The Queen whispered in her ear, and Melisande nodded. Then she said, aloud—

"I wish I had golden hair a yard long, and that it would grow an inch every day, and grow twice as fast every time it was cut, and——"

"Stop," cried the King. And the wish went off, and the next moment the Princess stood smiling at him through a shower of golden hair.

"Oh, how lovely," said the Queen. "What a pity you interrupted her, dear; she hadn't finished."

"What was the end?" asked the King.

"Oh," said Melisande, "I was only going to say, 'and twice as thick.'"

"It's a very good thing you didn't," said the King. "You've done about enough." For he had a mathematical mind, and could do the sums about the grains of wheat on the chess-board, and the nails in the horse's shoes, in his Royal head without any trouble at all.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the Queen.

"You'll know soon enough," said the King. "Come, let's be happy while we may. Give me a kiss, little Melisande, and then go to nurse and ask her to teach you how to comb your hair."

"I know," said Melisande, "I've often combed mother's."

“Your mother has beautiful hair,” said the King; “but I fancy you will find your own less easy to manage.”

And, indeed, it was so. The Princess’s hair began by being a yard long, and it grew an inch every night. If you know anything at all about the simplest sums you will see that in about five weeks her hair was about two yards long. This is a very inconvenient length. It trails on the floor and sweeps up all the dust, and though in palaces, of course, it is all gold-dust, still it is not nice to have it in your hair. And the Princess’s hair was growing an inch every night. When it was three yards long the Princess could not bear it any longer—it was so heavy and so hot—so she borrowed nurse’s cutting-out scissors and cut it all off, and then for a few hours she was comfortable. But the hair went on growing, and now it grew twice as fast as before; so that in thirty-six days it was as long as ever. The poor Princess cried with tiredness; when she couldn’t bear it any more she cut her hair and was comfortable for a very little time. For the hair now grew four times as fast as at first, and in eighteen days it was as long as before, and she had to have it cut. Then it grew eight inches a day, and the next time it was cut it grew sixteen inches a day, and then thirty-two inches and sixty-four inches and a hundred and twenty-eight inches a day, and so on, growing twice as fast after each cutting, till the Princess would go to bed at night with her hair clipped short, and wake up in the morning with yards and yards and yards of golden hair flowing all about the room, so that she could not move without pulling her own hair, and nurse had to come and cut the hair off before she could get out of bed.

“I wish I was bald again,” sighed poor Melisande, looking at the little green caps she used to wear, and she cried herself to sleep o’ nights between the golden billows of the golden hair. But she never let her mother see her cry, because it was the Queen’s fault, and Melisande did not want to seem to reproach her.

When first the Princess’s hair grew her mother sent locks of it to all her Royal relations, who had them set in rings and brooches. Later, the Queen was able to send enough for bracelets and girdles. But presently so much hair was cut off that they had to burn it. Then when autumn came all the crops failed; it seemed as though all the gold of harvest had gone into the Princess’s hair. And there was a famine. Then Melisande said—

“It seems a pity to waste all my hair; it does grow so very fast. Couldn’t we stuff things with it, or something, and sell them, to feed the people?”

So the King called a council of merchants, and they sent out samples of the Princess’s hair, and soon orders came pouring in; and the Princess’s hair became the staple export of that country. They stuffed pillows with it, and they stuffed beds with it. They made ropes of it for sailors to use, and curtains for hanging in Kings’ palaces. They made haircloth of it, for hermits, and other people who wished to be uncomfy. But it was so soft and silky that it only made them happy and warm, which they did not wish to be. So the hermits gave up wearing it, and, instead, mothers bought it for their little babies, and all well-born infants wore little shirts of Princess-haircloth.

And still the hair grew and grew. And the people were fed and the famine came to an end.

Then the King said: “It was all very well while the famine lasted—but now I shall write to my fairy godmother and see if something cannot be done.”

So he wrote and sent the letter by a skylark, and by return of bird came this answer—

“Why not advertise for a competent Prince? Offer the usual reward.”

So the King sent out his heralds all over the world to proclaim that any respectable Prince with proper references should marry the Princess Melisande if he could stop her hair growing.

Then from far and near came trains of Princes anxious to try their luck, and they brought all sorts of nasty things with them in bottles and round wooden boxes. The Princess tried all the remedies, but she did not like any of them, and she did not like any of the Princes, so in her heart she was rather glad that none of the nasty things in bottles and boxes made the least difference to her hair.

long lines of princes
**TRAINS OF PRINCES BRINGING NASTY THINGS IN BOTTLES AND
ROUND WOODEN BOXES.**

The Princess had to sleep in the great Throne Room now, because no other room was big enough to hold her and her hair. When she woke in the morning the long high room would be quite full of her golden hair, packed tight and thick like wool in a barn. And every night when she had had the hair cut close to her head she would sit in her green silk gown by the window and cry, and kiss the little green caps she used to wear, and wish herself bald again.

It was as she sat crying there on Midsummer Eve that she first saw Prince Florizel.

He had come to the palace that evening, but he would not appear in her presence with the dust of travel on him, and she had retired with her hair borne by twenty pages before he had bathed and changed his garments and entered the reception-room.

Now he was walking in the garden in the moonlight, and he looked up and she looked down, and for the first time Melisande, looking on a Prince, wished that he might have the power to stop her hair from growing. As for the Prince, he wished many things, and the first was granted him. For he said—

“You are Melisande?”

“And you are Florizel?”

“There are many roses round your window,” said he to her, “and none down here.”

She threw him one of three white roses she held in her hand. Then he said—

“White rose trees are strong. May I climb up to you?”

“Surely,” said the Princess.

So he climbed up to the window.

“Now,” said he, “if I can do what your father asks, will you marry me?”

“My father has promised that I shall,” said Melisande, playing with the white roses in her hand.

“Dear Princess,” said he, “your father’s promise is nothing to me. I want yours. Will you give it to me?”

“Yes,” said she, and gave him the second rose.

“I want your hand.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And your heart with it.”

“Yes,” said the Princess, and she gave him the third rose.

“And a kiss to seal the promise.”

“Yes,” said she.

“And a kiss to go with the hand.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And a kiss to bring the heart.”

“Yes,” said the Princess, and she gave him the three kisses.

“Now,” said he, when he had given them back to her, “to-night do not go to bed. Stay by your window, and I will stay down here in the garden and watch. And when your hair has grown to the filling of your room call to me, and then do as I tell you.”

“I will,” said the Princess.

So at dewy sunrise the Prince, lying on the turf beside the sun-dial, heard her voice—

“Florizel! Florizel! My hair has grown so long that it is pushing me out of the window.”

“Get out on to the window-sill,” said he, “and twist your hair three times round the great iron hook that is there.”

And she did.

Then the Prince climbed up the rose bush with his naked sword in his teeth, and he took the Princess's hair in his hand about a yard from her head and said—

“Jump!”

The Princess jumped, and screamed, for there she was hanging from the hook by a yard and a half of her bright hair; the Prince tightened his grasp of the hair and drew his sword across it.

Then he let her down gently by her hair till her feet were on the grass, and jumped down after her.

They stayed talking in the garden till all the shadows had crept under their proper trees and the sun-dial said it was breakfast time.

Then they went in to breakfast, and all the Court crowded round to wonder and admire. For the Princess's hair had not grown.

“How did you do it?” asked the King, shaking Florizel warmly by the hand.

“The simplest thing in the world,” said Florizel, modestly. “You have always cut the hair off the Princess. *I* just cut the Princess off the hair.”

“Humph!” said the King, who had a logical mind. And during breakfast he more than once looked anxiously at his daughter. When they got up from breakfast the Princess rose with the rest, but she rose and rose and rose, till it seemed as though there would never be an end of it. The Princess was nine feet high.

“I feared as much,” said the King, sadly. “I wonder what will be the rate of progression. You see,” he said to poor Florizel, “when we cut the hair off *it* grows—when we cut the Princess off *she* grows. I wish you had happened to think of that!”

The Princess went on growing. By dinner-time she was so large that she had to have her dinner brought out into the garden because she was too large to get indoors. But she was too unhappy to be able to eat anything.

And she cried so much that there was quite a pool in the garden, and several pages were nearly drowned. So she remembered her “Alice in Wonderland,” and stopped crying at once. But she did not stop growing. She grew bigger and bigger and bigger, till she had to go outside the palace gardens and sit on the common, and even that was too small to hold her comfortably, for every hour she grew twice as much as she had done the hour before. And nobody knew what to do, nor where the Princess was to sleep. Fortunately, her clothes had grown with her, or she would have been very cold indeed, and now she sat on the common in her green gown, embroidered with gold, looking like a great hill covered with gorse in flower.

You cannot possibly imagine how large the Princess was growing, and her mother stood wringing her hands on the castle tower, and the Prince Florizel looked on broken-hearted to see his Princess snatched from his arms and turned into a lady as big as a mountain.

The King did not weep or look on. He sat down at once and wrote to his fairy godmother, asking her advice. He sent a weasel with the letter, and by return of weasel he got his own letter back again, marked “Gone away. Left no address.”

It was now, when the kingdom was plunged into gloom, that a neighbouring King took it into his head to send an invading army against the island where Melisande lived. They came in ships and they landed in great numbers, and Melisande looking down from her height saw alien soldiers marching on the sacred soil of her country.

“I don’t mind so much now,” said she, “if I can really be of some use this size.”

And she picked up the army of the enemy in handfuls and double-handfuls, and put them back into their ships, and gave a little flip to each transport ship with her finger and thumb, which sent the ships off so fast that they never stopped till they reached their own country, and when they arrived there the whole army to a man said it would rather be courtmartialled a hundred times over than go near the place again.

Princess sitting outside the castle walls

**THE PRINCESS GREW SO BIG THAT SHE HAD
TO GO AND SIT ON THE COMMON.**

Meantime Melisande, sitting on the highest hill on the island, felt the land trembling and shivering under her giant feet.

“I do believe I’m getting too heavy,” she said, and jumped off the island into the sea, which was just up to her ankles. Just then a great fleet of warships and gunboats and torpedo boats came in sight, on their way to attack the island.

Melisande could easily have sunk them all with one kick, but she did not like to do this because it might have drowned the sailors, and besides, it might have swamped the island.

So she simply stooped and picked the island as you would pick a mushroom—for, of course, all islands are supported by a stalk underneath—and carried it away to another part of the world. So that when the warships got to where the island was marked on the map they found nothing but sea, and a very rough sea it was, because the Princess had churned it all up with her ankles as she walked away through it with the island.

When Melisande reached a suitable place, very sunny and warm, and with no sharks in the water, she set down the island; and the people made it fast with anchors, and then every one went to bed, thanking the kind fate which had sent them so great a Princess to help them in their need, and calling her the saviour of her country and the bulwark of the nation.

But it is poor work being the nation’s bulwark and your country’s saviour when you are miles high, and have no one to talk to, and when all you want is to be your humble right size again and to marry your sweetheart. And when it was dark the Princess came close to the island, and looked down, from far up, at her palace and her tower and cried, and cried, and cried. It does not matter how much you cry into the sea, it hardly makes any difference, however large you may be. Then when everything was quite dark the Princess looked up at the stars.

“I wonder how soon I shall be big enough to knock my head against them,” said she.

And as she stood star-gazing she heard a whisper right in her ear. A very little whisper, but quite plain.

“Cut off your hair!” it said.

Now, everything the Princess was wearing had grown big along with her, so that now there dangled from her golden girdle a pair of scissors as big as the Malay Peninsula, together with a pin-cushion the size of the Isle of Wight, and a yard measure that would have gone round Australia.

And when she heard the little, little voice, she knew it, small as it was, for the dear voice of Prince Florizel, and she whipped out the scissors from her gold case and snip, snip, snipped all her hair off, and it fell into the sea. The coral insects got hold of it at once and set to work on it, and now they have made it into the biggest coral reef in the world; but that has nothing to do with the story.

Then the voice said, “Get close to the island,” and the Princess did, but she could not get very close because she was so large, and she looked up again at the stars and they seemed to be much farther off.

Then the voice said, “Be ready to swim,” and she felt something climb out of her ear and clamber down her arm. The stars got farther and farther away, and next moment the Princess found herself swimming in the sea, and Prince Florizel swimming beside her.

“I crept on to your hand when you were carrying the island,” he explained, when their feet touched the sand and they walked in through the shallow water, “and I got into your ear with an ear-trumpet. You never noticed me because you were so great then.”

“Oh, my dear Prince,” cried Melisande, falling into his arms, “you have saved me. I am my proper size again.”

So they went home and told the King and Queen. Both were very, very happy, but the King rubbed his chin with his hand, and said—

“You’ve certainly had some fun for your money, young man, but don’t you see that we’re just where we were before? Why, the child’s hair is growing already.”

And indeed it was.

Then once more the King sent a letter to his godmother. He sent it by a flying-fish, and by return of fish come the answer—

“Just back from my holidays. Sorry for your troubles. Why not try scales?”

And on this message the whole Court pondered for weeks.

But the Prince caused a pair of gold scales to be made, and hung them up in the palace gardens under a big oak tree. And one morning he said to the Princess—

“My darling Melisande, I must really speak seriously to you. We are getting on in life. I am nearly twenty: it is time that we thought of being settled. Will you trust me entirely and get into one of those gold scales?”

So he took her down into the garden, and helped her into the scale, and she curled up in it in her green and gold gown, like a little grass mound with buttercups on it.

“And what is going into the other scale?” asked Melisande.

“Your hair,” said Florizel. “You see, when your hair is cut off you it grows, and when you are cut off your hair you grow—oh, my heart’s delight, I can never forget how you grew, never! But if, when your hair is no more than you, and you are no more than your hair, I snip the scissors between you and it, then neither you nor your hair can possibly decide which ought to go on growing.”

“Suppose *both* did,” said the poor Princess, humbly.

“Impossible,” said the Prince, with a shudder; “there are limits even to Malevola’s malevolence. And, besides, Fortuna said ‘Scales.’ Will you try it?”

“I will do whatever you wish,” said the poor Princess, “but let me kiss my father and mother once, and Nurse, and you, too, my dear, in case I grow large again and can kiss nobody any more.”

So they came one by one and kissed the Princess.

Then the nurse cut off the Princess's hair, and at once it began to grow at a frightful rate.

The King and Queen and nurse busily packed it, as it grew, into the other scale, and gradually the scale went down a little. The Prince stood waiting between the scales with his drawn sword, and just before the two were equal he struck. But during the time his sword took to flash through the air the Princess's hair grew a yard or two, so that at the instant when he struck the balance was true.

"You are a young man of sound judgment," said the King, embracing him, while the Queen and the nurse ran to help the Princess out of the gold scale.

The scale full of golden hair bumped down on to the ground as the Princess stepped out of the other one, and stood there before those who loved her, laughing and crying with happiness, because she remained her proper size, and her hair was not growing any more.

Princess being weighed; Prince standing by with sword
drawn

THE PRINCESS IN ONE SCALE AND HER HAIR IN THE OTHER.

She kissed her Prince a hundred times, and the very next day they were married. Every one remarked on the beauty of the bride, and it was noticed that her hair was quite short—only five feet five and a quarter inches long—just down to her pretty ankles. Because the scales had been ten feet ten and a half inches apart, and the Prince, having a straight eye, had cut the golden hair exactly in the middle!

FORTUNATUS REX & CO.

THERE was once a lady who found herself in middle life with but a slight income. Knowing herself to be insufficiently educated to be able to practise any other trade or calling, she of course decided, without hesitation, to enter the profession of teaching. She opened a very select Boarding School for Young Ladies. The highest references were given and required. And in order to keep her school as select as possible, Miss Fitzroy Robinson had a brass plate fastened on to the door, with an inscription in small polite lettering. (You have, of course, heard of the “polite letters.” Well, it was with these that Miss Fitzroy Robinson’s door-plate was engraved.)

“SELECT BOARDING ESTABLISHMENT FOR THE
DAUGHTERS OF RESPECTABLE MONARCHS.”

A great many kings who were not at all respectable would have given their royal ears to be allowed to send their daughters to this school, but Miss Fitzroy Robinson was very firm about references, and the consequence was that all the really high-class kings were only too pleased to be permitted to pay ten thousand pounds a year for their daughters’ education. And so Miss Fitzroy Robinson was able to lay aside a few pounds as a provision for her old age. And all the money she saved was invested in land.

Only one monarch refused to send his daughter to Miss Fitzroy Robinson, on the ground that so cheap a school could not be a really select one, and it was found out afterwards that his references were not at all satisfactory.

There were only six boarders, and of course the best masters were engaged to teach the royal pupils everything which their parents wished them to learn, and as the girls were never asked to do lessons except when they felt quite inclined, they all said it was the nicest school in the world, and cried at the very thought of being taken away. Thus it happened that the six pupils were quite grown up and were just becoming parlour boarders when events began to occur. Princess Daisy, the daughter of King Fortunatus, the ruling sovereign, was the only little girl in the school.

Now it was when she had been at school about a year, that a ring came at the front door-bell, and the maid-servant came to the schoolroom with a visiting card held in the corner of her apron—for her hands were wet because it was washing-day.

“A gentleman to see you, Miss,” she said; and Miss Fitzroy Robinson was quite fluttered because she thought it might be a respectable monarch, with a daughter who wanted teaching.

But when she looked at the card she left off fluttering, and said, “Dear me!” under her breath, because she was very genteel. If she had been vulgar like some of us she would have said “Bother!” and if she had been more vulgar than, I hope, any of us are, she might have said “Drat the man!” The card was large and shiny and had gold letters on it. Miss Fitzroy Robinson read:—

CHEVALIER DOLORO DE LARA
PROFESSOR OF MAGIC (WHITE)
AND THE BLACK ART.
PUPILS INSTRUCTED AT THEIR OWN RESIDENCES.
NO EXTRAS.
SPECIAL TERMS FOR SCHOOLS. EVENING PARTIES
ATTENDED.

Miss Fitzroy Robinson laid down her book—she never taught without a book—smoothed her yellow cap and her grey curls and went into the front parlour to see her visitor. He bowed low at sight of her. He was very tall and hungry-looking, with black eyes, and an indescribable mouth.

“It is indeed a pleasure,” said he, smiling so as to show every one of his thirty-two teeth—a very polite, but very difficult thing to do—“it is indeed a pleasure to meet once more my old pupil.”

“The pleasure is mutual, I am sure,” said Miss Fitzroy Robinson. If it is sometimes impossible to be polite and truthful at the same moment, that is not my fault, nor Miss Fitzroy Robinson’s.

“I have been travelling about,” said the Professor, still smiling immeasurably, “increasing my stock of wisdom. Ah, dear lady—we live and learn, do we not? And now I am really a far more competent teacher than

when I had the honour of instructing you. May I hope for an engagement as Professor in your Academy?"

"I have not yet been able to arrange for a regular course of Magic," said the schoolmistress; "it is a subject in which parents, especially royal ones, take but too little interest."

"It was your favourite study," said the professor.

"Yes—but—well, no doubt some day——"

"But I want an engagement *now*," said he, looking hungrier than ever; "a thousand pounds for thirteen lessons—to *you*, dear lady."

"It's quite impossible," said she, and she spoke firmly, for she knew from history how dangerous it is for a Magician to be allowed anywhere near a princess. Some harm almost always comes of it.

"Oh, very well!" said the Professor.

"You see my pupils are all princesses," she went on, "they don't require the use of magic, they can get all they want without it."

"Then it's '*No*'?" said he.

"It's 'No thank you kindly,'" said she.

Then, before she could stop him, he sprang past her out at the door, and she heard his boots on the oilcloth of the passage. She flew after him just in time to have the schoolroom door slammed and locked in her face.

"Well, I never!" said Miss Fitzroy Robinson. She hastened to the top of the house and hurried down the schoolroom chimney, which had been made with steps, in case of fire or other emergency. She stepped out of the grate on to the schoolroom hearthrug just one second too late. The seven Princesses were all gone, and the Professor of Magic stood alone among the ink-stained desks, smiling the largest smile Miss Fitzroy Robinson had seen yet.

"Oh, you naughty, bad, wicked man, you!" said she, shaking the school ruler at him.

• • • • •

The next day was Saturday, and the King of the country called as usual to take his daughter Daisy out to spend her half holiday. The servant who opened the door had a coarse apron on and cinders in her hair, and the King thought it was sackcloth and ashes, and said so a little anxiously, but the girl said, “No, I’ve only been a-doing of the kitchen range—though, for the matter of that—but you’d best see missus herself.”

So the King was shown into the best parlour where the tasteful wax-flowers were, and the antimacassars and water-colour drawings executed by the pupils, and the wool mats which Miss Fitzroy Robinson’s bed-ridden aunt made so beautifully. A delightful parlour full of the traces of the refining touch of a woman’s hand.

Miss Fitzroy Robinson came in slowly and sadly. Her gown was neatly made of sack-cloth—with an ingenious trimming of small cinders sewn on gold braid—and some larger-sized cinders dangled by silken threads from the edge of her lace cap.

The King saw at once that she was annoyed about something. “I hope I’m not too early,” said he.

“Your Majesty,” she answered, “not at all. You are always punctual, as stated in your references. Something has happened. I will not aggravate your misfortunes by breaking them to you. Your daughter Daisy, the pride and treasure of our little circle, has disappeared. Her six royal companions are with her. For the present all are safe, but at the moment I am unable to lay my hand on any one of the seven.”

The King sat down heavily on part of the handsome walnut and rep suite (ladies’ and gentlemen’s easy-chairs, couch and six occasional chairs) and gasped miserably. He could not find words. But the schoolmistress had written down what she was going to say on a slate and learned it off by heart, so she was able to go on fluently.

“Your Majesty, I am not wholly to blame—hang me if I am—I mean hang me if you must; but first allow me to have the honour of offering to you one or two explanatory remarks.”

With this she sat down and told him the whole story of the Professor's visit, only stopping exactly where I stopped when I was telling it to you just now.

The King listened, plucking nervously at the fringe of a purple and crimson antimacassar.

"I never *was* satisfied with the Professor's methods," said Miss Fitzroy Robinson sadly; "and I always had my doubts as to his moral character, doubts now set at rest for ever. After concluding my course of instruction with him some years ago I took a series of lessons from a far more efficient master, and thanks to those lessons, which were, I may mention, extremely costly, I was mercifully enabled to put a spoke in the wheel of the unprincipled ruffian——"

"Did you save the Princesses?" cried the King.

"No; but I can if your Majesty and the other parents will leave the matter entirely in my hands."

"It's rather a serious matter," said the King; "my poor little Daisy——"

"I would ask you," said the schoolmistress with dignity, "not to attach too much importance to this event. Of course it is regrettable, but unpleasant accidents occur in all schools, and the consequences of them can usually be averted by the exercise of tact and judgment."

"I ought to hang you, you know," said the King doubtfully.

"No doubt," said Miss Fitzroy Robinson, "and if you do you'll never see your Daisy again. Your duty as a parent—yes—and your duty to me—conflicting duties are very painful things."

"But can I trust you?"

"I may remind you," said she, drawing herself up so that the cinders rattled again, "that we exchanged satisfactory references at the commencement of our business relations."

The King rose. "Well, Miss Fitzroy Robinson," he said, "I have been entirely satisfied with Daisy's progress since she has been in your charge,

and I feel I cannot do better than leave this matter entirely in your able hands.”

The schoolmistress made him a curtsy, and he went back to his marble palace a broken-hearted monarch, with his crown all on one side and his poor, dear nose red with weeping.

The select boarding establishment was shut up.

Time went on and no news came of the lost Princesses.

The King found but little comfort in the fact that his other child, Prince Denis, was still spared to him. Denis was all very well and a nice little boy in his way, but a boy is not a girl.

The Queen was much more broken-hearted than the King, but of course she had the housekeeping to see to and the making of the pickles and preserves and the young Prince’s stockings to knit, so she had not much time for weeping, and after a year she said to the King—

“My dear, you ought to do something to distract your mind. It’s unkinglike to sit and cry all day. Now, do make an effort; do something useful, if it’s only opening a bazaar or laying a foundation stone.”

“I am frightened of bazaars,” said the King; “they are like bees—they buzz and worry; but foundation stones——” And after that he began to sit and think sometimes, without crying, and to make notes on the backs of old envelopes. So the Queen felt that she had not spoken quite in vain.

A month later the suggestion of foundation stones bore fruit.

The King floated a company, and Fortunatus Rex & Co. became almost at once the largest speculative builders in the world.

Perhaps you do not know what a speculative builder is. I’ll tell you what the King and his Co. did, and then you will know.

They bought all the pretty woods and fields they could get and cut them up into squares, and grubbed up the trees and the grass and put streets there and lamp-posts and ugly little yellow brick houses, in the hopes that people

would want to live in them. And curiously enough people did. So the King and his Co. made quite a lot of money.

It is curious that nearly all the great fortunes are made by turning beautiful things into ugly ones. Making beauty out of ugliness is very ill-paid work.

The ugly little streets crawled further and further out of the town, eating up the green country like greedy yellow caterpillars, but at the foot of the Clover Hill they had to stop. For the owner of Clover Hill would not sell any land at all—for any price that Fortunatus Rex & Co. could offer. In vain the solicitors of the Company called on the solicitors of the owner, wearing their best cloaks and swords and shields, and took them out to lunch and gave them nice things to eat and drink. Clover Hill was not for sale.

At last, however, a little old woman all in grey called at the Company's shining brass and mahogany offices and had a private interview with the King himself.

"I am the owner of Clover Hill," said she, "and you may build on all its acres except the seven at the top and the fifteen acres that go round that seven, and you must build me a high wall round the seven acres and another round the fifteen—of *red* brick, mind; none of your cheap yellow stuff—and you must make a brand new law that any one who steals my fruit is to be hanged from the tree he stole it from. That's all. What do you say?"

The King said "Yes," because since his trouble he cared for nothing but building, and his royal soul longed to see the green Clover Hill eaten up by yellow brick caterpillars with slate tops. He did not at all like building the two red brick walls, but he did it.

Now, the old woman wanted the walls and the acres to be this sort of shape—

Circle within a circle; inner circle: 7
acres; outer circle 15 acres

But it was such a bother getting the exact amount of ground into the two circles that all the surveyors tore out their hair by handfuls, and at last the

King said, “Oh bother! Do it this way,” and drew a plan on the back of an old Act of Parliament. So they did, and it was like this—

number blocks

The old lady was very vexed when she found that there was only one wall between her orchard and the world, as you see was the case at the corner where the two 1’s and the 15 meet; but the King said he couldn’t afford to build it all over again and that she’d got her two walls as she had said. So she had to put up with it. Only she insisted on the King’s getting her a fierce bull-dog to fly at the throat of any one who should come over the wall at that weak point where the two 1’s join on to the 15. So he got her a stout bull-dog whose name was Martha, and brought it himself in a jewelled leash.

“Martha will fly at any one who is not of kingly blood,” said he. “Of course she wouldn’t dream of biting a royal person; but, then, on the other hand, royal people don’t rob orchards.”

So the old woman had to be contented. She tied Martha up in the unprotected corner of her inner enclosure and then she planted little baby apple trees and had a house built and sat down in it and waited.

And the King was almost happy. The creepy, crawly yellow caterpillars ate up Clover Hill—all except the little green crown on the top, where the apple trees were and the two red brick walls and the little house and the old woman.

The poor Queen went on seeing to the jam and the pickles and the blanket washing and the spring cleaning, and every now and then she would say to her husband—

“Fortunatus, my love, do you *really* think Miss Fitzroy Robinson is trustworthy? Shall we ever see our Daisy again?”

And the King would rumple his fair hair with his hands till it stuck out like cheese straws under his crown, and answer—

“My dear, you must be patient; you know we had the very highest references.”

Now one day the new yellow brick town the King had built had a delightful experience. Six handsome Princes on beautiful white horses came riding through the dusty little streets. The housings of their chargers shone with silver embroidery and gleaming glowing jewels, and their gold armour flashed so gloriously in the sun that all the little children clapped their hands, and the Princes' faces were so young and kind and handsome that all the old women said: "Bless their pretty hearts!"

Now, of course, you will not need to be told that these six Princes were looking for the six grown-up Princesses who had been so happy at the Select Boarding Establishment. Their six Royal fathers, who lived many years' journey away on the other side of the world, and had not yet heard that the Princesses were mislaid, had given Miss Fitzroy Robinson's address to these Princes, and instructed them to marry the six Princesses without delay, and bring them home.

But when they got to the Select Boarding Establishment for the Daughters of Respectable Monarchs, the house was closed, and a card was in the window, saying that this desirable villa residence was to be let on moderate terms, furnished or otherwise. The wax fruit under the glass shade still showed attractively through the dusty panes. The six Princes looked through the window by turns. They were charmed with the furniture, and the refining touch of a woman's hand drew them like a magnet. They took the house, but they had their meals at the Palace by the King's special invitation.

King Fortunatus told the Princes the dreadful story of the disappearance of the entire Select School; and each Prince swore by his sword-hilt and his honour that he would find out the particular Princess that he was to marry, or perish in the attempt. For, of course, each Prince was to marry one Princess, mentioned by name in his instructions, and not one of the others.

The first night that the Princes spent in the furnished house passed quietly enough, so did the second and the third and the fourth, fifth and sixth, but on the seventh night, as the Princes sat playing spilikins in the schoolroom, they suddenly heard a voice that was not any of theirs. It said, "Open up Africa!"

The Princes looked here, there, and everywhere—but they could see no one. They had not been brought up to the exploring trade, and could not have opened up Africa if they had wanted to.

“Or cut through the Isthmus of Panama,” said the voice again.

Now, as it happened, none of the six Princes were engineers. They confessed as much.

“Cut up China, then!” said the voice, desperately.

“It’s like the ghost of a Tory newspaper,” said one of the Princes.

And then suddenly they knew that the voice came from one of the pair of globes which hung in frames at the end of the schoolroom. It was the terrestrial globe.

“I’m inside,” said the voice; “I can’t get out. Oh, cut the globe—anywhere—and let me out. But the African route is most convenient.”

Prince Primus opened up Africa with his sword, and out tumbled half a Professor of Magic.

“My other half’s in there,” he said, pointing to the Celestial globe. “Let my legs out, do——”

But Prince Secundus said, “Not so fast,” and Prince Tertius said, “Why were you shut up?”

“I was shut up for as pretty a bit of parlour-magic as ever you saw in all your born days,” said the top half of the Professor of Magic.

“Oh, you were, were you?” said Prince Quartus; “well, your legs aren’t coming out just yet. We want to engage a competent magician. You’ll do.”

“But I’m not all here,” said the Professor.

“Quite enough of you,” said Prince Quintus.

“Now look here,” said Prince Sextus; “we want to find our six Princesses. We can give a very good guess as to how they were lost; but

we'll let bygones be bygones. You tell us how to find them, and after our weddings we'll restore your legs to the light of day."

"This half of me feels so faint," said the half Professor of Magic.

"What are we to do?" said all the Princes, threateningly; "if you don't tell us, you shall never have a leg to stand on."

"Steal apples," said the half Professor, hoarsely, and fainted away.

They left him lying on the bare boards between the inkstained desks, and off they went to steal apples. But this was not so easy. Because Fortunatus Rex & Co. had built, and built, and built, and apples do not grow freely in those parts of the country which have been "opened up" by speculative builders.

So at last they asked the little Prince Denis where he went for apples when he wanted them. And Denis said—

"The old woman at the top of Clover Hill has apples in her seven acres, and in her fifteen acres, but there's a fierce bulldog in the seven acres, and I've stolen all the apples in the fifteen acres myself."

"We'll try the seven acres," said the Princes.

"Very well," said Denis; "You'll be hanged if you're caught. So, as I put you up to it, I'm coming too, and if you won't take me, I'll tell. So there!"

For Denis was a most honourable little Prince, and felt that you must not send others into danger unless you go yourself, and he would never have stolen apples if it had not been quite as dangerous as leading armies.

So the Princes had to agree, and the very next night Denis let himself down out of his window by a knotted rope made of all the stockings his mother had knitted for him, and the grown-up Princes were waiting under the window, and off they all went to the orchard on the top of Clover Hill.

They climbed the wall at the proper corner, and Martha, the bulldog, who was very wellbred, and knew a Prince when she saw one, wagged her kinked tail respectfully and wished them good luck.

The Princes stole over the dewy orchard grass and looked at tree after tree: there were no apples on any of them.

Only at last, in the very middle of the orchard there was a tree with a copper trunk and brass branches, and leaves of silver. And on it hung seven beautiful golden apples.

So each Prince took one of the golden apples, very quietly, and off they went, anxious to get back to the half-Professor of Magic, and learn what to do next. No one had any doubt as to the half-Professor having told the truth; for when your legs depend on your speaking the truth you will not willingly tell a falsehood.

They stole away as quietly as they could, each with a gold apple in his hand, but as they went Prince Denis could not resist his longing to take a bite out of his apple. He opened his mouth very wide so as to get a good bite, and the next moment he howled aloud, for the apple was as hard as stone, and the poor little boy had broken nearly all his first teeth.

He flung the apple away in a rage, and the next moment the old woman rushed out of her house. She screamed. Martha barked. Prince Denis howled. The whole town was aroused, and the six Princes were arrested, and taken under a strong guard to the Tower. Denis was let off, on the ground of his youth, and, besides, he had lost most of his teeth, which is a severe punishment, even for stealing apples.

The King sat in his Hall of Justice next morning, and the old woman and the Princes came before him. When the story had been told, he said—

“My dear fellows, I hope you’ll excuse me—the laws of hospitality are strict—but business is business after all. I should not like to have any constitutional unpleasantness over a little thing like this; you must all be hanged to-morrow morning.”

The Princes were extremely vexed, but they did not make a fuss. They asked to see Denis, and told him what to do.

So Denis went to the furnished house which had once been a Select Boarding Establishment for the Daughters of Respectable Monarchs. The door was locked, but Denis knew a way in, because his sister had told him

all about it one holiday. He got up on the roof and walked down the schoolroom chimney.

There, on the schoolroom floor, lay half a Professor of Magic, struggling feebly, and uttering sad, faint squeals.

“What are we to do now?” said Denis.

“Steal apples,” said the half-Professor in a weak whisper. “Do let my legs out. Slice up the Great Bear—or the Milky Way would be a good one for them to come out by.”

But Denis knew better.

“Not till we get the lost Princesses,” said he, “now, what’s to be done?”

“Steal apples I tell you,” said the half-Professor, crossly; “seven apples—there—seven kisses. Cut them down. Oh go along with you, do. Leave me to die, you heartless boy. I’ve got pins and needles in my legs.”

Then off ran Denis to the Seven Acre Orchard at the top of Clover Hill, and there were the six Princes hanging to the apple-tree, and the hangman had gone home to his dinner, and there was no one else about. And the Princes were not dead.

Denis climbed up the tree and cut the Princes down with the penknife of the gardener’s boy. (You will often find this penknife mentioned in your German exercises; now you know why so much fuss is made about it.)

The Princes fell to the ground, and when they recovered their wits Denis told them what he had done.

“Oh why did you cut us down?” said the Princes, “we were having such happy dreams.”

“Well,” said Denis, shutting up the penknife of the gardener’s boy, “of all the ungrateful chaps!” And he turned his back and marched off. But they ran quickly after him and thanked him and told him how they had been dreaming of walking arm in arm with the most dear and lovely Princesses in the world.

“Well,” said Denis, “it’s no use dreaming about *them*. You’ve got your own registered Princesses to find, and the half-Professor says, ‘Steal apples.’”

“There aren’t any more to steal,” said the Princes—but when they looked, there were the gold apples back on the tree just as before.

So once again they each picked one. Denis chose a different one this time. He thought it might be softer. The last time he had chosen the biggest apple—but now he took the littlest apple of all.

“Seven kisses!” he cried, and began to kiss the little gold apple.

Each Prince kissed the apple he held, till the sound of kisses was like the whisper of the evening wind in leafy trees. And, of course, at the seventh kiss each Prince found that he had in his hand not an apple, but the fingers of a lovely Princess. As for Denis, he had got his little sister Daisy, and he was so glad he promised at once to give her his guinea-pigs and his whole collection of foreign postage stamps.

“What is your name, dear and lovely lady?” asked Prince Primus.

“Sexta,” said his Princess. And then it turned out that every single one of the Princes had picked the wrong apple, so that each one had a Princess who was not the one mentioned in his letter of instructions. Secundus had plucked the apple that held Quinta, and Tertius held Quarta, and so on—and everything was as criss-cross-crooked as it possibly could be.

And yet nobody wanted to change.

Then the old woman came out of her house and looked at them and chuckled, and she said—

“You must be contented with what you have.”

“We *are*,” said all twelve of them, “but what about our parents?”

“They must put up with your choice,” said the old woman, “it’s the common lot of parents.”

“I think you ought to sort yourselves out properly,” said Denis; “I’m the only one who’s got his right Princess—because I wasn’t greedy. I took the smallest.”

The tallest Princess showed him a red mark on her arm, where his little teeth had been two nights before, and everybody laughed.

But the old woman said—

“They can’t change, my dear. When a Prince has picked a gold apple that has a Princess in it, and has kissed it till she comes out, no other Princess will ever do for him, any more than any other Prince will ever do for her.”

While she was speaking the old woman got younger and younger and younger, till as she spoke the last words she was quite young, not more than fifty-five. And it was Miss Fitzroy Robinson!

Her pupils stepped forward one by one with respectful curtsies, and she allowed them to kiss her on the cheek, just as if it was breaking-up day.

Then, all together, and very happily, they went down to the furnished villa that had once been the Select School, and when the half-professor had promised on his honour as a Magician to give up Magic and take to a respectable trade, they took his legs out of the starry sphere, and gave them back to him; and he joined himself together, and went off full of earnest resolve to live and die an honest plumber.

“My talents won’t be quite wasted,” said he; “a little hanky-panky is useful in most trades.”

When the King asked Miss Fitzroy Robinson to name her own reward for restoring the Princesses, she said—

“Make the land green again, your Majesty.”

So Fortunatus Rex & Co. devoted themselves to pulling down and carting off the yellow streets they had built. And now the country there is almost as green and pretty as it was before Princess Daisy and the six parlour-boarders were turned into gold apples.

“It was very clever of dear Miss Fitzroy Robinson to shut up that Professor in those two globes,” said the Queen; “it shows the advantage of having lessons from the best Masters.”

“Yes,” said the King, “I always say that you cannot go far wrong if you insist on the highest references!”

THE SUMS THAT CAME RIGHT

“IF twenty-seven barrelsful of apples cost £25 13s. 3d., what would the same barrels be worth if they had been packed by a dishonest person, who only put in 7/9ths of apples in each barrel and the rest sawdust?”

This was the sum.

It does not look very hard, perhaps, to you who have studied ardently for years at a Board School, or a High School, or a Preparatory School for the sons of gentlemen; but to Edwin it looked as hard as a ship's biscuit. But he went for it like a man, and presently produced an Answer and his Master wrote a big curly R across the sum. Perhaps you do not know that a big curly R means Right? As for the answer to the sum, I will try to get a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (who is a very terrible person), to work it out for you, and if he can do it I will put the answer at the end of this story. I cannot work it myself.

Edwin was glad to see the large curly R. He saw it so seldom that to meet it was a real pleasure.

“But what's the use?” he said. “Everything else leads to something else, except lessons. If you put seeds in the garden they come up flowers, unless they're rotten seeds or you forget where you put them. And if you buy a rabbit—well, there it is, unless it dies. And if you eat your dinner—well, you're not hungry any more for an hour or two. But lessons!”

He bit his penholder angrily and put his head into his desk to look for nibs to play Simpkins minor with. You know the game of nibs, of course? He held up the lid of the desk on his head, as I daresay you have often done, and the inside of the desk was darkish, so that the sudden light at the very back of the desk showed quite brightly and unmistakably.

“Those firework fusees, O Crikey!” was Edwin's first thought.

But it was no firework fusee. It was like glow-worms, only a thousand times more bright and white. For it was the light of pure reason, and it

glowed from the glorious eyes of the Arithmetic Fairy. You did not know that there was an Arithmetic Fairy? If you knew as much as I do, it would be simply silly for me to try to tell you stories, wouldn't it?

Her wonderful eyes gleamed and flashed straight into the round goggling eyes of the amazed Edwin.

"Upon my word!" she said.

Edwin said nothing.

"Did no one ever tell you?" the fairy went on, shaking out her dress, which was woven of the integral calculus, and trimmed with a dazzling fringe of logarithms. "Did no one ever tell you that the things that happen when you've done your sums right, happen when you're grown up?"

"I don't care what happens then," Edwin dared to say, for the flashing eyes were kind eyes. "I shall be a pirate, or a bushranger, or something."

The fairy drew herself up, and her graceful garland of simple equations trembled as Edwin breathed heavily.

"A Pirate," said she, "a nice sort of pirate who can't calculate his men's share of the plunder to three-seventeenths of a gold link of the dead captain's chain! A fine bushranger who can't arrange the forty-two bullets from the revolvers of his seven dauntless followers so that each of the fifteen enemies gets his fair share! Go along with you!" said the Arithmetic Fairy.

But Edwin's eyes were, as I said, wide open, goggling.

"I say," he suddenly remarked, "how jolly pretty you are."

The Arithmetic Fairy has but one weakness—a feminine weakness. She loves a pretty speech. If blunt, so much the worse; yet even bluntness....

She looked down and played shyly with the bunch of miscellaneous examples in vulgar fractions which adorned her waistband.

"I suppose you can't be expected to understand, yet," she said, and she said it very gently.

Edwin took courage.

“When I do things I want something to happen at once. ‘I want a white rabbit and I want it *now*.’”

She did not recognise the quotation.

“Get your Master to set you a little simple multiplication sum in white rabbits,” she said. “Goodbye, my child. You’ll know me better in time, and as you know me better you’ll love me more.”

“I ... you’re lovely now,” said Edwin.

The Fairy laughed, and spread her dazzling wings glistening with all the glories of the higher mathematics.

Edwin closed dazzled eyes, and opened them as the desk lid shut down on his head, swayed by no uncertain hand. It was the mathematical master’s hand, in fact.

A new example was set. And, curiously enough, white rabbits were in it.

“If seven thousand five hundred and sixty-three white rabbits,” it began. Edwin, his brain in a whirl, worked it correctly, by a sort of inspiration, like an ancient prophet or a calculating machine.

When he returned, with his books in a strap, to the red villa whose gables meant home for him, he found an excited crowd dancing round the white-painted gates.

The whole of the front garden, as well as most of the back garden, was a seething mass of white rabbits. Seven thousand five hundred and sixty-three there were, to be exact. I alone know this. The joyous Edwin and his distracted parents were never able to count them.

“What a lot of hutches we shall want,” Edwin thought gaily. But when his father came home from the Stock Exchange, where he spent his days in considering $7\frac{5}{8}$ and $10\text{-}3/32$ —no doubt under the direct guidance of the Arithmetic Fairy, he said at once—

“Send for the poulterer.”

This was done. Only one pair of white rabbits remained the property of Edwin, but these, by the power of the Arithmetic Fairy, became ten by Christmas.

The rabbits disposed of, peace spread a longing wing over the villa, but was not allowed to settle.

“Oh, please ’m,” the startled cook, cap all crooked, exclaimed in the hall, “the cellar is choke-full of apples—most of ’em bad ’m—I never see no one deliver them, nor yet give no receipt.”

The cook, for once in a lurid career, spoke truth. The cellar *was* full of apples. Nineteen pounds nineteen and twopence and one-third of a pennyworth—to be accurate.

Edwin went to bed, feeling now quite sure that he had *not* dreamed the Arithmetic Fairy, and anxiously wondering what to-morrow’s sums would be about. Not, he trusted, about snakes, or Sunday School teachers.

The next day’s sum was about oranges. Edwin did it correctly, and went home a prey to the most golden apprehensions. Nor were these unfounded. The whole of the dining-room and most of the hall—up to the seventh step of the neatly carpeted stairs, was golden with oranges. Edwin’s father said some severe things about practical jokers, and sent for the greengrocer. Edwin ate nine $3/7$ th oranges, and went to bed yellow, but not absolutely unhappy.

But now he was quite sure.

On the following day his sum dealt with elephants, and in such numbers that his father, on returning from business, yielded to a very natural annoyance, and gave notice to his landlord that he should, at Lady Day, leave a villa where elephants and oranges occurred to such an extent.

No one suspected Edwin of having anything to do with these happenings. And indeed, it was not his fault, so how and why could or should he have owned up to it?

I wish I had time to tell you of the events that occurred when Edwin’s sums were set in buttered muffins. Of the seventy-five pigs travelling in a

circle at varying rates, I can only say that part of this circle ran through Edwin's mother's drawing-room. Nor can I here relate the tale of the three hundred lightning conductors which were suddenly found to be attached to the once happy villa-home. Edwin's mother cried all day when she was not laughing, and people came from far and near to see the haunted house. For when it came to four thousand white owls and a church steeple every one felt that it was more than a mere accident.

Edwin's master had a pretty taste in sums, and about once a term he used to set a sum about canes. Edwin worked that sum wrong on purpose, so I suppose it served him right that the canes should be at home before he was, just as they would have been if he had worked the sum properly, and as he had borrowed his father's razor that morning to sharpen a slate-pencil, the fifty-seven canes were not all thrown away.

But it was the sum about the cistern that convinced Edwin of the desperate need of finding the Arithmetic Fairy, and begging her to take back the present she had made him. It is not polite to ask this, but Edwin had to do it. You see in the sum the cistern had to leak three pints in thirteen minutes and a quarter, but the cistern at home happened to have a little leak of its own already, where Edwin had tried his new drill on it, and the two leaks together managed so well that when Edwin got home he found water dripping from all the top bedroom ceilings and the staircase was a sort of Niagara. It was very exciting—but when the plumber came he let Edwin's father know all about the little drilled hole, and Edwin got the credit of the leak in the sum, which was much larger and most unfair. His father spoke to Edwin about this matter in his study, and it was then that Edwin saw that he must put an end to the sums that came true.

So he went up to his bedroom with his candle and his arithmetic book. Directly he put the candle on the chest of drawers a big splash of water from the ceiling fell right on the flame and it went out. He had to go right down stairs to get another light. Then he put the candle on the dressing table—splash—out it went. Chair. Splash! Out! At last he got the candle to stay alight on the washhand-stand, which was, by some curious accident, the only dry place in the room.

Then he opened his book. Somewhere in the book he knew there must be something that would fetch the fairy. He said the Multiplication Table up to nine times—after that, as you know, the worst is over. But no fairy appeared.

Then he read aloud the instructions for working the different rules, including the examples given. There was no result.

Then he called to the Fairy—but she did not come.

Then he tried counting. Then counting and calling mixed with other things. Like this:

“Oh, good Fairy! One-two-three-four-five-six-seven; do come and help me! Eight-nine-ten-eleven! Beautiful, dear, kind, lovely fairy! Nine nines are eighty-one! Dear fairy, do come! Seven million two hundred thousand six hundred and fifty-nine! I will always love you if you will come to me now. Three-sevenths of five-ninths of five-twelfths of sixteen-fiftieths. You were so kind the other day. Two and two are four, and three are seven! Do come now—you’ve no idea what an awful mess you’ve got me into. Seven nines are sixty-three—though I know you meant it kindly. Dear Fairy. Thirteen from thirty-seven leaves twenty-four. Do come and see what a hole I’m in—do come—and the product will give you the desired result!”

Edwin stopped, out of breath. He looked round him for the Fairy. But his room, with the water dripping from the roof and the wet towels and basins on the floor, was not a fairy-like place. Edwin saw, with a sigh, that it was no go.

“I’ll have another go in prep to-morrow,” he said. This he did.

The Mathematical Master was pleased with himself that day because he had succeeded in preventing his best boy from yielding to the allurements of the Head-master and the Classical side.

Of course his class knew at once what kind of temper the Mathematical Master was in—you know we always know that—and Edwin ventured to ask that the examples that day might be about a model steam engine.

“Only *one*, sir, please,” he was careful to explain. The Master kindly consented, and by great good fortune the example did not deal with a faulty

boiler, nor with any other defect—but concerned itself solely with the model engine’s speed. So Edwin knew, when he had worked his sum, exactly what pace the model engine he would find at home would be good for. He worked the sum right.

Then he put his head into his desk and began again.

“Oh, good Fairy, if a sum of £4,700 is to be divided between A, B, and C,—do, do come and help me. Three-tenths of a pound is six shillings, dear Fairy—eleven—twelve—thirteen—fourteen—oh, lovely Fairy—” and so on.

But no Fairy came. And Simpkins minor whispered—

“What are you chunnering about?” and stuck a pin into Edwin’s leg. “Can’t you do the beastly example?”

Then quite suddenly Edwin knew what he had to do. He made up an example for himself. This was it.

“If 7,535 fairies were in my desk at school and I subtracted 710 and added 1,006, and the rest flew away in 783 equal gangs, how many would be left over in the desk?”

When he had worked it the answer was one. Very quickly he opened his desk again, and there was the Arithmetic Fairy, looking more lovely than ever in a rich gown of indices, lined with surds, that fell to her feet in osculating curves. In her hand, like a sceptre, shone the starry glory of the binomial theorem. But her eyes were starrier still. She smiled, but her first words were severe.

“You careless boy,” she said. “Why can’t you learn to be accurate? It’s the merest chance you got me. You should have stated your problem more clearly, and you should have said seven thousand *Arithmetic* Fairies. Why suppose you had found one fairy in your desk, and it had been the Grammar Fairy, or the Football Fairy—what would you have done then?”

“*Is* there a Football Fairy?” Edwin asked.

“Of course. There’s a fairy for everything you have to learn. There’s a Patience Fairy, and a Good-temper Fairy, and a Fairy to teach people to

make bread, and another to teach them to make love. Didn't you really know that?"

"No," said Edwin, "but I say, look here——"

"I am looking," she said, fixing her bright eyes on Edwin's goggling ones, exactly as at their first meeting.

"No—I mean—oh—I say—" he said.

"So I hear," she said.

"No, but—no kid," said he.

"Of course there isn't any kid," said she.

"Dear, kind, pretty Fairy," Edwin began again.

"That's better," said the Fairy.

"Didn't you hear all I was saying to you yesterday, when the water was dripping from the ceiling all over the room?"

"From nineteen several spots. Of course I did."

"Well then," said Edwin.

"You mean that you're tired of having things happen when you do your sums correctly? You prefer the old way!"

"Yes, *please*," said Edwin, "if you're sure you don't mind? I know you meant it for kindness, but, oh, it is most beastly, when you get into the thick of it." He was thinking of the elephants, I fancy.

"I only did it to please you," said the Fairy pouting. "I'll make everything as it was before. Does *that* please you? And there's your third wish. You know we always give three wishes. It's customary in the profession. What would you like?"

Edwin had not attended properly to this speech, so he had only heard "as it was before" and then "What would you like?"

So he said, "I should like to see you again some day."

The Arithmetic Fairy smiled at him, and her beauty grew more and more radiant. She had not expected this. “I made sure you would ask for a pony or a cricket bat or a pair of white mice,” she said. “You *shall* see me again, Edwin. Goodbye.”

And the bright vision faded away in a dim mist of rosy permutations.

When Edwin got home he heard that a model engine had been discovered in the larder, and had been given to his younger brother. There are some wrongs, some sorrows, to which even a pen like mine cannot hope to do justice.

• • • • •

Edwin is now a quiet-looking grown-up person in a black frock coat; and his hair is slowly withdrawing itself from the top of his learned head. I suppose it feels itself unworthy to cover so great a brain. The fairy has been with him, unseen, this many a year. The other day he saw her.

He had been Senior Wrangler, of course; that was nothing to Edwin. And he was Astronomer Royal, but that, after all, he had a right to expect.

But it was when he took breath from his researches one day, and suddenly found that he had invented a bran-new Hypernebular Hypothesis—that he thought of the Fairy, and thinking of her, he beheld her. She was lightly poised above a pile of books based on Newton’s “Principia,” and topped with his own latest work, “The Fourth and Further Dimensions.” He knew her at once, and now he appreciated, more than ever in his youth, the radiance of her eyes and of her wings, for now he understood it.

“Dear, beautiful Fairy,” he said, “how glad I am to see you again.”

“I’ve been with you all the time,” she said. “I wish I could do something more for you. Is there anything you want?”

The great Mathematician who was Edwin ran his hand over his thin hair.

“No,” he said, “no.” And then he remembered the school and Simpkins minor and the old desk he used to keep firework fusees in. “Unless,” he added, “you could make me young again.”

She dropped a little tear, clear as a solved problem.

“I can’t do *that*,” she said. “You can’t have *everything*. The only person who could do that for you is the Love Fairy. If you had found her instead of me you would have been always young, but you wouldn’t have invented the Hypernebular Hypothesis.”

“I suppose I shall never never find her now?” said Edwin, and as he spoke he looked out of the window to the garden, where a girl was gathering roses.

“I wonder!” said she. “The Love Fairy doesn’t live in schoolbooks or books on Fourth Dimensions.”

“I wonder!” said Edwin. “Does the Love Fairy live in gardens?”

“I wonder!” echoed the Arithmetic Fairy, a little sadly, and she spread her bright wings and flew out of the open window and out of this story.

Edwin went out into the rose garden. And did he find the Love Fairy?

I wonder!

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PS.—The Fellow of Trinity says the answer to that sum is nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings and two pence and one-third of a penny.

Does the Fellow of Trinity speak the truth?

I wonder!

THE TOWN IN THE LIBRARY IN THE TOWN IN THE LIBRARY

ROSAMUND and Fabian were left alone in the library. You may not believe this; but I advise you to believe everything I tell you, because it is true. Truth is stranger than story-books, and when you grow up you will hear people say this till you grow quite sick of listening to them: you will then want to write the strangest story that ever was—just to show that *some* stories can be stranger than truth.

Mother was obliged to leave the children alone, because Nurse was ill with measles, which seems a babyish thing for a grown-up nurse to have—but it is quite true. If I had wanted to make up anything I could have said she was ill of a broken heart or a brain-fever, which always happens in books. But I wish to speak the truth even if it sounds silly. And it *was* measles.

Mother could not stay with the children, because it was Christmas Eve, and on that day a lot of poor old people came up to get their Christmas presents, tea and snuff, and flannel petticoats, and warm capes, and boxes of needles and cottons and things like that. Generally the children helped to give out the presents, but this year Mother was afraid they might be going to have measles themselves, and measles is a nasty forward illness with no manners at all. You can catch it from a person before they know they've got it, and if Rosamund and Fabian had been going to have it they might have given it to all the old men and women who came up to get their Christmas presents. And measles is a present no old men or women want to have given them, even at Christmas time, no matter how old they may be. They would not mind brain-fever or a broken heart so much perhaps—because it is more interesting. But no one can think it interesting to have measles, at any rate till you come to the part where they give you jelly and boiled sole.

So the children were left alone. Before Mother went away she said—

“Look here, dears, you may play with your bricks, or make pictures with your pretty blocks that kind Uncle Thomas gave you, but you must not touch the two top-drawers of the bureau. Now don’t forget. And if you’re good you shall have tea with me, and perhaps there will be cake. Now you *will* be good, won’t you?”

Fabian and Rosamund promised faithfully that they would be *very* good and that they would not touch the two top-drawers, and Mother went away to see about the flannel petticoats and the tea and snuff and tobacco and things. When the children were left alone, Fabian said—

“I am going to be very good, I shall be much more good than Mother expects me to.”

“We *won’t* look in the drawers,” said Rosamund, stroking the shiny top of the bureau.

“We won’t even *think* about the insides of the drawers,” said Fabian. He stroked the bureau too and his fingers left four long streaks on it, because he had been eating toffee.

“I suppose,” he said presently, “we may open the two *bottom* drawers? Mother couldn’t have made a mistake—could she?”

So they opened the two bottom drawers just to be sure that Mother hadn’t made a mistake, and to see whether there was anything in the bottom drawers that they ought not to look at.

But the bottom drawer of all had only old magazines in it. And the next to the bottom drawer had a lot of papers in it. The children knew at once by the look of the papers that they belonged to Father’s great work about the Domestic Life of the Ancient Druids, and they knew it was not right—or even interesting—to try to read other people’s papers.

So they shut the drawers and looked at each other, and Fabian said, “I think it would be right to play with the bricks and the pretty blocks that Uncle Thomas gave us.”

But Rosamund was younger than Fabian, and she said, “I am tired of the blocks, and I am tired of Uncle Thomas. I would rather look in the

drawers.”

“So would I,” said Fabian. And they stood looking at the bureau.

Perhaps you don’t know what a bureau is—children learn very little at school nowadays—so I will tell you that a bureau is a kind of chest of drawers. Sometimes it has a bookcase on the top of it, and instead of the two little top corner drawers like the chests of drawers in a bedroom it has a sloping lid, and when it is quite open you pull out two little boards underneath—and then it makes a sort of shelf for people to write letters on. The shelf lies quite flat, and lets you see little drawers inside with mother of pearl handles—and a row of pigeon holes—(which are not holes pigeons live in, but places for keeping the letters carrier-pigeons could carry round their necks if they liked). And there is very often a tiny cupboard in the middle of the bureau, with a pattern on the door in different coloured woods. So now you know.

Fabian stood first on one leg and then on the other, till Rosamund said—

“Well, you might as well pull up your stockings.”

So he did. His stockings were always just like a concertina or a very expensive photographic camera, but he used to say it was not his fault, and I suppose he knew best. Then he said—

“I say, Rom! mother only said we weren’t to *touch* the two top-drawers _____”

“I *should* like to be good,” said Rosamund.

“I *mean* to be good,” said Fabian. “But if you took the little thin poker that is not kept for best you could put it through one of the brass handles and I could hold the other handle with the tongs. And then we could open the drawer without touching it.”

“So we could! How clever you are, Fabe,” said Rosamund. And she admired her brother very much. So they took the poker and the tongs. The front of the bureau got a little scratched, but the top drawer came open, and there they saw two boxes with glass tops and narrow gold paper going all round; though you could only see paper shavings through the glass they

knew it was soldiers. Besides these boxes there was a doll and a donkey standing on a green grass plot that had wooden wheels, and a little wicker-work doll's cradle, and some brass cannons, and a bag that looked like marbles, and some flags, and a mouse that seemed as though it moved with clockwork; only, of course, they had promised not to touch the drawer, so they could not make sure. There was a wooden box, too, and it was wrong way up and on the bottom of it was written in pencil, "Vill: and anim: 5/9-1/2." They looked at each other, and Fabian said:

"I wish it was to-morrow!"

You have seen that Fabian was quite a clever boy; and he knew at once that these were the Christmas presents which Santa Claus had brought for him and Rosamund. But Rosamund said, "Oh dear, I wish we hadn't!"

However, she consented to open the other drawer—without touching it, of course, because she had promised faithfully—and when, with the poker and tongs, the other drawer came open, there were large wooden boxes—the kind that hold raisins and figs—and round boxes with paper on—smooth on the top and folded in pleats round the edge; and the children knew what was inside without looking. Every one knows what candied fruit looks like on the outside of the box. There were square boxes, too—the kind that have crackers in—with a cracker going off on the lid, very different in size and brightness from what it does really, for, as no doubt you know, a cracker very often comes in two quite calmly, without any pop at all, and then you only have the motto and the sweet, which is never nice. Of course, if there is anything else in the cracker, such as brooches or rings, you have to let the little girl who sits next you at supper have it.

When they had pushed back the drawer Fabian said—

"Let us pull out the writing drawer and make a castle."

So they pulled the drawer out and put it on the floor. Please do not try to do this if your father has a bureau, because it leads to trouble. It was only because this one was broken that they were able to do it.

Then they began to build. They had the two boxes of bricks—the wooden bricks with the pillars and the coloured glass windows, and the rational bricks which are made of clay like tiles, and their father called them

the All-Wool bricks, which seems silly, only of course grown-up people always talk sense. When all the bricks were used up they got the pretty picture blocks that kind Uncle Thomas gave them, and they built with these; but one box of blocks does not go far. Picture blocks are only good for building, except just at first. When you have made the pictures a few times you know exactly how they go, and then what's the good? This is a fault which belongs to many very expensive toys. These blocks had six pictures—Windsor Castle with the Royal Standard hoisted; ducks in a pond, with a very handsome green and blue drake; Rebecca at the well; a snowball fight—but none of the boys knew how to chuck a snowball; the Harvest Home; and the Death of Nelson.

These did not go far, as I said. There are six times as few blocks as there are pictures, because every block has six sides. If you don't understand this it shows they don't teach arithmetic at your school, or else that you don't do your home lessons.

But the best of a library is the books. Rosamund and Fabian made up with books. They got Shakespeare in fourteen volumes, and Rollin's "Ancient History," and Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," and "The Beauties of Literature" in fifty-six fat little volumes, and they built not only a castle, but a town—and a big town—that presently towered high above them on the top of the bureau.

"It's almost big enough to get into," said Fabian, "if we had some steps." So they made steps with the "British Essayists," the "Spectator," and the "Rambler," and the "Observer," and the "Tatler"; and when the steps were done they walked up them.

You may think that they could not have walked up these steps and into a town they had built themselves, but I assure you people have often done it, and anyway this is a true story. They had made a lovely gateway with two fat volumes of Macaulay and Milton's poetical works on top, and as they went through it they felt all the feelings which people have to feel when they are tourists and see really fine architecture. (Architecture means buildings, but it is a grander word, as you see.)

Rosamund and Fabian simply walked up the steps into the town they had built. Whether they got larger or the town got smaller, I do not pretend to

say. When they had gone under the great gateway they found that they were in a street which they could not remember building. But they were not disagreeable about it, and they said it was a very nice street all the same.

There was a large square in the middle of the town, with seats, and there they sat down, in the town they had made, and wondered how they could have been so clever as to build it. Then they went to the walls of the town—high, strong walls built of the Encyclopedia and the Biographical Dictionary—and far away over the brown plain of the carpet they saw a great thing like a square mountain. It was very shiny. And as they looked at it a great slice of it pushed itself out, and Fabian saw the brass handles shine, and he said:

“Why, Rom, that’s the bureau.”

“It’s larger than I want it to be,” said Rosamund, who was a little frightened. And indeed it did seem to be an extra size, for it was higher than the town.

The drawer of the great mountain bureau opened slowly, and the children could see something moving inside; then they saw the glass lid of one of the boxes go slowly up till it stood on end and looked like one side of the Crystal Palace, it was so large—and inside the box they saw something moving. The shavings and tissue-paper and the cotton-wool heaved and tossed like a sea when it is rough and you wish you had not come for a sail. And then from among the heaving whiteness came out a blue soldier, and another and another. They let themselves down from the drawer with ropes of shavings, and when they were all out there were fifty of them—foot soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets, as well as a thin captain on a horse and a sergeant and a drummer.

The drummer beat his drum and the whole company formed fours and marched straight for the town. They seemed to be quite full-size soldiers—indeed, *extra* large.

The children were very frightened. They left the walls and ran up and down the streets of the town trying to find a place to hide.

“Oh, there’s our very own house,” cried Rosamund at last; “we shall be safe there.” She was surprised as well as pleased to find their own house

inside the town they had built.

So they ran in, and into the library, and there was the bureau and the castle they had built, and it was all small and quite the proper size. But when they looked out of the window it was not their own street, but the one they had built; they could see two volumes of the “Beauties of Literature” and the head of Rebecca in the house opposite, and down the street was the Mausoleum they had built after the pattern given in the red and yellow book that goes with the All-Wool bricks. It was all very confusing.

Suddenly, as they stood looking out of the windows, they heard a shouting, and there were the blue soldiers coming along the street by twos, and when the Captain got opposite their house he called out—

“Fabian! Rosamund! come down!”

And they had to, for they were very much frightened.

Then the Captain said—

“We have taken this town, and you are our prisoners. Do not attempt to escape, or I don’t know what will happen to you.”

The children explained that they had built the town, so they thought it was theirs; but the captain said very politely—

“That doesn’t follow at all. It’s our town now. And I want provisions for my soldiers.”

“We haven’t any,” said Fabian, but Rosamund nudged him, and said, “Won’t the soldiers be very fierce if they are hungry?”

The Blue Captain heard her, and said—

“You are quite right, little girl. If you have any food, produce it. It will be a generous act, and may stop any unpleasantness. My soldiers *are* very fierce. Besides,” he added in a lower tone, speaking behind his hand, “you need only feed the soldiers in the usual way.”

When the children heard this their minds were made up.

“If you do not mind waiting a minute,” said Fabian, politely, “I will bring down any little things I can find.”

Then he took his tongs, and Rosamund took the poker, and they opened the drawer where the raisins and figs and dried fruits were—for everything in the library in the town was just the same as in the library at home—and they carried them out into the big square where the Captain had drawn up his blue regiment. And here the soldiers were fed. I suppose you know how tin soldiers are fed? But children learn so little at school nowadays that I daresay you don’t, so I will tell you. You just put a bit of the fig or raisin, or whatever it is, on the soldier’s tin bayonet—or his sword, if he is a cavalry man—and you let it stay on till you are tired of playing at giving the soldiers rations, and then of course *you eat it for him*. This was the way in which Fabian and Rosamund fed the starving blue soldiers. But when they had done so, the soldiers were as hungry as ever. Which only shows that soldiers are an ungrateful lot, and it is idle to try and make their lives better and brighter.

So then the Blue Captain, who had not had anything, even on the point of his sword, said—

“More—more, my gallant men are fainting for lack of food.”

So there was nothing for it but to bring out the candied fruits, and to feed the soldiers with them. So Fabian and Rosamund stuck bits of candied apricot and fig and pear and cherry and beetroot on the tops of the soldiers’ bayonets, and when every soldier had a piece they put a fat candied cherry on the officer’s sword. Then the children knew the soldiers would be quiet for a few minutes, and they ran back into their own house and into the library to talk to each other about what they had better do, for they both felt that the blue soldiers were a very hard-hearted set of men.

“They might shut us up in the dungeons,” said Rosamund, “and then Mother might lock us in, when she shut up the lid of the bureau, and we should starve to death.”

For they could not be sure exactly what size they were, or which library their Mother would come back to when she had given away all the flannel petticoats and things.

The dungeons were the pigeon-holes of the bureau, and the doors of them were the little “Beauties of Literature”—very heavy doors they were too.

You see the curious thing was that the children had built a town and got into it, and in it they had found their own house with the very town they had built—or one exactly like it—still on the library floor.

“I think it’s all nonsense,” said Rosamund. But when they looked out of the window there was the house with Windsor Castle and the head of Rebecca just opposite.

“If we could only find Mother,” she said; but they knew without looking that Mother was not in the house that they were in then.

“I wish we had that mouse that looked like clockwork—and the donkey, and the other box of soldiers—perhaps they are red ones, and they would fight the blue and lick them—because red-coats are English and they always win,” said Fabian.

And then Rosamund said—

“Oh, Fabe, I believe we could go into *this* town, too, if we tried! Let us put all the things in, and then try!”

So they went to the bureau drawer, and Rosamund got out the other box of soldiers and the mouse—it *was* a clockwork one—and the donkey with panniers, and put them in the town, while Fabian ate up a few odd raisins that had dropped on the floor.

When all the soldiers (they *were* red) were arranged on the ramparts of the little town, Fabian said—

“I am thinking of all the raisins and things on the soldiers’ bayonets outside. It seems a pity not to eat the things for them.”

But Rosamund said—

“No, no; let’s get into this town, and perhaps we shall be safe from the blue soldiers. Oh, Fabe, never mind the raisins!”

But Fabian said, “I don’t want you to come if you’re frightened. I’ll go alone. Who’s afraid?”

So then of course Rosamund said she would come with him, so they went out and ate the things for the soldiers, leaving the Captain’s cherry for the last. And when that was eaten they ran as hard as they could back to their house and into the library, where the town was on the floor, with the little red soldiers on the ramparts.

“I’m sure we can get into this town,” cried Fabian, and sure enough they did, just as they had done into the first one. Whether they got smaller or the town got larger I leave you to decide. And it was exactly the same sort of town as the other. So now they were in a town built in a library in a house in a town built in a library in a house in a town called London—and the town they were in now had red soldiers in it and they felt quite safe, and the Union Jack was stuck up over the gateway. It was a stiff little flag they had found with some others in the bureau drawer; it was meant to be stuck in the Christmas pudding, but they had stuck it between two blocks and put it over the gate of their town. They walked about this town and found their own house, just as before, and went in, and there was the toy town on the floor; and you will see that they might have walked into that town also, but they saw that it was no good, and that they couldn’t get out that way, but would only get deeper and deeper into a nest of towns in libraries in houses in towns in libraries in houses in towns in ... and so on for always—something like Chinese puzzle-boxes multiplied by millions and millions for ever and ever. And they did not like even to think of this, because of course they would be getting further and further from home every time. And when Fabian explained all this to Rosamund she said he made her head ache, and she began to cry.

Then Fabian thumped her on the back and told her not to be a little silly, for he was a very kind brother. And he said—

“Come out and let’s see if the soldiers can tell us what to do.”

So they went out; but the red soldiers said they knew nothing but drill, and even the Red Captain said he really couldn’t advise. Then they met the clockwork mouse. He was big like an elephant, and the donkey with panniers was as big as a mastodon or a megatherium. (If they teach you

anything at school of course they have taught you all about the megatherium and the mastodon.)

The Mouse kindly stopped to speak to the children, and Rosamund burst into tears again and said she wanted to go home.

The great Mouse looked down at her and said—

“I am sorry for *you*, but your brother is the kind of child that overwinds clockwork mice the very first day he has them. I prefer to stay this size.”

Then Fabian said: “On my honour, I won’t. If we get back home I’ll give you to Rosamund. That is, supposing I get you for one of my Christmas presents.”

The donkey with panniers said—

“And you won’t put coals in my panniers or unglue my feet from my green grass-plot because I look more natural without wheels?”

“I give you my word,” said Fabian, “I wouldn’t think of such a thing.”

“Very well,” said the Mouse, “then I will tell you. It is a great secret, but there is only one way to get out of this kind of town. You—I hardly know how to explain—you—you just *walk out of the gate*, you know.”

“Dear me,” said Rosamund; “I never thought of that!”

So they all went to the gate of the town and walked out, and there they were in the library again. But when they looked out of the window the All-Wool Mausoleum was still to be seen, and the terrible blue soldiers.

“What are we to do now?” asked Rosamund; but the clockwork mouse and the donkey with panniers were their proper size again now (or else the children had got bigger. It is no use asking me which, for I do not know), and so of course they could not speak.

“We must walk out of this town as we did out of the other,” said Fabian.

“Yes,” Rosamund said; “only this town is full of blue soldiers and I am afraid of them. Don’t you think it would do if we *ran* out?”

So out they ran and down the steps that were made of the “Spectator” and the “Rambler” and the “Tatler” and the “Observer.” And directly they stood on the brown library carpet they ran to the window and looked out, and they saw—instead of the building with Windsor Castle and Rebecca’s head in it, and the All-Wool Mausoleum—they saw their own road with the trees without any leaves and the man was just going along lighting the lamps with the stick that the gas-light pops out of, like a bird, to roost in the glass cage at the top of the lamp-post. So they knew that they were safe at home again.

And as they stood looking out they heard the library door open, and Mother’s voice saying—

“What a dreadful muddle! And what have you done with the raisins and the candied fruits?” And her voice was very grave indeed.

Now you will see that it was quite impossible for Fabian and Rosamund to explain to their mother what they had done with the raisins and things, and how they had been in a town in a library in a house in a town they had built in their own library with the books and the bricks and the pretty picture blocks kind Uncle Thomas gave them. Because they were much younger than I am, and even I have found it rather hard to explain.

So Rosamund said, “Oh, Mother, my head does ache so,” and began to cry. And Fabian said nothing, but he, also, began to cry.

And Mother said, “I don’t wonder your head aches, after all those sweet things.” And she looked as if she would like to cry too.

“I don’t know what Daddy will say,” said Mother, and then she gave them each a nasty powder and put them both to bed.

“I wonder what he *will* say,” said Fabian just before he went to sleep.

“*I* don’t know,” said Rosamund, and, strange to say, they don’t know to this hour what Daddy said. Because next day they both had measles, and when they got better every one had forgotten about what had happened on Christmas Eve. And Fabian and Rosamund had forgotten just as much as everybody else. So I should never have heard of it but for the clockwork mouse. It was he who told me the story, just as the children told it to him in

the town in the library in the house in the town they built in their own library with the books and the bricks and the pretty picture blocks which were given to them by kind Uncle Thomas. And if you do not believe the story it is not my fault: I believe every word the mouse said, for I know the good character of that clockwork mouse, and I know it could not tell an untruth even if it tried.

THE PLUSH USURPER

THERE was a knock at the King's study door. The King looked up from his plans for the new municipal washhouses and sighed; for that was the twenty-seventh knock that had come to his door since breakfast.

"Come in," said the King, wearily.

And the Lord Chief Good-doer came in. He wore a white gown and carried a white wand. If you had been there you would have noticed how clean the King's study looked. All the books were bound in white vellum, and the floor was covered with white matting, and the window curtains were of white silk. Of course, it would not be right for every one to have such things, even if we were all kings because it would make such a lot of work for the servants. But this king, whose name was Alban, had an excellent housekeeper. She did all the cooking and cleaned everything by white magic, which is better even than *nettoyage-à-sec* (if you know what that is), and only took the good lady five minutes every morning.

"I am extremely sorry to disturb your Majesty," said the Lord Chief Good-doer, "but your Majesty's long-lost brother Negretti has called in from the Golden Indies, and he says he can't stay more than half an hour."

The King jumped up, knocking over the white wood table where the White Books were. (We call them Blue Books in England, but the insides are just as dull whatever colour you put outside.)

"My dear brother! I haven't seen him since we were boys together," he cried, and ran out to meet him, tucking up his royal white velvet robes to run the quicker down the cool marble corridors.

At the front door of the Palace was the King's brother just getting off his elephant. He was a brown and yellow brother, withered and shrivelled like a very old apple, and dressed in a suite of plush of a bright orange, sown thick with emeralds. All the white marble terrace in front of the Palace was crowded with the retinue of the new arrival. Slaves of all colours—black,

brown, yellow, and cream colour, dressed in all sorts of bright hues, scarlet and blue and purple and orange, with rubies and sapphires and amethysts and topazes sewn thickly on them, so that the eye could hardly bear the glow and glitter of them as they shone in the sunlight on the terrace.

“Welcome, welcome!” King Alban cried, and kissed his brother on both cheeks, as is the fashion in Albanatolia and in many other civilised lands. Then, still holding him by both hands, he led him into the Palace. The jewelled gorgeous retinue followed him in, and the head parlour-maid shut the front door and put the chain up, because she knew it to be more than possible that a few odd rubies and sapphires and things would drop off the retinue on to the floor, and she thought any such little odds and ends might as well go into her dust-pan, when she swept up after lunch, as into the pockets of any poor people who might look in during the afternoon to ask the King’s advice, as they were fond of doing. This was the beginning of the trouble that was wrought by the coming of the King’s brother. Before this every door stood unfastened all day long, because every one was contented, and therefore honest.

King Alban entertained his brother royally for seven days in the good old fashion, and then gave him a palace of his own to live in. The Palace was of white marble, like most of the buildings in Albanatolia, but the King’s brother had it painted red all over without a moment’s delay. And then he began to give parties and to have processions and to scatter money among the crowd, and every day the people loved him more. He was a loud, jolly, joking sort of man, with a black beard, and he always wore clothes of plush, a material hitherto unknown; and he always blazed with jewels, and he had a circus set up at his own expense in the field at the back of his Palace; and he introduced horse-racing and animated photographs—all highly coloured—and thus became extraordinarily popular: so much so that the people presently began to forget all the good that King Alban had done for them, and to wish secretly that the kingdom had happened to have a bright, cheerful king like Prince Negretti.

For King Alban had worked so hard for his people’s good that he had not had time to be amusing. He had never had processions and circuses, preferring rather small tea-parties with the Lord Chief Good-doer, the Commissioner of Public Health, and a few chosen spirits from the

Education Department, and loving best of all to wander alone, dreaming, among the blossoming orchards or in the meadows beyond the river, where the white jonquils grew, or in the lanes between the pearly may-bushes, or in the terraced garden of his Palace, where the white roses hung in heavy-scented clusters, and the white peacocks spread their tails upon the marble balustrades. And wherever he went he thought of the people's good, and devised new ways of making them comfortable. Everything was beautifully managed. Every one had enough to wear and enough to eat, and enough to do, which is very important; but they had not enough to play at, and this was what made them ready to lend long and discontented ears to the whispers of the King's brother.

King welcoming Negretti
"WELCOME! WELCOME!"

Now Negretti was a Magician, and his was the black or coloured magic which won't wash clothes. He was always messing about with acids and alkalis, and sulphites and bicarbonates, and retorts and furnaces, and test-tubes, and pestles and mortars, and the like; and whenever he happened to make a nice colour by mixing two or more of these things together, he always put it in a bottle and stuck it up in one of the Palace windows, so that at night his windows were brighter than any chemist's and druggist's in any street, and the people said it was as good as fireworks. The King's palace windows only sent out a soft white light like moonlight, and this was now considered very tame.

It was the Magician's habit to wander about the town stirring up discontent as easily as if it had been one of his chemical messes; and though he was so well known among the people he was never recognised, because he always took care to disguise himself as a respectable person, and the disguise was quite impenetrable. (I hope you know what that is?)

One night he sat disguised at the King's Head—the finest of the municipal alehouses—drinking dog's-nose out of a pewter-pot, and the grumbling of the people was music in his wicked ears.

"Alban is not my sort of king," said the blacksmith.

“I’d make a better king out of a penn’orth of putty any day of the week,” said the painter.

“What’s the good of a king if you never see him?” said the landlady.

“No processions, no flags, no gilt coaches, no rubies and diamonds and sapphires, no royal robes of purple and gold—such as a loyal country has a right to expect on its sovereign’s back! Only that old white thing,” said the barmaid.

“No better than a velvet nightgown,” said the landlady.

“I like a bit of colour, I do,” said the painter. “Graining I don’t ask for, for he’s not had the education to know its beauty; but a good warm maroon, or a royal blue, now! But, no; it’s white, white, white, till I’m sick of it. And us all wearing white by law, and washing done free, by white magic, at the Palace, on Mondays from 10 to 4. And no one to have more than a quart of beer of an evening! I tell you what it is, my boys, we’re miserable, degraded slaves; that’s what we are!”

“If we must have a king,” said the blacksmith, “why not good old Negretti? He’s something like a king, he is! Ah! if he only knew how our free hearts beat with him, he’d be sitting on the throne to-morrow.”

Then Negretti threw off his disguise—the pewter with the municipal arms on it rolled on the sanded floor, and spilt what was left of the dog’s-nose on to the disguise—and the Magician stood before them, pale but firm, his dark lantern in his hand. It was a magic lantern, of course.

“Down-trodden slaves!” he cried, “poor benighted, oppressed people! Follow me! Let us dethrone a king who seeks to mask tyranny with hypocritical public kitchens, and cloaks his infamous autocracy with free washing by white magic on a Monday! To the Palace, to the Palace!”

And they all finished up their beer and followed him, and half the town beside joined the throng as it pressed through the streets towards the Eastern gate, beyond which was the King’s Palace.

Now while the Magician was drinking his dog’s-nose, disguised as a respectable person, the King in his white robes was walking under the

boughs of the white-blossomed pear-trees, for it was spring, and the moon was at the full. And presently, coming along over the dewy grey grass of the orchard, he saw a figure in white, and when it came close to him he saw that it was a lady more fair than the fair stars of that fair night.

“And who are you?” said the King.

Negretto telling people at table to follow him
“POOR BENIGHTED, OPPRESSED PEOPLE, FOLLOW ME!”

“I am a poor Princess seeking my fortune,” said she.

“You will rest under my roof to-night,” said the King, and led her through the long sweet grass under the blossoming boughs to the Palace garden. When they came to the terrace the Princess loosed a lantern from her girdle, set it on the stone balustrade close by where one of the white peacocks perched in fluffy feathery slumber, kindled it, and threw open the horn door. A flood of light streamed out, bright as spring sunshine, and fell full upon her, and then the King saw that her gown was not white, as it had seemed in the moonlight, but was the colour of yellow gold, and her hair was red gold, and her eyes were of gold and grey mingled. Then for the first time in all his life the King thought of himself and of his own happiness, and he caught her hands and said—

“Nothing will ever again content me, not even doing good to my people, if I must part from you. Will you stay and be my Queen?”

The Princess said, “I am seeking my fortune. Do you think you are it?”

“I do not know, my dear,” said the King, “whether I am your fortune, but I know well enough that *you* are *mine*!”

Then the Princess clapped her hands and said, “That is the right answer! I have travelled half round the world to hear it; and will you love me always?”

“Always, my Queen,” said he, “exactly the same as you will love me. We are not of the race that changes heart.”

So then they kissed each other as lovers should, and wandered along the yew-tree avenue deep in lovers’ talk, and never even heard the crowd that

the Magician had brought to the front door. So when the crowd found that the Palace door was locked for the night it went home again, but it came back in the morning with trumpets and banners and scraps of coloured stuff tied over its white clothing, and the King went out to meet it.

When the crowd saw him every one began to shout: “Down with Alban!” “Down with the White King!” “Free Beer!” “No more washing!” and things like that.

Then the King stood forth and said—

“What have I done but seek for your good? When, till now, have I thought of my own happiness? Who has stirred you up to these ill thoughts of me? My people, my own beloved people, have my ears ever been closed to your complaints? Have you wrongs? Tell me, and I will right them. Have you sorrows? Make them known and let me soothe them. Do you not know that your King is your servant, and lives but to do you good?”

And the crowd grumbled and muttered, and one voice cried—

“We don’t want to be done good to. We want to enjoy ourselves.”

“I did not know,” said the King, gently. “But now you have spoken I will at once appoint a Minister of Public Enjoyment, and——”

The Magician was watching the crowd, and he saw how the sight of the King’s good face and the sound of his good voice were working on their hearts that had once loved him. Now Negretti sprang forward. “One word, brother!” he cried, and led the King into the shadow of a close-clipped yew-tree walk. The moment they were hidden he caught his brother’s arm and whispered a wicked spell: and the first words of it were in Persian, and the next in Greek, and after that came words in Arabic and Spanish, and the speech of the county of Essex, and the last words of all were “be changed to a stone.”

And so strong was the spell that the King was turned to a stone that very minute—a great white stone—and fell under the yew hedge, and lay there.

Then the Magician said “Ha, ha!” and, after waiting so long as he deemed prudent, he went back to the people, and said—

“I regret to inform you that your King has proved quite unreliable as a man of business. When I urged him to sign a written agreement to keep you always in a good humour he refused, and then he remembered an urgent appointment in Nova Scotia; and he has gone, and taken most of the crown treasure with him. But, do not despair, I will be your King, and I have an income quite sufficient to keep up a small establishment of my own. And my golden argosies are now on the way from the Indies, bearing all manner of precious things, and bales of plush are on their way from Yorkshire. So now I am King.”

The people believed him, for they had never known a King who spoke anything but the truth. So they shouted, “Long live the King!” and the matter was settled. That very day Negretti had the Palace painted magenta, and covered all the window-sashes and mantelpieces with gold paint, and stuck embossed coloured scraps on them.

Then he went out into the garden to get a good look at his magenta Palace from the outside, and as he went along the clipped-yew walk there was the Princess Perihelia weeping over the white stone.

“What are you crying for?” he asked.

“I’m crying for the White King,” said she.

“And why do you cry *here*?” said the Magician.

“I don’t know,” said the poor Princess, and she looked so beautiful that the Magician went straight into the Palace and told the Prime Tailor to sew new rubies all over his new purple plush suit because he was going a-courting.

The very next day Negretti put on the purple plush suit as well as the Royal Crown, and went to the wing of the Palace which the White King had set apart for the Princess Perihelia to live in. Alban’s crown was made of silver and pearls and moonstones, and the new King had ordered a new crown, all gold, and stuck as full of rubies and emeralds and sapphires as a really good Christmas cake is of plums. (I do not mean the cake they call “good, wholesome school cake,” but the kind they have at home when there is a party.) He took all his many-coloured retinue with him, and they waited on the terrace while the Magician knocked at the door.

“Come in,” said the Princess.

“I’ve come to marry you,” said the Magician, coming to the point at once; for he had arranged to have a procession that afternoon, and he was a little pressed for time.

But Perihelia said, “No, thank you.”

The Magician could hardly believe his ears. “But you’ll be Queen of the land,” said he, “and that’s what you’d have been if you’d married my brother, and, I suppose, what you wanted to be.”

“O no, it isn’t,” said she.

“Well, what did you want?” said he.

“I wanted to be the White King’s wife,” said she.

“It’s the same thing,” he said.

But she said: “No, it isn’t, not a bit.” And it was in vain that he showed her his best plush suit and the plush suits of his retainers; she simply wouldn’t look at them, nor at the precious stones either; so at last he went off to his Palace to make more rubies and precious stones and things like that, and she went off to cry over the white stone.

Now a lot of tell-tale-tits had built their nests above the Palace, and some of them flew off and told the Magician how Perihelia was always crying in the yew avenue over the white stone. So he said to his slaves: “Get a hand-cart, and carry the thing on to the middle of the bridge and drop it into the river.” So they did, and the stone stuck, end-up, in the mud; and when the golden argosies of the Magician came up the river, bearing peacocks and apes and turquoises, every single galley split on that stone, and the whole treasure went to the bottom; all but the peacocks, and they flew away into the country of a neighbouring King, who thought every one should be useful and not ornamental; so he cut off the peacocks tails, and clipped their wings, and tried to teach them to lay turkey’s eggs. But it is very difficult to get a peacock to do anything useful.

So then the Magician set a lot of people dredging for the lost treasure; and, among other things, they fished up some poor dead apes and the big

white stone, and as the stone seemed to have been rather in the way in the bed of the river, they carted it away to the fields behind the town, where the white jonquils grew, and dumped it down there, and left it among the long grass.

And the Princess could not come and cry over it there because she did not know where it was, and besides she was very busy; for, after she had refused to marry him, the Magician said, "Very well, then, you can just do the free washing;" for the royal housekeeper had given five minutes' notice, and left at the end of it, as soon as the new King had the Palace painted magenta, and no one else knew how to do washing by white magic, and though the people had sneered at it in the White King's time they stood out for it now, and said free washing was what they had always been accustomed to. Poor Perihelia did not know the white magic; but she washed by the Sunlight Magic, and everything she sent home from the wash was pinky or pearly or greeny, like the little clouds in a May dawn. The people were pleased, but not the Magician.

"I like a colour to *be* a colour," he said. "I hate your half measures."

He was beginning to remodel the kingdom to his own fancy. Instead of a Lord Chief Good-doer he had a Lord Chief Magician, and instead of the Education Department he had a Permanent Committee of Black and Coloured Magic, and he shut up the free washhouses. "Who wants to wash?" said he, and he ordered a free distribution of nasty medicine instead; and altogether he was really beginning to enjoy himself when another tell-tale-tit came fluttering in at the window of his laboratory, and, perching on the top of a crucible, told him of a Rumour. The Rumour had been running about the town like a mad thing, and wherever it ran it left its tail behind it. Rumour, as you know, is a beast with many tales; and now everybody knew that the white stone had moved in the night and had come rolling up to the gate of the town.

"Whatever shall we do?" said the Lord Chief Magician, who was pounding up nasty things in the mortar ready for the free distribution of medicine next day.

"Smash it," said Negretti. "I'll take a turn at the medicine while you go and see the thing done."

So the Lord Chief Magician called together the Permanent Committee of Black and Coloured Magic and sent them to break the stone. And when they began to hit it with their hammers and picks seventeen sharp splinters of white stone flew off, and each splinter hit a member of the Committee in the eye and killed him. There were exactly seventeen members, as it happened. So then the Lord Chief Magician shut the town gates and ran home and hid under the bed.

And the people of the town were very much interested in the stone that had rolled by itself and had killed seventeen members of the Committee, and they made little parties and picnics all day long, taking their children to look at the stone and carrying sandwiches with them and bottles of beer.

The Magician was very angry.

“Such rubbish I never heard of,” said he when the tell-tale-tit alighted on the window-sill and told him of it. “If they want to look at anything, why can’t they come and look at *me*? I’m sure I’m coloured enough!”

That night the stone rose up in the thickest of the black dark, when no one at all is out of doors, except the Police—and not always him—and it smashed through the town gate and came rolling right up into the Square and lay there.

The tell-tale-tit awoke the Magician in the morning by singing the news sharply in his ear, and he went out to see. There was a great crowd in the Square, and they all cried out—

“It is a magic stone. It will bring us luck. Build it into the royal Palace.”

“I might do worse,” thought Negretti. “If good Roman cement and a double coat of magenta paint doesn’t keep it quiet nothing will.”

So he gave orders, and the stone was carted to the Palace, and built into the wall over the great gate; and while they were gone to fetch the red paint to cover up the stone and the mortar the Lord Chief Magician came out from under his bed, and went sneaking up to the Palace and in at the gate, and the stone fell on him and smashed him quite flat.

Then Perihelia came running out, and she washed the mortar off the white stone by her Sunlight Magic; and when the Magician come out she said: "Let it lie here to-night, and to-morrow, if you will let me go, I will take it away to my own kingdom, so that it shall never trouble you again."

Negretti agreed, because he did not know what else to do, and he was beginning to despair of the Princess ever marrying him, because he had now asked her to do so every day for a month, and always with more display of plush and jewels, and she said "No" more decidedly, and even crossly, every time. So he began to lose heart.

That night, just when the moon was waning, and before morning broke, Princess Perihelia slipped down the Palace stairs and into the garden to look once more on the place where the White King had promised to love her always.

And when she came to that same place there was the white stone lying under the shadow of the white rose bushes, and pearly rose leaves had fallen all over it, and were falling still, like tears.

Perihelia knelt down beside the stone and put her arms round it, and said

"Poor stone, dear stone, what is it that troubles you so that you cannot rest? If I only knew, I might help you with my Sunlight Magic. Why are you so troubled, and why do I pity you so? Oh, if my White King were here he would understand and help you! But I can do nothing!"

With that she began to weep over the stone, calling on the White King to come back to her. And all the while she was talking and weeping the moon was waning and the light in the East grew pearlier and prettier minute by minute. And as she wept and clasped the stone she presently saw in the glowing light that the stone was changing in her arms. Like white sands falling in an hour-glass, the white stone fell away and fell away until the sun looked through the white rose bushes and saw Perihelia clasp the living form of the White King in her loving arms.

The sun's was not the only eye which saw that meeting. The Magician had had a bad night, and he came out early, curious to see whether the stone had moved again. His curiosity was gratified.

When the White King saw his treacherous brother his tongue was loosed—hitherto kisses had been speech enough for him—and he spoke the words which he found in his mouth. And they were, naturally enough, the last words that had gone in at his ears, and the words were first Persian and then Greek, and then Arabic and Spanish, and the language of foreigners from Essex; and the words he wound up with were, “be changed into a stone.”

But the wicked spell that had turned King Alban into a stone had grown weaker by keeping (as even '20 port did when it was kept too long), and it had no longer power to do what it ought to have done. It could not turn the wicked Magician into a stone, as I am sure you would wish it to have done; it was only strong enough to turn him into a wooden post.

• • • • •

I do not wish to have to mention such an unpleasant character as Negretti again, so I will tell you at once the end of him. He remained a post for ever and ever, and later on, when King Alban had begun to do things for his people's good again, he thought it a pity to waste even a post, for he was ever a careful King. So he had it made into a pump, and the water from it was bitter and nasty, like the medicine the Magician used to give the people; and it was very good for children, and gave them a nice bright colour in their cheeks. Take care you do not grow pale, or you may have to drink the water out of that pump. It is now at Harrogate, or Epsom, or Bath, or somewhere, and you might quite easily be taken there and made to drink that unpleasant water. The first persons who had to drink it were the Magician's retinue. The King thought it would be good for them, and they were very grateful; but the next night they stole the State barge, and went home by sea to their own country.

Among his other improvements, the King started municipal omnibuses, which were white and gold. But the pump being near the place where the omnibuses changed horses the conductors used to take the bitter water to wash the omnibuses with, and gradually they became scarlet and blue and green and violet, just as you see them to-day. So now you know the reason of the colour of omnibuses. And this is the end of the Magician's part of the story.

• • • • •

When the Magician had been turned into a post, the King said—

“I’m very sorry;” but the Princess said—

“Dear, he deserved it. And being a post is not painful. Let us never think of him again. I have learned many things since I came here. I have something to break to you. Do you think you can bear it?”

“I can bear anything now,” said he, holding her in his arms, and kissing her again, because she was so very dear.

“Well,” said Perihelia, “I am Princess of the Sun, and if I marry you, my own dear King, I shan’t be able to help colouring your pretty white kingdom a little. Just soft sweet colours, dear, and not an inch of plush. We’ll make a law against *that* the very first thing. And you shall go on teaching your people to be good, and I’ll try to teach them to be happy. Do you think I can?”

The White King smiled. “You’ve taught *me*,” he said; “but now, before we do anything for the people, let’s go and get married, and we can begin to make the new laws directly we’ve finished breakfast. We shall just have time to be married if we go off to church at once.”

So they went off, and woke up the Archbishop, and were married, and the Archbishop came home with them to breakfast, and afterwards they began to make laws as hard as they could.

The first law was “There is to be no Plush at all in this kingdom.” And now Albanatolia is the most beautiful country in the world, all soft sweet colours and clear pearly white; and the Queen Perihelia has taught the people how to be happy, so the King has very little work to do, for they are good almost without his interfering at all. It is a lovely country. I hope you will go there some day. I went there once but they would not let me stay because I had a black coat on, and gaiters; and the sight of these clothes made the people so unhappy that the Queen asked me as a private and personal favour to go away, and never to come back unless I could come dressed in something like the colours of the clouds at dawn. I have never

been able to manage this, and, anyway, I don't suppose I could find the way there now. But, if you could get the proper dress, perhaps you could?

THE END

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Transcriber's Note:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

Page 88, “an” changed to “ran” (ran up a signal-box)

Page 227, “hersel” changed to “herself” (fairy drew herself up)

Page 258, “or” changed to “for” (for lack of food)

Page 258, “brng” changed to “bring” (but to bring out)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NINE UNLIKELY TALES ***

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