

PRINCE VALCE

BY
ELEANOR PUTNAM
AND
CARLO BATES

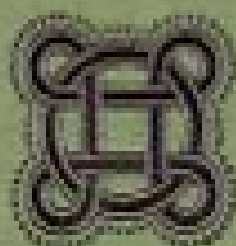


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The Project Gutenberg eBook of Prince Vance: The Story of a Prince with a Court in His Box

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THE STORY OF A PRINCE WITH A COURT IN HIS BOX ***

PRINCE VANCE

Prince Vance

**The Story of a Prince with a Court in his
Box**

BY

ELEANOR PUTNAM AND ARLO BATES

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK MYRICK

BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS
1888

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TO THE BOY ORIC

*Dear son, this twisted, tangled web of whims
For you was woven while you scarcely knew
The simplest speech men use; but infant limbs,
That round and smooth in dimpled fairness grew,
Waved for all word in a babe's perfect glee,*

So wondrous sweet to see.

*It is not stranger than this world must seem
To one who its vagaries first does scan;
It is less weird than the enchanted dream
Which life may change to ere you be a man.
Such as it is, take it for this alone,—
That it is all your own.*

*Those who together wrought its colors gay,
And its fantastic warp and woof entwined,
May not again for you in work or play
Together labor. Yet the loving mind
In which they then were one will still be one
Till life and sense be done.*

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PRINCE VANCE.

I.

I

It was certainly not strange that Prince Vance was so stupefied with astonishment that he sat for a full half-hour foolishly staring before him, without an effort to move a muscle or to stir from his seat. Indeed, it is probable that any other prince in the same circumstances would have been equally struck dumb with amazement,—as any one may see who will attend while I go back to the beginning, and relate what had happened.

By the beginning is meant the birth of Prince Vance, when the powerful fairy Copetta had been chosen his godmother, since which time she certainly had not devoted herself to being agreeable to the Prince. She had insisted, for instance, that her godson should pay attention to his lessons; that he should show respect to his tutors; and, what was most outrageous of all, that he, Prince Vance, only son of his parents and sole heir to the kingdom, should learn to obey. She had coolly informed her godson, moreover, that if he did not obey her willingly, it would certainly be the worse for him; since learn he must, by harsh means, if no others would move him.

All this seemed to Vance a most unpleasant and unreasonable sort of talk, and, as may be imagined, it did not increase his love for his godmother. So things had gone on from bad to worse between them until Vance was a fine, lusty lad beginning his teens, when one day the Blue Wizard came to court.

Vance had been having a remarkably unpleasant scene with his godmother that morning. She had come popping into the school-room, in a disagreeable way she had of appearing when she was least expected; and, of course, nothing would do but she must come at the exact moment when the Prince was engaged in boxing his tutor's ears (without boxing-gloves), because the poor old man wanted him to learn the boundaries of what would some day be his own kingdom.

"You shall see the boundaries by travelling over them all on foot," the fairy had said crossly. "You are growing up idle, selfish, and disobedient; a shame to

your godmother and a disgrace to your family. You will be associating with the Blue Wizard next, I dare say!"

"Yes, so I will," the Prince answered stubbornly; for though he really had never heard of the Blue Wizard before, he would have said anything just then to vex his godmother,— "so I will. I should like to see him. I really wish he would come this very day!"

"As for me, you evil boy!" Copetta said, more angrily yet, striking her cane sharply upon the ground, "you shall want me badly enough before you find me, I promise you; and sorrow shall have made you wiser before you look upon my face again."

"Not that I shall miss you much, with your scoldings and fault-findings!" replied the saucy Prince; and as she vanished before his eyes, according to her startling custom, he began shying his books at the head of his tutor, to the great discomfort of that unhappy man, who thought that his lot in life was indeed a sad one, and wished himself a wood-cutter in the royal forest, or indeed anything rather than what he was.

When his pile of books was quite gone, and the blackboard erasers, the bits of crayon, and the pointer had been thrown after them, the Prince put his hands in his pockets and lounged to the window, whistling a tune he had caught from a hand-organ. His twelve younger sisters were just coming into the courtyard, two by two, returning from taking their morning airing with their governesses. The Princesses were quite as good as the Prince was bad, and there could certainly have been no prettier sight than that of the twelve royal little girls walking along so properly and primly. Each had a green velvet pelisse, a neat Leghorn bonnet, and a green fringed parasol; each wore nice buff mitts and a good-tempered smile, and each had a complexion like pink and white ice-cream, and eyes like pretty blue beads. It was therefore very naughty indeed of Prince Vance to shout "Boh!" so loudly that each Princess started and hopped quite one foot from the ground, and even the governesses put their hands to their hearts. This, however, gave much joy to the Prince; and after his sisters had disappeared he stood by the window still whistling, with his hands in his pockets and a wicked grin on his face.

"Your Royal Highness," began the tutor, meekly, "your Highness really must not put your Highness's hands in your Highness's trousers pockets, and whistle

that dreadful tune. If her Royal Highness the Queen should hear you, she would certainly have me beheaded."

"Why should I care for that?" asked the Prince, carelessly; and just at that moment he caught sight of the Blue Wizard himself coming into the court below.

II

W

Whatever else might be said of the Blue Wizard, nobody would ever think of calling him a beauty. His nose and his chin were long and pointed, his eyebrows big and bushy, his teeth sharp and protruding from his mouth; and everything about him—skin, hair, teeth, and dress—was as blue as a sky on a June afternoon when not a cloud is to be seen. He had, too, a way of perking his head about, which was most unsettling to the nerves; twitching and twisting it constantly from side to side, like a toy mandarin. He came boldly into the courtyard of the palace, quite as if the whole place belonged to him; and catching sight of Prince Vance at the window above, he raised one finger, long and skinny and blue as a larkspur blossom, and beckoned for him to come down.

The Prince hesitated. Certainly the Blue Wizard was not so charming in his looks as to make one wish to get any nearer to him, but Vance happened to remember that his godmother had seemed to disapprove most highly of this very wizard; so with an idea of displeasing Copetta, the Prince obeyed the beckoning finger and went down.

At a nearer view the Wizard looked even uglier than from a distance. His very lips were blue, and when he opened his mouth his tongue was seen to be blue also.

"Come," he said to the Prince, in rather an injured tone, "you keep me waiting long enough, I hope, when I only came to teach you a droll trick."

"That is good," answered Vance, growing interested at once. "I do like droll tricks. What is it?"

"It is in here," the Blue Wizard said, holding out a pretty gold bonbon box. "Just make anybody eat one of these, and then you shall see what you shall see."

The Prince took the box in his hand and opened his lips to ask another question; but before he could speak a single word the Blue Wizard had vanished quite away, and he stood alone.

He went slowly and thoughtfully upstairs, wondering what the trick could be.

"I'll try it on the tutor first," he concluded, "because I'm sure I don't care what happens to him, and I really must know what the droll trick is."

So he went smilingly up to his tutor and offered the open box; and the simple old gentleman, suspecting nothing, bowed and simpered at the great honor his Royal Highness did him, and quickly swallowed one of the little bonbons.

And this is what happened. Pouf! The unfortunate tutor shut up like a crush-hat, and shrunk together until he was as short as a pygmy and as plump as a mushroom. Really one might just as well have no tutor at all as to have one so tiny. How Prince Vance did laugh! Of all the wizards he had ever known—and for one so young his Highness had known a great many wizards; he almost always met more or less of them when he played truant by climbing out of a back window and going into the woods fishing—he thought the Blue Wizard was the most amusing and had invented the very drollest trick.

"Dear me, your Highness!" said the poor tutor, in so tiny a voice that it was quite all the Prince could do to hear him. "Dear me! what is the matter? I certainly feel very queer; I do, indeed."

"You look even queerer than you feel, I fancy," replied the naughty Prince, chuckling with glee.

He picked up the poor tutor, and putting him on the window-sill laughed at him till his sides were fairly sore. Then he began to consider how he could get the most fun and make the most mischief out of his bonbons, for there were not a great many of them; and, being a shrewd young rascal, he at last contrived the plan of putting them into the ice-cream which was then being frozen for the royal dinner. Then everybody would be sure to get a taste at least of the magic potion; and slipping down into the kitchen, the wicked young Prince succeeded in carrying out this evil and dangerous plan.

III

E

verybody looked at the Prince when at dinner he declined ice-cream. It was unheard of. Nobody had ever known him to do such a thing before. The twelve young Princesses, though much too well bred to remark upon it, stared at their brother with their twenty-four beady blue eyes, and made their twelve little mouths as round as penny pieces in their surprise.

Now the King, being fond of ice-cream, happened to eat quite steadily for some moments without stopping; so that when he did look up he beheld his Queen already shrunk to the size of a teaspoon, and every moment growing smaller.

"My dear," said he, gravely, "really I don't think you ought,—before the children too; just consider what a bad example you are setting them."

"I'm sure, Sire," replied the Queen, rather crossly, for the sudden shrinking had given her quite a giddy feeling,—"I'm sure I cannot imagine what you are talking about. Bad example, indeed! You had better be looking to your own behavior. What the children will think of you for growing so very small, I'm sure I cannot imagine."

At this moment the royal pair looked about on their daughters. They were about the size of lucifer matches! They ran their eyes down the long table; every person there was a pygmy.

Horror and fear filled every mind save that of Prince Vance. He nearly went wild with joy over the great success of his trick. He had, it is true, run out of the dining-hall at first, from his old habit of starting off whenever he had performed any of his abominable jokes; but he soon ventured to come back again, and round and round the table he went, laughing as if he would kill himself at the tiny people sprawling helplessly in their big chairs.

The Prince helped himself to fruit and cakes and bonbons from the table. He seated his royal mother on top of the sugar-bowl, and put the poor old King in the salt-cellar. As for the Lord Chancellor, whom he especially hated, Vance dumped the bewigged old fop into the pepper-box, where he would really have sneezed himself to death in another minute, had not the Blue Wizard fortunately appeared and given the unhappy man a sudden bath in a finger-bowl.

"It worked well, didn't it?" the Blue Wizard observed with a grin, as he put the Lord Chancellor, very white and limp, on the window-seat to dry in the sun.

"Oh, awfully well!" Vance replied briskly, although secretly he was more than a little afraid of this particular wizard, who seemed to be much more sudden in his way of appearing and disappearing than the common sort of wizards to which the Prince was accustomed.

"The worst of it is," remarked the Wizard, thoughtfully, pulling his bushy eyebrows with his long blue fingers, "you can't change 'em back."

"What!" exclaimed the Prince, in his confusion dropping his father into the pudding sauce and entirely ruining the royal robes. "Can't change them back? But you must change them back if I tell you to."

"Oh, as to that," the Blue Wizard answered carelessly, giving the king in turn a bath in the finger-bowl, "what you say isn't of the least consequence any way. In the first place, no wizard is bound to obey anybody who does not himself know how to obey; and in the second place, nobody can undo this particular charm but the Crushed Strawberry Wizard."

"Very well, then," said Vance, imperiously, paying no attention whatever to the first part of the Blue Wizard's remark; "go and get the Crushed Strawberry Wizard."

"Get him yourself!" was the answer. "*I* don't want him. It is nothing to me, you know; this isn't my family."

"But where does the Crushed Strawberry Wizard live?" asked the Prince, more humbly.

"I'm sure I've no idea," the Blue Wizard replied lightly; "and now I think of it, I don't believe I care. I'm sure I don't see why I should."

"But it's all your fault," blubbered Vance, beginning to cry, and sitting down upon his uncle, the Duke Ogee, without even noticing him till the Duke wriggled so that Vance jumped up in a fright, thinking he had sat down upon a frog. "I'm sure you got me into the scrape."

"Now you're getting tiresome," said the Wizard, yawning. "I never liked tiresome people myself."

"But I don't know what to do-oo!" sobbed the Prince.

At this the Wizard only gave a terrible laugh and vanished quite away again, leaving the naughty young Prince to get out of his trouble as best he could.

IV

F

or a few moments Prince Vance continued to cry rather noisily, though it must be confessed that it was more because he was so vexed at the Blue Wizard than because he was at all sorry for what he had done. Indeed, he did not even now realize that the trick was likely to turn out a very serious thing; and after a while he dried his eyes, and having collected his wits proceeded to collect also all the little people and put them together at one end of the royal dining-table.

They made such a pretty sight, with their little court robes and tiny jewels, that Vance was charmed with them and declared them to be more interesting than white mice or even guinea pigs. He could hear them, too, if he listened very closely indeed, quarrelling and blaming one another for what had befallen them; and this was so vastly funny to the wicked Prince that he rubbed his hands and fairly danced again with glee. It was only when the palace cat, pouncing upon the Lord Chancellor as he lay upon the window-sill, snatched him and carried him off in her mouth, that Vance began to be a little frightened, and to realize that, having made the whole family unable to protect themselves, it had now become his duty to care for them and see that they came to no harm. He just managed to save the Lord Chancellor from the lantern jaws of the royal cat, and then proceeded at once to set his small family in safe places for the night. Some he put in the crystal lily-cups of the chandeliers; others in the crannies of the golden mouldings on the wall; while for the King and Queen and the twelve little Princesses, he found a lovely chamber in a pink porcelain shell which hung from the ceiling by silver chains, and was commonly used for the burning of perfumes and spices to make the air of the dining-hall sweet and delightful. All this being attended to, the Prince betook himself to bed; but the palace seemed very lonely and silent, and the Prince was so dull and so frightened that he might not have gone to sleep at all, save for the cheering thought that at least there was no danger of lessons

on the morrow, as the tutor was too small to teach, and his father and mother far too little to make him obey.

"I will go to the preserve closets," he murmured to himself as he was dropping off to sleep. "There is now nobody to stop me. I shall begin with the damsons and the honey in the morning, and I shall have all the wedding cake and macaroons that I can possibly eat."

But, alas for the Prince! when morning came he found that affairs were turning out differently indeed from the way in which he had planned. When he came down to breakfast, with his foolish head full of visions of ordering the cook to send up pigeon pot-pie, curry of larks, strong coffee,—which was a forbidden delight to the Prince except upon his birthdays,—and unlimited buttered toast and jam, what a downfall to all his hopes was it to find, pacing the dining-hall, the fierce and cruel General Bopi, who, luckily for himself, had been out hunting the day before, and so missed the fatal dinner, and was still quite as large as life if not larger. He had discovered the state of affairs at the palace; and so far from making himself unhappy about this, he was evidently in great good spirits, and, to say the least, was disposed to make the best of matters instead of the worst. He had put on the King's very best crown which was kept to be worn only on great occasions, and with a cloak of royal ermine on his shoulders was strutting boldly up and down, enjoying his new splendors and the feeling of power which they brought.

How it happened Vance never was quite able to tell, but the first thing he knew, his dreams of having his own way and ordering the servants about to his heart's content were shattered, and he found himself somehow pushed and hustled outside on the palace steps,—himself, the Prince, and heir to the royal throne, turned away from his own door and ordered to leave the kingdom on pain of death.

"But my family!" cried Vance; "I hid them from the cat, and now they will starve. Nobody can find them but me!"

"As for their starving," the General replied indifferently, "I don't know that I care for that; but I would rather the palace should be rid of the whole vermin race of them, so you may come in and gather them up. But be quick about it, or I'll set the royal bloodhounds on you!"

Thus roughly treated, the poor Prince made haste to collect his scattered family from the nooks and crannies where he had hidden them. He was cramming them into his pockets with very little thought for their feelings, when he happened to remember his sister's baby-house, which not only had parlors, bedrooms, and dining-rooms in plenty, but was well furnished with everything which the heart of little people could desire. This he begged very humbly of the new king, and having it granted him he packed his family into it, making them as comfortable as their reduced circumstances would allow. A grinning footman strapped the box on the back of the Prince as an organ-grinder carries his organ; then he helped him out of the palace with a sudden push which had nearly sent him headlong down the steps. Laughing pages ran before him, and the Prince recalled the many times he had tweaked their noses and stuck pins in the calves of their legs. Everybody seemed heartily glad to see him go.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" quoth the palace hound; "you will never again put my meat up a tree where I cannot get it."

"Get out with you!" snapped the royal cat. "I'm glad you are turned out of the house. Let us hope a body can take a nap in comfort now, without having her tail stepped on or snuff sprinkled in her face."

"Don't trouble yourself ever to come back," screeched the peacock, hoarsely. "For my part, I'm tired of having my handsomest tail-feathers snatched out by the handful. I'm sure I trust I shall never set eyes on you again."

So it was with all the animals in the royal gardens. The deer, the emus, the gazelles, the swans, the flamingoes, the parrots, even his own particular white mice and spotted guinea pigs, declared that they were glad he was going, and hoped he might never come back any more. Not a creature did anything but rejoice as the royal beggar was tumbled rudely out from his own father's gardens and left standing alone in the highway, already heartily sorry for his prank, and quite at his wits' end as to what to do with the Court which he carried in his baggage.

V

C

onsidering that Prince Vance had never done anything at all for himself, not even so much as to tie his own shoe-strings, it was a pretty hard lot for him to be turned out into the world to get his own living, and take care of the whole Court besides. At first he was almost tempted to throw away the box and all his relatives with it; but although of course he could not be expected to think so much of his father and mother now that there was so very little of them to be fond of, still under all his follies Vance had a good sort of heart, and so he trudged away with the troublesome little Court strapped tightly to his shoulders. I am not perfectly sure that he did not take some pleasure in jolting it about, for I have more than once seen little folk bang and jerk bundles they were made to carry against their wills. At any rate, the King and the Queen and the Court came very near being seasick upon dry land, from the jolting and rocking of this new manner of travelling.

Prince Vance had not the least idea where he was going. He knew, of course, that he wanted to find the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, but he did not know where that individual lived, or how to go to work to find him; so he only made his best pace to get away from the palace as fast as he could, being afraid that the new king might repent of not having taken his head from his shoulders, and send somebody after him.

It was about sunset when he came to a beautiful field which lay along the banks of a wide dark river; and Vance, who by this time was half starved, was delighted that wild strawberries grew here in great plenty, making the ground quite red. He first looked about for somebody to pick them for him, but naturally he found no one; so he set down his luggage and fell to helping himself, eating very fast and paying very little attention to the rules of good society.

It was not until he had stuffed himself to the throat that he happened to think that his travelling companions might also be hungry. He opened the box and

let them out, and found much pleasure in watching their funny antics as they stumbled over tiny pebbles or became entangled in the grass and struggled helplessly as if caught in some horrible thicket. Two or three would seat themselves around one ripe berry, and dine from it where it was growing; others drank drops of the evening dew, which already shone in the clover leaves and buttercups; while the Lord Chancellor, who seemed to be always getting into trouble, picked some sort of quarrel with a large green grasshopper,—and so terrible did the battle become that there is no telling who would have come out of it alive had not Vance gone to the poor Lord's help and frightened the insect away.

Under all these trying circumstances the poor nobles kept something of their court manners; and their smiles and stately movements, their bowings and courtesies, seemed to Prince Vance so droll that he went into violent fits of laughter and rolled about on the grass.

As it grew dark he did indeed stop laughing and think longingly of his soft bed with its silken pillows and down coverings, but in truth he was so tired he could hardly keep his eyes open at all; and as soon as he had picked his small relatives and friends out of the damp grass and put them safely into their box, he lay down under a spreading beech-tree and fell into a sound and delicious sleep.

The morning found the Prince somewhat refreshed and gave him a fresh determination. He resolved to set out at once on the search for the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, leaving no means untried until he discovered him and prevailed upon him to change the transformed Court to its former condition. He shouldered his box and started bravely on the road, not knowing at all where he was going, and already beginning to regret that he had not paid to his lessons at least sufficient attention to have learned in which direction his own kingdom extended.

He had walked an hour or two when he saw by the roadside a man engaged in gathering the down from the tall thistles that grew by the way.

"Hallo!" cried the Prince; "what do you expect to do with that?"

"Beds," answered the man, shortly, and without stopping his work.

"Oh!" Vance said, seating himself on a stone and putting down his box beside him. "You make beds of it, do you? They must be very soft."

"Dandelion," replied the man.

"Dandelion?" repeated the Prince. "That doesn't mean anything."

The man nodded his head in a knowing way, but said nothing. He was a strange-looking individual, with clothing which was made of all sorts of odds and ends pieced together; while so lean and wizened was he that it made the Prince hungry only to look at him.

"Do you mean that dandelion down makes better beds?" asked Vance, whose wits were being sharpened by his travels.

The other nodded.

"Then why in the world couldn't you say so? You are not dumb."

"Breath," returned the little thin man, briefly.

He moved from the bunch of thistles which he had stripped to the next, turning as he did so and carefully picking up his footprints to use over again and save himself the trouble of making new ones.

"You are certainly the most economical man I ever saw," declared the Prince, irritably. "I wouldn't be so mean with my old footprints; nobody else would bother to pick them up. And as for breath, you might spare a little more of that; it doesn't cost anything."

The man paid no especial attention to these rather uncivil remarks, but went on in his work with great diligence.

"Do talk a little!" Vance said, becoming more and more impatient every moment. "At least you can tell me how to find the Crushed Strawberry Wizard?"

"Why?" asked the man, with the first show of interest he had displayed.

"I'm going in search of him."

"Wouldn't," was the little man's reply.

"Why not?"

"Dreadfully wearing on shoes," the other answered.

Then he stopped and collected the breath which he had used in this speech,—for him a very long one,—and went on steadily picking thistledown.

"But I must find him," Vance persisted, vexed anew at this reply; "where does he live?"

"Don't know," said the thistledown-gatherer, shortly.

Vance arose from the stone with an impatient flounce, and took up his box so suddenly that the teeth of all the Court chattered.

"Well," he said snappishly, "you are certainly the stingiest man I ever saw. You can't even give away a civil word."

"Oh, no!" returned the old man, with an expression of great astonishment. "Never give anything away. What will you give for your dolls?"

Now, this question might sound like pure idiocy to some people; but funnily enough it came into the head of Vance that when he had been teasing those twelve models of propriety, his sisters, a few days before, and had made their blue bead-like eyes swim with tears by taking away their playthings, he had used just those very same words to them. He hung his head a little; but still, determined to put a bold face on the matter, he said,—

"Don't talk nonsense! Tell me the way to the Crushed Strawberry Wizard's this minute!"

But, to his surprise, where the queer old man had stood there was only a seedy black raven, very battered and ragged, but with a remarkable pair of glittering red eyes.

VI

I

must say," the raven remarked severely, "that, considering the fact that nobody invited you to come to this concert at all, and that you have no check for a reserved seat, it would look better in you to keep quiet and not disturb the entertainment."

"Concert!" exclaimed Vance, in bewilderment. "There isn't any concert."

"But there is going to be," returned the bird, more severely than before. "I'm going to sing myself. First, I shall sing a love-song. Be quiet!"

And without further ado he began, in a terribly hoarse and cracked voice,—

"Snip-snap, frip-frap,
Bungalee, tee hee lees;
Jip-jap; nip-nap,
Tungatee tinum gee me strap,
Bring me a bottle of cheese."

"Oh, come," exclaimed the Prince, "you must really know that that is nonsense! It certainly means nothing."

"How do you know?" demanded the raven, fixing his glittering eye on the Prince. "Do you understand the language of love?"

"No," said Vance, more humbly; "I must confess that I don't, though I've always heard it was very silly."

"Speaking of the boundaries of a king—" the raven began easily; but the Prince interrupted in great haste.

"Nobody *was* speaking of boundaries," he said sharply; "you made that up yourself."

"—dom," resumed the raven, calmly, paying no sort of attention to the interruption of the Prince, but cocking his head on one side and looking wickedly out of one eye, "they are very useful to know, and there are various ways of learning them. Some people learn them in the school room; that's one way: some travel; that's—"

But before he could get any farther Vance had caught up a stone and flung it at him. With a terrible croaking the raven flew up into the air in circles higher and higher until he vanished straight overhead.

"Ten to one that was Godmother herself," grumbled Vance, as he picked up his box and started again along the dusty road.

All the rest of the day he travelled, growing more and more weary, until at sunset he came to a very old woman sitting beside a great tree upon the river's bank.

"Hallo!" cried Vance, not too politely.

The wrinkled old creature looked at the river, at the tree, at the sky,—everywhere, in a word, except at the travel-stained Vance.

"Come!" he said more roughly yet, "why don't you speak when you are spoken to? Do you know who I am?"

The aged crone wrinkled her forehead and lifted her grizzled eyebrows, still without looking at him.

"No," she answered coolly, "I don't know that I do. You look like a boot-black with that box on your shoulders, only that a boot-black would be more civil-spoken."

An angry retort sprang to the lips of the Prince, but before he could give vent to it a terrible little shrill sound from the box struck his ears. In sudden dismay he unslung the baby-house, and opened it to discover what was the matter with his family.

In the middle of the floor of the largest room of the baby-house were all the Court, gathered about the old King, who had fallen in a faint from hunger.

"He is starved!" cried the Queen, in a piercing wee voice of anguish.

"I am starving myself!" roared the Lord Chamberlain, in a keen though tiny roar.

"We are all starving!" shrieked the whole Court, in voices more or less audible.

"Well," Vance said, looking at the affliction of the little people, "I must say this is extremely disagreeable of them all to be starving. They always are starving."

"Very," the old woman echoed, with a sneering chuckle.

As she spoke, she took from beneath her faded cloak a basket in which were delicate white cakes, fruits, and honey. These she began to eat with great relish, apparently not at all interested in the Prince or his family.

"Come, now," cried he, "give me some of that! My Court is half dead."

"Really?" she returned, coolly munching away.

"Yes," shouted Vance, vainly attempting to snatch something from the well-filled basket, "and I must have a cake to feed them on."

The old lady made no resistance, but only flitted up like a bird, in some unaccountable way, to a limb of a tree, where she sat eating as placidly as ever.

"Goodness!" said poor Vance, startled half out of his wits, "are you Godmother too? You shy about just like her."

"She is a friend of mine," answered the old woman. "I know all about you, too, for that matter."

There was nothing left for Vance but to beg for pity, and at last the strange creature threw him down half a small cake.

"There's plenty for your family."

Vance provided for his little people, and then began humbly to beg for a few morsels for himself.

"Wait," said the woman on the bough overhead, "till I see what there is in the pantry."

She disappeared with great suddenness; but presently a little window opened in the side of the tree trunk, from which the wrinkled old face looked out.

"Here are a few dry crusts from the closet," she said. "You may have them. With a little honey I think they will go very well."

She handed two or three mouldy scraps of bread out as she spoke, which Vance took with as good grace as he could muster.

"Where is the honey?" he asked, eying his crusts ruefully.

"Oh, I'll eat the honey while you eat the crusts," was the answer. "That is by far the best way to arrange it."

"You are mean enough, I hope," he exclaimed angrily.

But, alas! at the word the crusts left his grasp and appeared in the hand of the old woman.

"Oh, very well," she said, "just as you please! You are not obliged to have them, of course."

Poor Vance was ready to cry with vexation and hunger, and quite broke down at this last misfortune. He begged so humbly for the crusts that at last the queer old crone relented and gave them back; and never did anything taste sweeter to him than these dry and mouldy morsels of bread.

"You may sleep where you are," the woman said as he finished; and she closed the window with a slam, leaving it impossible to say where it had been.

"Oh, by the way," she cried, a moment later, sticking her head through the bark of the tree, in a way that looked very uncomfortable indeed, "about

those boundaries, you know, and the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, I was going to say—But, no; on the whole, it's no matter."

And once more she disappeared, not again to be seen.

"I must say," muttered Prince Vance, "strange things happen to me all the time."

And curling himself up on the moss, he fell fast asleep from weariness.

VII

T

he morning sun shining into his eyes awakened him; and after looking about carefully to assure himself that there was nothing to be had to eat in that place, Vance shouldered his box and trudged along the river's bank. It was a beautiful bright morning; the birds were singing, the flowers were opening to the light, and had it not been for a constantly growing hunger, the young traveller might have enjoyed his walk greatly. As it was, he soon became so hungry that he could think of nothing but eating. He went on, however, until about noon, before he found any food; then to his great joy he came upon a fine tree hanging full of ripe peaches, rosy and plump as a baby's cheek.

"Now for a feast!" he said eagerly to himself, as he put down his box and prepared to gather a hatful of the delicious fruit.

Just then he stumbled over something, and looking down saw a man lying on the grass with his eyes shut and his mouth open.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the Prince. "Who are you? Are you awake or asleep?"

"Awake," answered the man, without stirring.

"Why don't you get up then?" asked Vance. "Are you ill?"

"No," replied the man, briefly.

And indeed he was as stout a fellow as one would meet in a summer's day.

"Then what are you doing?" demanded the Prince, who had lost all patience and who thought that the other might at least take the trouble to open his eyes to see who was talking to him.

"Waiting," the man said, opening his eyes at last.

"Waiting for what?"

"For a peach to drop into my mouth."

"One has fallen beside your cheek," said Vance, "and another right in your hand."

"But I want it in my mouth," sighed the man on the ground. "I am so dreadfully hungry."

"So dreadfully lazy, you mean," exclaimed Vance, quite out of patience; and he began to eat the luscious fruit. "You must certainly be the laziest man in the world."

"If you think that," was the drawling answer, "you ought to see my cousin Loto, who lives down the river a mile as the crow flies."

"He'll have to be lazy, indeed, to beat you," the Prince said, as he once more shouldered his box. "Do you know where the Crushed Strawberry Wizard lives?"

"I know," returned the man, "but I'm too lazy to tell."

"It wouldn't take you any longer to tell than to say you can't tell," cried Vance, hotly.

"Perhaps not," was the cool retort; "but if I told it would be doing something, and I never do anything."

The Prince started on his way without another word. He did not even stop to put a peach into the lazy man's open mouth, as he at first had some thought of doing. He kept along beside the river for some time, and had nearly forgotten the words of the lazy man about his cousin, when suddenly he came upon what to his horror he at first supposed to be the body of some thief hanging from a tree. As he got closer, however, he found that the man was alive and suspended by a belt which went under his arms. The man did not seem in the least to mind being hung, but looked quite calm and peaceful. A second man stood upon an overturned bucket and blew into the mouth of the first with a pair of bellows.

"What are you doing?" asked Vance curiously, as he stopped beside them.

"Why," replied the man with the bellows, "this fellow is too lazy to stand, so we have to hang him up; and he is too lazy to breathe for himself, so he pays me a groat a day to do it for him with the bellows."

"I saw a man up the river who was too lazy to eat," observed Vance. "I thought he was bad enough, but this is surely the laziest man alive."

"If you think that," the blower answered, "you should see his cousin Gobbo, who lives a mile farther down the river as the crow flies."

At this Vance was reminded that nightfall was not very far off, and once more he started on his way. The man with the bellows jumped down from his bucket and ran eagerly after him. He was a simple-looking man, with a large and frog-like mouth.

"It creeps in the family," he whispered hoarsely to the Prince.

"What does?"

"Laziness. If it were anything else, you know, you'd say it *ran* in the family. But wait till you see Gobbo!"

Just then he noticed that Loto was growing quite limp and purple in the face for want of breath; so he hastily scrambled back to his bucket, and once more began to blow for dear life and a groat a day.

"By the way," asked Vance, halting, "do you know where the Crushed Strawberry Wizard lives?"

"He knows," replied the blower, "but you can't get it out of him. He's too lazy to speak; so it's no manner of use fretting about it."

With a sigh of weariness and disgust the royal wayfarer turned away and went on his journey. Just at dusk he reached a small village, or rather a group of poor little houses; and as he was about to knock at the door of one to ask for shelter, he saw a procession coming over the fields. There were a number of men with flaring torches, one or two with picks and spades,

while in the midst was carried a bier upon which lay a man with his eyes wide open, staring straight ahead.

"What's all this?" the Prince asked of one who seemed of some authority in the company.

"We are going to bury Gobbo," replied the man.

"But he isn't dead yet," exclaimed Vance, quite horrified.

"True," the man returned, in a matter-of-fact tone, "but he does not care about living. I know, for he's hired me to think for him these ten years. Now I'm tired of it, and so I think it's best to bury him; and of course it's all the same as if he thought so himself."

"Well," said Vance, who was beginning to grow badly confused by the odd people he encountered, "if he doesn't mind I'm sure I don't know why I should. But perhaps before he is buried he can tell me where to find the Crushed Strawberry Wizard."

"He won't take the trouble to remember," answered the man, "and I'm sure I'll do no more thinking for him."

"Well," was the thought with which the unlucky Vance consoled himself, "it is something to have seen the laziest man on earth."

VIII

H

e found an empty hut, in which was some mouldy straw; and there he passed the night, sleeping as soundly as if he had been on his own royal bed of down in the palace at home. His breakfast was begged at the door of one of the houses in the village; and all day he followed the river, until near evening he came to the gray seashore and the huts of the fisher folk.

"What is the name of the river I have been following?" he asked of a wrinkled old fisherman who was mending his net in the sunset.

"It is called Laf," the old man answered. "It is the eastern border of Jolliland, as the coast is the northern."

"Oh, bother boundaries!" Vance exclaimed, "I hate them. Can you give me something to eat?"

"We are poor folk," said the old man, "but I suppose we can give ye a bite if ye pays for it."

"Pay for it!" cried Vance, in astonishment. "Do you know who I am?"

"Not rightly," said the fisherman; "but from yer look and from yer box I take ye for a travelling showman. What have ye got in yer box?"

"My family," answered the Prince, before he thought. "Do you know where the Crushed Strawberry Wizard lives?"

"Not rightly," the other replied again; "but I think somewhere alongshore. What sort of a family have ye got? A happy family?"

"I'm sure I hope they're happy," was Vance's response. "I know that I am not. Perhaps they may like being carried better than I like carrying them."

"What can they do?" the fisherman persisted. "Can they dance and eat buns like a bear, or do they fight and knock each other about like Punch and Judy?"

"They do nothing of the sort," began the Prince, angrily. "It is not a show at all; it is—"

Then remembering that if he was rude to the fisherman he should certainly lose all chance of getting a supper, he became more polite, and ended by saying,—

"They are—I mean they act out a king and queen and their court."

"Truly," cried the fisherman; "that is a rare show indeed! I never saw the like. Come in and get your supper, and afterward we will have out the puppets."

Upon this he led the way into his hut, and bade the Prince follow him. It was a very poor little hut indeed, with rude walls, in which the cracks were stuffed with seaweed to keep out the wind, and with a small fire burning on the heap of flat stones which served for a fireplace. The fisherman's wife, who was old and quite crooked with rheumatism, was hobbling about getting the supper, which she said was all but ready. When it was all ready, without the but, they sat down, though the poor Prince, hungry as he was, found it hard work to swallow the dry red herring, the rasping oaten cakes, and the brackish water of which the meal consisted. When he had finished the meal,—which, as you may suppose, did not take long,—he set his box upon the table and opened it.

"First," he said, "let us give them some food, and you shall see how prettily they can play at eating and drinking."

But if the food was coarse eating to Vance, you may well imagine that it was quite beyond the power of the tiny teeth of the little people, who were not able to eat a morsel. This made them wring their hands and weep upon their tiny pocket-handkerchiefs; and the King even boxed the Lord Chancellor's ears, so angry was he at being disappointed of his supper.

All this was vastly amusing to the fisherman and his wife, who thought the whole thing was done as a show, and would not hear of Vance's closing his box until the darkness quite hid the supposed puppets from sight.

In the night, as Vance lay trying in vain to sleep upon the hard clay floor of the cottage, he overheard the fisherman and his wife whispering together.

"I tell ye, wife," the old man was saying, "I will do it, so there be's an end to the matter. I tell ye I will have the show for my very own. I could make more money with the puppets in one day at the fair, than I make by a year's fishing hereabouts."

"But the boy," asked the old woman, eagerly,— "ye won't hurt the boy, will ye, good man?"

"Hurt him? No," returned the fisherman, "I won't do him no harm. I'll sell him for a sailor to the ship that lies in the offing, and then I'll take his show and travel about the country with it, making money."

As Vance heard this, you may be sure he shivered with horror at the idea that his family was to be stolen and he himself sold to go as a sailor. He lay very still, however, till the loud snoring told him that the fisherman and his wife were both asleep, when he rose softly, and finding his precious box shouldered his burden, crept quietly from the cottage, and made all the speed he could in the darkness to leave the wicked fisherman and his hut far, far behind.

At daybreak he met a man just pushing his boat from the shore, and from him he asked whither the road along the beach would lead him.

"That's a thing as nobody can't tell ye," said the man, fitting the oars into his boat, "because nobody don't rightly know. Howsoever, I advise ye to take it, for it's full as likely to lead somewheres as nowheres."

This advice was of no great value to the Prince, yet he felt obliged to follow it, as he dared not go back; so he tramped on steadily, though the sun was high, and the box was heavy, and the Court within buzzed like a hive of angry bees at being forced to go so long without food.

IX

N

ear noon the Prince was joined by a jelly-fish, who seemed to be of a cheerful and lively disposition, and who insisted upon attaching himself to Vance and going along with him. The boy thought that he already had quite as many people as he was able to look after, and he told the creature so plainly.

"Besides," he finished quite crossly, for he was really out of patience, "to say the truth, you flump so that you make me nervous."

"Boys shouldn't have nerves," said the jelly-fish, coolly. "Of course, if I have no legs I can't walk, and if I can't walk I must flump. That's plain, even to you, I suppose."

Prince Vance was too vexed to reply; so the pair kept on in silence, save for the tired footsteps of the boy and the loud flumping of the jelly-fish on the damp sand of the shore. Near sundown they reached a broad field where ripe grain of some sort seemed to be growing, and through it, shaded by trees, ran a brook, clear as crystal. Into this field the weary Prince gladly turned, and first of all opened his box, half fearing lest he should find the poor little Court quite dead from cruel hunger. They were not indeed really lifeless, but they were lying about limp and white, and looked as if there was very little strength left in them. The Prince hastily filled them several acorn cups from the clear, cold brook, and then, seizing one of the long heads, of which the grain hung full, he broke it open as quickly as possible.

"Raw wheat," he said, "is certainly not good, but at least it will keep them from starva—"

He stopped in amazement, and no wonder; for instead of the grain he expected to find, the pod was full of chocolate creams, large, and all of the

most delicious flavors, as the Prince found by trying one. He opened another pod in astonishment; lemon drops fell from it. A third was full of burnt almonds, while a fourth contained sugared dates. In short, the whole wonderful field was full of sweetmeats: cocoanut cakes and macaroons; cream figs, marsh mallows, and gum drops; almond paste, candied nuts, sugared seeds, and crystallized fruits; in truth, you could not even dream of any sort of luscious confectionery which was not growing fresh and plentiful in that charming field.

Very quickly the Prince placed several fine bonbons upon the baby-house table. The King, too near starving to care much for good manners, carved with his sword, and ladies and gentlemen seized slices in their hands and ate as if famished. A wine drop furnished them with delicious cordial to drink, and thus the Court feasted so merrily that it would have done one's heart good to see them.

Having thus provided for his family, you may be sure that Vance was not a great while in providing for himself; and having shelled a fine lapful of bonbons, he sat down to enjoy himself in peace, when to his vexation he heard at his side the unwelcome voice of the jelly-fish.

"Feed me first!" cried the creature; "I have no hands to gather bonbons for myself. Feed me first! I am hungry too."

Poor Prince Vance! He was indeed weary and warm and hungry, and his patience was quite gone.

"Go and eat without hands, then!" he cried crossly; and seizing the flabby creature he tossed it recklessly away from him among the vines.

He had, however, hardly drawn a breath of relief, and was just setting his teeth in a delicious bit of nougat, when back came the jelly-fish quite unhurt and fully as cheerful as ever.

"Now, why should you take the trouble to do a thing of that sort?" demanded the fish. "It cannot amuse you, and it doesn't hurt me. I shall certainly flump back again as often as you throw me away, so you see it is

of no use; and if it is of no use, why, it certainly is not useful. I suppose even you can see that. Feed me!"

"I don't see any way of feeding you," replied the Prince, with his mouth full of sugared apricot; "you certainly have no mouth."

"That is apparently true," returned the fish, amiably; "but just lay a soft bonbon on top of me and see what will happen."

The Prince did as he was bid, and had the satisfaction of seeing a large orange cream melt gradually away as the jelly-fish slowly drew it into himself.

The Prince had eaten, for once in his life, all the sugar-plums he wanted, and had just taken a drink of water from the cold, clear brook, when he heard a voice like thunder rolling among the hills.

"Who is this," it cried, "in my lollipop field, stealing my lollipops?"

With his heart thumping loudly against his side, Vance looked up and beheld a sight which might have made a king and his army shake in their shoes; and how much more a poor little Prince with a Court to care for and only a jelly-fish to help him!

X

T

he sight which so terrified Prince Vance was indeed nothing more nor less than a horrible giant, fully as tall as the tallest church-steeple you ever saw, and having in his forehead three hideous great eyes—red, white, and blue—and a mouth which looked like nothing so much as a dark cave on a mountain side.

Before Vance really knew what had happened, he found himself snatched up and standing upon the great hand of the giant, as if it were a table.

"Please," he said, speaking in a great hurry, he was so frightened,— "please, we only took a few because we were nearly starving. We did not know they belonged to you, and we meant no harm. Please, oh, please let us go this once, and we'll promise never, never to come back any more."

"Oh, ho!" cried the giant, with a great laugh; "let you go, indeed! Not so fast, Thumbkin! I am fond of little people like you."

Poor Vance danced helplessly about upon the giant's great palm, but could do nothing to help himself and had to look on as the giant seized the box in his other hand and shook it gently, making the little folk fly about wildly and get many a bruise and bump from tables and chairs.

"These will amuse my wife vastly," said the giant, as he began to stride toward home. "I should not wonder but she'd preserve ye in brown sugar. I like such little relishes, and 'tis a long time since I've had any."

At this you can fancy that poor Vance became quite ill with fear; but as there seemed just then to be no way of escaping, he held his tongue and looked sharply about him until in time they came to the giant's castle. It was a huge gray stone building, with iron-barred windows, and at the gate three

dogs so enormous in size and so hideous to see that merely to hear of them would be enough to give one the shivers, so you shall be told nothing at all about them. Horrible as they looked, they stood in fear of the giant; and at his word they lay down meekly enough, and did not even growl as he strode by them through the court and into the castle hall.

"Wife," cried the giant to a woman who stood admiring herself in a big mirror in the end of the room,— "wife, come ye here and see what I have found."

"What have you found?" asked she, without turning away from the glass. "Is it anything to wear?"

"Zounds!" shouted the giant. "Can you think of nothing but dress, Madam? No, it is far better than something to wear; it is something to eat. Come, put on the pot!"

At this all hope forsook poor Vance, and he thought that his end had come indeed. But the giant's wife spoke up sharply, and declared that it was quite too late to be cooking anything fresh for supper, and that the giant might wait until morning.

"What is there for supper, anyhow?" asked the giant, discontentedly, for he had quite counted upon the fresh stew he would have made from Vance.

"Why," replied the giantess, "there's the sea-serpent pie I've warmed up, and I've opened a can of elephant's heads by way of a relish."

"Be quick with it," growled the giant, "or I shall eat this boy up raw in no time!"

At this the giant's wife, who was by no means a bad-hearted woman, though rather fond of dress and vain of her beauty, (and being as high as a steeple, one must confess that there was a good deal of her to be vain of!) gave Vance a shove into a corner to get him out of her husband's sight; and in the corner Vance was glad enough to stay hid while the giant ate an enormous supper, and drank a whole cask of ale which his wife drew for him from a huge butt in the corner of the hall.

After he had finished eating and drinking, the giant bade his wife look to it that the boy was put in a safe place for the night; then, seizing a candle as long as a bean-pole, he stumbled heavily away to bed. His wife, who had been sitting by the fire, now rose and invited Vance to come and share the remains of the supper.

"You are a pretty little boy," she said, "and that peach-colored velvet jacket must have been handsome before it grew so soiled. Now come, eat a bit of pie and drink a little ale; you want to be in good condition for to-morrow. If you must be made into a stew, of course you'd rather be a good stew than a bad one."

"I don't know about that," replied Vance, dismally; "if I must be cooked whether I like it or not, I rather think I would like to taste particularly nasty."

"Oh, fie now!" cried the giantess. "Good little boys do not talk so. I am sure you must be a good little boy, by your looks. What is in your box? Jewelry?"

"If I will show you," asked Vance, with some hope in his voice, "will you let me go? My dear, kind lady, you do pity me, don't you? I am sure you are kind and good. Only let me go, and I will send you beautiful jewels. I will do anything for you if you will only let me go."

"No," said the giantess, "I can't do that. He would beat me to death if I let you go; besides, you could not get by the dogs if I let you free twenty times over. But I'll tell you what I will do; if you will unlock your box I'll give you laughing-gas before I cook you to-morrow, and then you won't know what has happened till you are fairly stewed and eaten."

This was but cold comfort to Vance, as you may imagine; but he saw that the giantess meant kindly, and he still hoped to escape in some way, so he swallowed his sobs as best he could and proceeded to open his box. No sooner were the tiny people free than they began to run eagerly about the table, eating the crumbs of oaten bread and the grains of sugar which the untidy giantess had scattered. Small as the little courtiers were, their jewels and robes glistened and made a fine show; and the giantess leaned upon her

elbows and watched them with delight, declaring them the prettiest little things she ever saw.

"I should not wonder, now," she said, "if my husband would give these little things to me; they are too small to be of any use except as seasoning. I wish I could make them useful in some way."

The giantess, as has been said, was a vain woman, and she was always thinking how everything could be put to use as something to wear.

"I have an idea," she said, suddenly jumping up and bringing a spool of pink silk from her work-box, which was about the size of a Saratoga trunk. "I have heard of ladies wearing live beetles fastened by tiny gold chains to their breast-pins. I believe I can do something of the sort with these little puppets."

"But, Madam," begged Vance, in dismay, "you do not seem to understand that these are my own royal rela—"

"Now, you be still!" said the giant's wife, playfully, "or I'll pop you into that steaming kettle over there without a single sniff of laughing-gas; and you can't begin to fancy how unpleasant you would find it,—you can't, really."

At this Prince Vance shivered, and said very feebly indeed,—

"Please don't hurt them, dear Mrs. Giant; they are very tender."

"I shall not hurt them," said the lady, "or at least only enough to make them kick; they are so amusing when they kick."

As she talked, she tied bits of silk about the waists of the King and the Queen, and hung them in her ears as children sometimes hang buttons when they pretend to have eardrops. When she had fastened on her strange earrings, she made a necklace of the Princesses and Courtiers, and having put it on she began to admire herself in the glass as if she would never be done. After a while, however, she got so sleepy that she could no longer see, and was even too tired to toss her head and make the King and the Queen swing about in her ears. She put her new jewelry back in their box, and picking Vance up put him into a wooden bird-cage on the wall.

"Pleasant dreams!" she said cheerfully.

And then she too went away to bed.

XI

L

left alone in his high-hung cage, poor Vance was indeed in deep despair. He saw no way out of his troubles, and could not help weeping as he bemoaned his miserable lot.

"It is all the fault of that wretched Blue Wizard!" he exclaimed; for it did not occur to him that it was his own bad behavior which brought the Blue Wizard to the palace in the first place.

Just at this moment, in a pause between his sobs, the Prince heard a familiar flumping sound on the stone floor below him; and looking down beheld to his surprise his old companion the jelly-fish.

"How do you do?" asked the jelly-fish, politely. "I suppose you're not very glad to see me."

"Oh, but I am, though!" cried the Prince, not very politely. "I should be glad to see anybody now, no matter who. How did you get by the dogs?"

"I flew," replied the creature.

"Jelly-fish cannot fly," said the Prince; "so that cannot be true."

"Well, then," responded the jelly-fish, indifferently, "I swam; and if that isn't true, why, I suppose it is false. Even you can see the wisdom of that, can't you? However, now that I am here, I've something to tell you. This castle is in the township of Bogarru, and Bogarru is situated on the western boundary of Jolliland, which—"

"Who cares for boundaries?" the impatient Prince interrupted. "Have you nothing pleasanter than that to talk about?"

"—brings me to my point," the unmoved jelly-fish continued. "Whenever I visit a place for the first time I am able to have one wish come true. This is my first visit to Bogarru. Now the question is, Shall I wish the heathen of Gobbs Island to become converted, stop eating their grandmothers and take to wearing clothes; or shall I wish you out of this castle, you and your Court, in the time a cat winks?"

"The last, the last!" cried the Prince, too eager to speak correctly. "Dear, kind, good jelly-fish, do wish us out of this horrible place, and you shall go everywhere with me if you want to, and I'll never speak rudely to you again as long as you live!"

"Ah!" replied the fish, "I was afraid you'd choose thus. You care more for yourself than you do for the Gobbs Islanders. It is not truly noble, but perhaps it is natural. Now, then, open your mouth and shut your eyes!"

The Prince obeyed, and at once there was a taste of something exceedingly bitter on his tongue; sparks danced before his closed eyes, and directly he felt a whiff of cool fresh air blowing upon him.

"Open your eyes!" said the voice of the jelly-fish.

The Prince did so, and to his great joy found himself, with his box beside him, out upon a country road, with the stars twinkling over his head.

"Oh, dear, good jelly-fish!" he cried joyously, "how can I ever thank you?"

"You seem to be fonder of me than you were a while ago," observed the jelly-fish, dryly. "However, I forgive you. If you want to find the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, keep straight on along this road till you come to the house of the Funny Man. Flubaloo!"

The jelly-fish disappeared as he spoke this last mysterious word.

"What a pity!" said the Prince; "I can never tell him how sorry I am for my rudeness. I have lost my only friend. I wonder what he meant by 'flubaloo,' now?"

This, however, was so hard a question to think out that at last the Prince decided to give it up. So, shouldering his pack, he started briskly off along the high-road, not daring to linger till daylight for fear that the giant would wake up, and, finding his prisoner gone, would come after him and carry him back to the terrible castle of Bogarru.

XII

A

Il night Prince Vance trudged on in the starlight, and did not stop even to take breath till he saw the sky begin to grow red with the coming sunrise; then, clambering over a hedge, he laid himself down in its shelter, and instantly fell into a deep and heavy sleep.

The sun was high above him when he woke, and at once he became aware of a great ringing of bells, blowing of horns, and beating of drums, as if he were in the midst of some holiday celebration. He started up, rubbing his eyes, and found that he had fallen asleep in a field which was now gay with hundreds of merry-makers. Flags were flying from tents and booths; bands of musicians were playing; glass-blowers and jugglers were performing their tricks; peasants in gay dresses were singing, dancing, and feasting; and there were all manner of shows and swings and merry-go-rounds, enough to have turned your head entirely, had you been there to see. As to the Prince, he was so delighted as even to forget for a while both hunger and weariness, and walked about from sight to sight, crying "Hurrah!" as the jugglers and rope-dancers performed their curious and daring tricks.

At length he came to a booth in which an old woman was preparing over her fire a kettle of steaming stew, which to the hungry Prince seemed to send forth the most delicious odor of any stew he ever had known in his life.

"Ah," he exclaimed eagerly, "that smells exceedingly savory, good mother!"

"Ay," replied the old woman; "and truly it ought, for it has in it blue pigeons, a fine fat cock, three wild hares, and every vegetable and savory herb known in all Jolliland. Will you have a bowl?"

"Ay," said the Prince, "that I will; and let the bowl be a large one!" he added, as he watched the old woman filling a goodly wooden basin with the

stew.

"There!" she exclaimed as she held it toward him, "there it is; and good enough eating for a royal prince, if I do say it who made it. One silver bit and 'tis yours, my fine young fellow!"

"But," stammered the Prince, his mouth watering as the fragrant steam reached his nostrils,— "but I have no silver bit. If you will only trust me for it, I will pay you as soon as ever I find the Crushed Straw—"

He stopped speaking suddenly, for he saw that the woman was laughing at him. She had snatched the basin of stew as it were from his very mouth; and as she laughed loudly and shrilly, she pointed at the Prince with her fat forefinger.

Drawn by the noise she was making, all the peasants flocked around, crying out,—

"What is it, Mother Michael? What is the joke? Tell us, that we may laugh too; for you know we must laugh. It is our duty to laugh."

"He wants to be trusted for a basin of broth," tittered the old dame, "and he says that he will pay me when he finds the Crushed Strawberry Wizard!"

At this all the peasants laughed in chorus till the very hills echoed.

"I don't see what you are laughing at," cried the poor Prince, hotly; "I think you are very silly indeed."

"Of course we are!" answered the laughing peasants. "It is our duty to be silly. If we cannot laugh at something, we laugh at nothing, since this is Sillyburg, the merriest town in Jolliland."

"But," asked the Prince, in vexation, "does nobody here know anything? Has nobody any sense?"

"Of course not!" said the peasants. "Who cares about knowing anything, and what's the good of having sense? We have a good time in the world, and that's enough for us."

The Prince would have reproved the peasants for talking so foolishly, but that the words seemed to have a strangely familiar sound; and he suddenly remembered that he had used them himself at one time when his tutor was urging him to learn common fractions.

In the mean time the peasants, always eager for any new thing, had become very anxious to know what was in the mysterious box which the Prince carried.

"If it is a show," they cried, "open the box and set it out. We are weary for something new to laugh at."

But the Prince hardly thought it would please the King and Queen to be laughed at by a crowd of gaping rustics. To be sure, he had shown them before, but that was in private and not as a real exhibition at a public fair. Some days ago this would not have troubled the Prince at all; but trial and hardship were fast making Vance into a very different sort of boy from the Prince who was the despair of his poor tutor and the torment of the entire palace.

However, the poor wayfarer reflected that as food was only to be had for money, money must be earned in some way, or the Court and himself were certain to starve. It also occurred to him that if his family still had any feelings they must be such exceedingly small ones that they were not of much importance; and accordingly he opened his box and proceeded to show off his tiny relatives, the peasants screaming with laughter at the airs and graces of the little Courtiers, and offering them all manner of cakes, fruits, and bonbons for the sake of seeing them eat. The Court Priest pleased the rustics particularly, as he seized the only sugared almond and ran away with it into a corner, pursued by the entire Court, all squabbling and quarrelling in the most undignified manner possible. This sight so delighted the peasants that they gave Vance plenty of good silver bits, and thus he was able at last to buy himself a breakfast, though you may be quite sure he did not get it of the old woman who had made sport of him before.

When he had finished his meal, which was eaten sitting on the grass before a chicken-pasty booth, he rose and asked the peasants politely the way to

the Funny Man's house.

"The house is far away," they cried, "but the Funny Man is here at the Fair if you can only find him. You can't always find him."

"This is the Funny Man," cried a jolly gay voice. "This is I! Here I be. Why don't you catch me?"

XIII

V

ance looked, and saw, dodging and hopping about behind a neighboring booth, a fat little man dressed in green and hung all over with fluttering ribbons and jingling bells. He looked so lively and merry that at first sight the Prince was quite charmed with him; but he soon thought that his looks were far more agreeable than his behavior, for the Funny Man would neither stop to speak nor to listen, but kept running and dodging about and hiding behind booths or groups of peasants, so that the Prince was in despair about ever finding out from him where the Crushed Strawberry Wizard lived.

"I want to speak to you, if you please," cried the Prince. "I have something which I must say to you; I really must."

"Catch me, then!" cried the Funny Man. "Chase me! Run after me! Whoop! Now you see me, and now you don't! Hurrah for me and my legs!"

Away dashed the Funny Man, and away scampered the angry Prince in pursuit of him. But Vance soon found it to be of no use in the world to try to capture so swift a runner; so he stopped, hot and breathless and weary, while all the peasants held their sides to prevent their splitting with laughter, and cried,—

"Hurrah for the Funny Man!"

"Do you give it up?" asked the Funny Man, as Vance seated himself by his box and wiped his heated forehead.

"Of course I do," answered the Prince, crossly. "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself. Why do you want to act so, anyway?"

"For the fun of it afterward," replied the Funny Man.

Now that at last he was standing still, the Prince perceived that his nose was of a most peculiar and curious fashion. It was not only of large size and green in color, but it ended in a long and slender pipe, something like a stick of macaroni, which was twisted up for ornament or convenience into a sort of figure eight.

"For the fun of it afterward," repeated the Funny Man.

"Well," said the Prince, "I should say that it couldn't be any great fun, in the first place, to be a grown-up man like you, and it certainly can be no fun whatever afterward."

"Oh," rejoined the Funny Man, "that's only one of my queer sayings, you know. It doesn't really mean anything. By the by, what did you want of me?"

"A friend of mine who was a jelly-fish," began the Prince, "told me to ask you how I should find the Crushed Strawberry Wizard."

"Pooh!" cried the Funny Man, turning rapidly on the ends of his pointed toes. "I don't care about doing that. Why should I? There's no fun in it. Stop a minute, though! Is that *all* the jelly-fish said? You are sure he said nothing more, not a word?"

"Nothing that meant anything," replied the Prince. "He said 'Flubaloo' as he left me."

"No!" exclaimed the Funny Man, turning rather pale. "Did he really, though? If he did, that puts matters in a very different light, a very serious light. Come home with me, and in the morning I'll set you off on the right road. Hurry! for we have a good distance to go, and 'tis a roundabout way."

Following the lead of the Funny Man, the Prince found himself once more upon the high-road, along which they journeyed until late in the afternoon, when their path suddenly plunged deep into the forest.

"Wait a minute!" said the Funny Man; "I must light my nose."

"Do what?" asked the astonished Prince.

"Light my nose, Stupid!" replied his guide.

The Prince said no more, but looked on in silent amazement while the Funny Man untwisted the figure eight at the point of his nose, and removed a small copper cap which covered the end. He then struck a match and applied it to the bottom of this macaroni-like tube. A light like a large star at once appeared, and shed its yellow beams about so widely as to make the gloomy forest-road as light as day.

"Excuse me for speaking of it," said the Prince, politely, "but that's a strange sort of nose you have."

"Not at all," answered the Funny Man, carelessly; "very common in these parts,—very common, indeed. Simply a sort of slow-match; grows in the daytime as much as it burns away at night. Come on! I'm going to run, and you must catch me. Hurrah! Now you see me and now you don't!"

Alas for the poor Prince! it was mostly "don't." The light flickered and danced ahead of him like a will-o'-the-wisp, and was often lost entirely; while the tired boy, burdened with his cumbersome box, hastened after as best he might, stumbling and tumbling over stones and tough roots, splashing through miry places and running violently against tree-trunks, till just as he was ready to sink down in despair and let his unpleasant companion go where he would, he came suddenly upon the Funny Man resting upon the gate of a curious little house, and laughing with great glee at the race he had led the Prince.

"Here we are," said the Funny Man; "come in! My wife's at home, and I've no doubt supper's all ready except the seasoning. I always season things myself, because I'm something of an epicure."

As he spoke, he led the way into the house, having put out his light and once more wound his nose up into its figure eight.

XIV

T

he room in which the Prince found himself was bright and cheery, and the table was laid for supper. The wife of the Funny Man was rather a mournful-looking woman, which the Prince privately thought was by no means to be wondered at. She had a somewhat peculiar and startling appearance, from the fact that her head was twisted completely round on her body, so that she faced the wrong way.

"Curious effect, isn't it?" asked the Funny Man, as he observed that the Prince was staring at his wife. "I did it one day for a joke, and the best part of it all is that I have forgotten the charm to bring her round right again."

"Does she think it is a joke?" asked the Prince.

"As to that," replied the Funny Man, indifferently, "I don't know, because I never asked her, and I certainly do not care one way or another."

"?reppus ot nwod tis ot uoy esaelp ti lliW" said the woman, after the Funny Man had busied himself a few moments with the dishes.

Vance stared in confusion, but the Funny Man seemed quite used to this odd way of speaking.

"Her talk is all hind-side before," he explained, chuckling, "since I turned her head about. Sit down! Supper is ready."

They all sat down. The unfortunate woman faced the wall behind her, and therefore she was a little awkward in ladling the soup. However, that was a slight affair, and Vance was far too famished to be particular. The pottage gave forth a most appetizing odor, and the Prince hastily plunged in his

spoon and began to eat. He had not taken a fair taste before he stopped eating with a terribly wry face. The soup was bitterer than gall.

"Don't you like the seasoning?" snickered the Funny Man. "Now, come, that's too bad, when I thought 'twould be just to your liking!"

Too angry to speak, the Prince snatched a glass of water and drank, only to find it scalding hot and full of salt.

"Try a bit of venison pasty," urged his host, pleasantly. "No more fooling, on my word!"

"?opiH, enola dlihc roop eht tel uoy t'nac yhW" asked the wife, who seemed to be as kind-hearted as could be expected of one so twisted.

The Prince, however, had already tasted of the pasty, which proved hotter than fire with red pepper. So it was with everything on the table. Nothing was fit to eat. The ragout was full of pins and needles, the wine was drugged with nauseous herbs, the cakes were stuffed with cotton; and the Prince cracked his teeth instead of the almonds, which were cleverly made out of stone.

All this nonsense was very bitter to the hungry Prince, as you may suppose; but as for the Funny Man, he was quite wild with delight. He rolled over and over on the floor, and the tears of joy streamed down his cheeks at the success of his jokes.

"This is the best fun I've had for months," he cried. "This is joy! This is true happiness!"

"A very poor sort of happiness," the Prince said ruefully. "I think I will go to bed."

Alas! here things were just as bad. As the Prince entered his chamber a bucket of ice-cold water, balanced above, fell down and drenched him to the skin. His bed was full of eels and frogs; and when the poor boy tried to get a nap in a chair a tame owl and a pair of pet bats flapped their wings in his face and tweaked his nose and ears. At the earliest peep of dawn the tortured Prince shouldered his box and left his chamber.

Sitting on the balustrade, whittling, was the host.

XV

"G

ood-morning!" said the Funny Man, politely. "I hope you slept well."

"I did not sleep at all," replied the Prince, hotly; "and of course you knew I wouldn't."

"That was the joke, you know," the Funny Man chuckled, pocketing his knife and preparing to lead the way to the breakfast-table.

The Prince, however, had no mind for another feast like that of the night before; so he resisted all urging and started forth.

"Don't miss the way!" said the Funny Man, who seemed to be much cast down because the Prince would not stay to breakfast. "Cross the stream, you know, than climb a red stile, and there you are on the straight road. If ever I come your way I'll make you a visit. I've taken a fancy to you."

"That's more than I've done to you," muttered Vance, as he trudged away.

He was very angry indeed with the Funny Man, and yet he had an unpleasant remembrance of a time, not so very far away, when he himself was the terror of the entire palace on account of his fondness for playing cruel jokes upon others.

The road was rough, the sun was hot, and the Prince was so famished that he was glad to devour a couple of apples which had fallen from the cart of a peasant bound for market. Still Vance cheered himself with the thought that his troubles were about to end. He was now near the home of the Crushed Strawberry Wizard; so he pressed on till mid-afternoon, only stopping once when he came upon some pears growing upon a stunted tree by the roadside. They were small, crabbed, and stony; but the hungry Prince was glad enough to gather a number and eat them seated in the pear-tree's scanty

shade. As to the Court, it was quite a relief to Vance to remember that the peasants at the fair had provided the baby-house with cakes and bonbons enough to last for many days.

"After all," the Prince said to himself, as he once more trudged along,—"after all, they have a far easier time of it than I. I don't think I should much mind being little myself if I could have as good a time as they do."

Toward the middle of the afternoon the Prince reached a dark wood into which his road seemed to lead him. He had not walked far before he heard a sound as of somebody sobbing, and also a curious clashing noise as of cymbals striking together. These sounds became more and more distinct as the Prince kept on; and at last he came to a small monkey who was seated in a low juniper-tree, weeping most bitterly and now and then smiting its hands together in sorrow. The hands of the monkey, being of metal (as indeed was the creature's entire body), produced, as they beat together, the cymbal-like sounds which the Prince had heard.

"What is the matter?" asked the Prince, as the monkey continued to weep without paying any attention whatever to him.

The monkey, looking up, wiped its eyes upon a small lace handkerchief which was already quite damp enough.

"I am so miserable," it sighed. "Did you never hear folk say it was cold enough to freeze the tail off a brass monkey? I am the brass monkey. They mean me; they mean my tail."

"But it never has been cold enough to freeze your tail off," said the Prince, consolingly.

"No," replied the monkey, wretchedly; "but then I'm always afraid it will be, and that's just as bad. Oh, what a world this is!"

The monkey upon this fell to weeping more bitterly than before, and the Prince sneezed violently three times.

"There!" exclaimed the monkey, dismally; "now you're taking cold because I'm so damp with crying."

"Oh, never mind that!" replied the Prince, politely. "It really doesn't matter. A good sneeze is really quite refreshing."

"That reminds me," said the monkey, "that I was sent to tell you to go back again; this isn't the road."

"Not the—" began the Prince, looking puzzled.

"Road," finished the monkey, beginning to cry once more. "To the Crushed Strawberry Wizard's, you know. You have just come back by another way nearly to the Castle of Bogarru, where the giant lives. The Funny Man told you wrong."

"Told me wrong!" repeated the poor Prince, now thoroughly discouraged.

"Yes," said the monkey, "for a joke, you know. Oh, my beautiful brass tail! What a world this is!"

"This is the very worst and meanest joke of the whole!" cried the Prince.

He shivered at the idea of being once more near the castle of the terrible giant; and then he remembered the weary miles he had travelled that day under the burning sun, and thinking of these things he could have wept with right good-will, had it not been that the brass monkey had already made quite a pool of tears, and Vance was afraid of causing a flood.

"You must go back the way you came," said the monkey, wringing the tears from its handkerchief. "It will take you longer than it did to come, because now it will be night. At daybreak you will see three silver birches in a meadow; then climb the hedge and follow a row of large white stones till you come to a green stile; after this the path is straight to the Crushed Strawberry Wizard's door. You cannot miss it."

"If this is true," said the Prince, "I am a thousand times obliged to you. But are you quite certain that this, too, is not a joke?"

"Oh, my jointed brass body!" cried the monkey, mournfully. "Now, do I look like a joker? I never made a joke in my life, never."

"I should be only too glad," said the Prince, as he turned to go, "to do something to cheer you up, if I might."

"Oh, no!" wailed the monkey; "nobody can do anything. Besides, I like to be miserable; it is the only comfort I have. Go! it is getting darker every minute. Oh, my brass toes and fingers, what a world this is!"

At this the monkey wept so violently that Vance had to give up all idea of thanking him or even of saying good-by; so he contented himself by turning and hastening back along the path by which he had come.

XVI

N

early all night the Prince kept on over the stony road. When the sky grew gray, he took a short nap under a thorny hedge, and by sunrise he was once more on his way. On his right, in a beautiful green field, he saw to his great delight three silver birches, their branches rustling lightly in the morning wind.

Vance climbed the hedge and walked on steadily, being guided, as the monkey had promised, by a seemingly endless row of pure white stones. At noon he came upon a green stile, but it was so crooked that the Prince thought he could more easily climb the hedge than get over it. As he drew nearer he perceived a curious little man, who appeared to be hunting for something in the grass at the foot of the stile. He was a good-natured-looking old man; but his head, body, arms, and legs, even his features, were twisted so that nothing about him was fair or straight. He greeted the Prince very kindly, however, and invited him to sit down by the brook and share his luncheon of bread and cheese. This, you may imagine, the famished Prince was only too glad to do.

"You've heard, perhaps," said the stranger, "of the crooked man who walked a crooked mile and found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile? I am the man. I haven't found the sixpence yet, but hope to do so soon. I want to warn you, when you reach the Crushed Strawberry Wizard's, not to speak until he has spoken, or you'll spoil the charm for ten years."

"How good you are!" exclaimed the Prince, gratefully. "How terrible if, after all my journeying, I had spoilt the charm! Can I do anything for you? I will help hunt for the sixpence if you like, or I will beg the Wizard to untwist you."

"Oh, never mind!" returned the Crooked Man, cheerfully. "As to the sixpence, I must find that myself; and as to my crookedness, a whirlwind did it and a whirlwind must undo it. I don't mind. You see, I do not feel as badly as I look."

Thanking the kind little man once more for his luncheon and his good advice, Vance started off merrily through the beech-wood, feeling that his toilsome journey was truly drawing to an end at last. The birds sang, the brook babbled cheerfully beside him, and the breeze brought him sweet odors from a thousand flowers. Just at sunset the Prince left the wood, and came into a small open glade where the grass was like cool green velvet to his feet, and a crystal fountain splashed in the midst of a bed of flowers. Here Vance beheld a curious pink house shaped like an enormous strawberry; and before the door, busily making tatting, was a strange-looking person, all of a pinkish magenta color even to his hair, and wearing a gown and pointed hat of the same unpleasant hue.

Prince Vance had found the Crushed Strawberry Wizard at last.

XVII

I

It was well that Vance had been warned by the Crooked Man not to speak first, as he certainly would have done so, for in truth the Crushed Strawberry Wizard did not appear to be at all a talkative sort of man. He did indeed look up as Vance came near and put down his box; but he said nothing, and closing his eyes, went on making tatting in silence.

Vance stood on one foot awhile, and then on the other. He counted the white doves upon the peaked roof, and watched a small old lady who was gathering herbs in the tiny garden beside the house; but he was very careful not to speak. At last his patience was rewarded. The Wizard opened his eyes and spoke.

"The reason," he said very slowly, "that a sausage cannot walk is that it has no legs. You can understand that, can't you?"

"Oh, certainly!" replied the Prince, politely.

He was extremely anxious not to say anything to make the Wizard angry.

"Well, then," returned the Wizard, "don't pretend that you can't, that's all."

For some time longer the Wizard made tatting in silence; then once again he spoke.

"The reason," he said gravely, "that a horse has no trunk is because it is not an elephant. Can you see the philosophy of that?"

"Yes, your—" "Majesty," the Prince was about to say, in his eagerness to be polite; but he changed his mind just in time, and said courteously, "Yes, your Wizardship."

This appeared to please the Wizard, for he bent his head three times and invited the Prince in to tea. The table was already spread; and seated about it were the old lady Vance had seen herb-gathering, and nine black cats with green eyes, peaked caps, and nice white napkins under their chins. The Wizard placed a chair for the Prince.

"This is my wife," he said, waving his hand toward the tiny old lady. "She is a professional witch. She eats nothing but grasshoppers gathered when the moon is full."

The Wizard here lowered his voice mysteriously and bent toward Vance.

"Economical," he said, "very economical. She hardly costs me a groat a year, except for her high-heeled shoes; those come dear, but she must have them, being a professional witch, you know. Now, as to these cats, how many lives should you guess they had among them, eh?"

"I have heard," replied the Prince, "that every cat has nine lives, so I should think that there must be eighty-one lives here."

"You'd be wrong, then," said the Wizard, "for some of these cats have only one or two lives left. I keep 'em, you understand, so that when folks lose their lives, all they have to do is to come to me and I can sell them new ones from the cats."

"Do the cats like it?" asked Vance.

"They don't mind," replied the Wizard. "Anyhow, they know they've all got to come to it. When the last life is gone, a cat turns into a wind; you've heard them of a March night, yowling about the castle turrets."

"The moon," said the witch, speaking for the first time, "being probably if not otherwise added to this whose salt, magnifying."

"You are right, my dear," said the Wizard, "as you always are. The boy *is* better off in bed."

Upon this the Wizard left the table and led Vance to a neat little bed-chamber, where he bade him good-night. The Prince, having opened his box

to give his family some air, lay down and enjoyed the first night of slumber in a bed which he had known since leaving the palace.

The next morning, after breakfasting with the Wizard, the witch, and the cats, the Prince was called into the garden and given a spade.

"Just dig awhile, as we talk," said the Wizard, seating himself, "and see if you can find any Greek roots. My wife wants some for a philter she is making."

"Tintypes," observed the witch, "catnip promulgating canticles concerning emoluments, producing."

Vance stared; but the Wizard, who was evidently accustomed to this odd sort of talk, answered quietly:

"You are right, as usual, my dear. He must be very careful not to cut them in two with his spade."

The Prince took the spade and began to dig, though not very hopefully. The truth was, he had never been at all successful in finding Greek roots himself; and besides he was longing to ask the Wizard for the charm which should restore his family. However, he dug away bravely and said nothing till the Wizard spoke to him.

"I suppose," said the Wizard, at length, "that, as to your family, you know the rule for simple reduction, don't you?"

"Yes," said the Prince, doubtfully, "I do if that page wasn't torn out of my book. However, I could learn it."

"Learn it, then," said the Wizard; "and when you have learned it, use it."

"But, if you please," ventured the Prince, humbly, "they are already reduced to the lowest terms. I don't wish to reduce them any more."

"All right, then," replied the Wizard, crossly; for the truth was, that, having a variety of affairs on his mind that day, he had forgotten that Vance's Court were pygmies, and was thinking they were giants, and a wizard never likes

to find himself mistaken. "All right, then; don't reduce them. I'm sure I don't care what you do."

"Oh, don't say that!" begged the Prince, with tears in his eyes. "Please don't act as if you didn't care! Oh, your Wizardship, I've come so far to find you, and I've met such unpleasant people, and such horrible things have happened to me on the way, pray do not refuse to help me now that I have found you at last!"

"Well, then," returned the Wizard, "be polite, and do as I tell you. Do you find any roots, by the by?"

"Not one," said the Prince, leaning on his spade in despair.

"That's bad," said the Wizard. "I would sell the charm to you for one Greek root."

"Oh," cried the Prince, "my tutor has some, I know. His head used to be full of them; and unless they have grown so small that he has lost them, I'll be bound he has them still."

Upon this the Prince hastened to open his box, and, to his great delight, succeeded in obtaining from his tutor several Greek roots which, though small, were of good shape and in fair condition. These being given to the Wizard, and by him handed to the witch, the Prince waited eagerly for the charm to be told him.

But the Wizard had apparently no mind to speak. He whistled a few moments, and then, drawing a string from his pocket, began to make a cat's-cradle over his long crushed-strawberry fingers.

"I've sent a message by telegraph to the court cat," he announced. "Go through that white gateway, and you'll come to the high-road. It is the southern boundary of Jolliland. Your way is straight. By sunset you will be at the castle. The cat knows all."

XVIII

ince thanked the Wizard, though not very warmly: for, to tell the truth, he did not much believe that the Wizard had sent a message to the cat; and even if he had, Vance had in times past so hectored and tormented that poor animal that he felt some delicacy in asking a favor from her now. However, he kept on in the direction pointed out, passed through the white gate, and started forth merrily enough along the high-road. He was disturbed, indeed, by some fears of the wicked General Bopi; but he had, in spite of himself, some faith in the Crushed Strawberry Wizard, and he meant to be very cautious in approaching the palace.

By sundown, as the Wizard had promised, the young Prince found his long journey ended, and beheld at last the dear old home where he was born and had always lived till his own misdoings sent him forth. How beautiful it looked to the worn and footsore Prince, with its velvety terraces, its clear blue lake, marble statues, and crystal fountains, lovely flowers, waving ferns, and shady trees, and, above all, the great golden palace itself, its turrets flashing and glittering in the rays of the setting sun! The Prince could have wept for very joy.

Everything about the palace seemed wonderfully still. The white swans slept upon the lake, and the peacocks stood like jewelled images upon the terrace.

Peeping about cautiously for any signs of the wicked General, the Prince made his way softly through the shrubbery till he was very near the front entrance of the palace. Still no signs of the pretended king. The court cat, sleeker than in the days when Vance made her life a burden, sat alone on the upper step, placidly washing herself.

"You may as well come out from behind that almond-tree," she said, "for I see you plainly enough."

At this the Prince came out, still cautiously looking about him, and set his box down upon the steps.

"Dear cat," he said politely, "how do you do?"

"Humph!" replied Tabby, rather unpleasantly. "'Dear cat!' How touching!"

"I've been gone a long time," ventured the Prince.

"That may be," returned the cat; "the days have passed swiftly enough with us here. We have not grown thin in your absence."

"That is true," the Prince assented rather shamefacedly, and he hastened to change the subject. "Where is everybody?"

"Beheaded," replied the cat, briefly; "that is, all but the King."

"Do you mean General Bopi?" asked the Prince. "You know I have the real King here in my box."

"Don't quibble!" retorted the cat, sharply. "A king is known by his deeds. If you have seen the way he's been beheading people right and left, I think you'd call him something more than a general. What few he has left alive have fled from the palace and are hiding in the woods."

"And where is the Gen—King himself?" asked Vance, uneasily.

"Oh!" replied the cat, carelessly, "he's 'round."

"Round where?" asked Vance.

"Round here," the cat replied.

"I don't see him," said the Prince, with a start, as he looked about him on all sides.

"No?" said the cat. "That's because you can't see through me."

"How very strangely you talk, cat!" exclaimed Vance. "I don't know what you mean."

"Well," returned the cat, "you know those funny bonbons?"

"Yes," murmured the Prince, hanging his head a bit and blushing.

"One rolled under the sofa," the cat observed thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Vance, "I remember that one was dropped and I couldn't find it."

"After the telegram reached me from the Crushed Strawberry Wizard," remarked the cat, "I rolled the bonbon out into the middle of the floor. It was a pretty pink bonbon, and the King, coming into the room, saw it and gobbled it up."

"Well," exclaimed the Prince, breathlessly, "what then?"

The cat put out her tongue and licked her chops.

"He was very tender," she said.

"You ate him?" he asked breathlessly.

The cat placidly nodded her head, her whiskers twitching with the remembrance of her feast.

"Then," cried Prince Vance, joyously, "my father is King again, or will be when he is made big enough. You say you had a telegram from the Crushed Strawberry Wizard. Tell me, do tell me, dear cat, what it said."

"I can't till midnight," said the cat, "or all will be spoiled, and the charm won't work."

XIX

B

efore he left home the Prince would have stamped about and made a great uproar at being obliged to wait even a minute for anything he wanted; but of late he had learned, among other lessons, the lesson of patience; so he neither stormed nor cried, but entering the palace seated himself where he could see the great hall-clock and watch for midnight.

He was so weary, however, that he could not keep his eyes open, and presently he was as sound asleep as a dormouse. At length the cat touched him on the shoulder, her claws pricking him so that he sprang up in a hurry.

"Wake up!" said the cat; "the clock will strike twelve in seven minutes."

"Why, have I been asleep?" asked the Prince, rubbing his eyes.

"It looks like it," replied the cat. "Why did you leave the Court shut up in the box?"

"To tell the truth," the Prince confessed, "I was afraid they might be running about the floor in the dark and—something might eat them by mistake."

"Well," the cat answered, with a look as near a blush as a cat can come to such a thing, "you may be right. One never can tell what may happen. It is now almost on the stroke of twelve, and we must make haste. Run out to the terrace and see if the peahen has laid an egg. If she has, bring it in here to me; and be very quick!"

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, the Prince hastened to do as he was bid. He found an egg, indeed, and rushing back to the palace reached the hall just as the clock sounded the first stroke of twelve.

"Break it exactly across the middle, and do it with three blows," the cat commanded.

The Prince obeyed, and from the shattered fragments of the shell, just as the last stroke of twelve ceased, out stepped the Fairy Copetta, as sharp, fresh, and brisk from top to toe as if she had just been made, and not in the least as if she had found her quarters in the peahen's egg either close or confining. She shook out her petticoat with a brisk little flirt, hopped lightly down from the table, and hit the Prince a tap on the head with her cane.

"Well," she said sharply, "how about the Blue Wizard? Do you like him as well as you thought you should?"

"I don't know," stammered the poor Prince, decidedly taken aback by his godmother's sudden appearance. "Did I say I liked him? I had forgotten—I mean I don't like him at all, if you please, Godmother."

"Oh!" exclaimed the old lady, mockingly, "don't you, really? Yet, if I remember rightly, you quite longed for a visit from him a while ago. Well, then, how about the giant of Bogarru and the Funny Man, both intimate friends of mine—did you like them, eh? Did you find them witty and agreeable? Did they treat you with great respect because you were a real live prince, eh?"

"You know they did not," cried the Prince. "I must say, Godmother, that you have strange taste in choosing friends."

"Each to his liking," responded Copetta, lightly. "I dare say, now, that you found more pleasure in that stupid jelly-fish, or that dismal brass monkey, or that crooked man,—and *he's* a beauty, by the way!"

"I did like them," replied the Prince, stoutly; "they were so good to me. Are they, too, friends of yours, Godmother?"

"Why, yes," said the fairy, her bright eyes twinkling elfishly, "I think I may say that they're rather intimate with me."

"I didn't know," ventured Vance, rather timidly, "but they might all be you, Godmother."

"Perhaps you think," she answered tartly, "that I am a sort of living multiplication-table, or that I have as many lives as a cat. By the way, can

you bound the kingdom now?"

"I ought to be able to bound it," the Prince replied; "I have been quite around it on foot."

"Well," returned his godmother, acidly, "I dare say it hasn't hurt you. That reminds me; have you had enough of it?"

"Oh, please, Godmother," cried the Prince, "I have had enough of everything but kindness; and oh, Godmother, if you only would tell me how to turn my people back again, indeed, there is nothing I wouldn't do. Believe me, dear Godmother, I'm a very different sort of boy from the one who wouldn't learn the boundaries, and wanted to know the Blue Wizard; I am, indeed."

"Humph!" sniffed the fairy, though secretly she was not ill pleased with him, "you're a much dirtier one, at all events. Have you washed your face since you've been gone?"

"I'm afraid I haven't washed it very often," confessed the humbled Prince. "You see, I've had so much else on my mind, Godmother."

"Bah!" exclaimed the fairy. "Go take a bath!"

"But the Court, Godmother," pleaded the Prince, timidly; "they must be very tired of being small."

"Tut, tut," cried the godmother, sharply, "how you do harp on one string, to be sure! 'Tis very ill bred of you. However, as it's not for yourself, I don't mind telling you that it's a very simple matter when you once know how to do it. They were facing each other when they shrank, were they not?"

"Yes," said the Prince, blushing.

"Turn them all back to back, then," said the fairy, snappishly. "I should think any fool might have known enough to do that long ago."

Vance opened his box, and trembling with excitement arranged his relatives and friends in two rows, back to back.

Pouf! The effect was magical! Quicker by far than they had grown small, the little folk regained their former size. Then, indeed, confusion reigned. Such gabbling and chattering and running about; such hand-shakings, embracing, and congratulations; such beratings and cuffings of Vance because he had made them small, and then such kissings and caressings because he had made them large again! Never was there known such a mighty confusion and uproar in any royal palace before or since.

"But, Godmother," ventured Vance, timidly, when the excitement had died away enough to allow a body to begin once more to think,— "But, Godmother, if you please, may I ask you one question?"

"If it's a short one," replied the sharp old lady, "and not *too* foolish."

"Well, then," asked Vance, "I would like very much to know, if you please, what we should have done if the peahen had happened not to lay an egg?"

"Pshaw!" said the godmother, crisply. "Stuff!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PRINCE VANCE:
THE STORY OF A PRINCE WITH A COURT IN HIS BOX ***

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