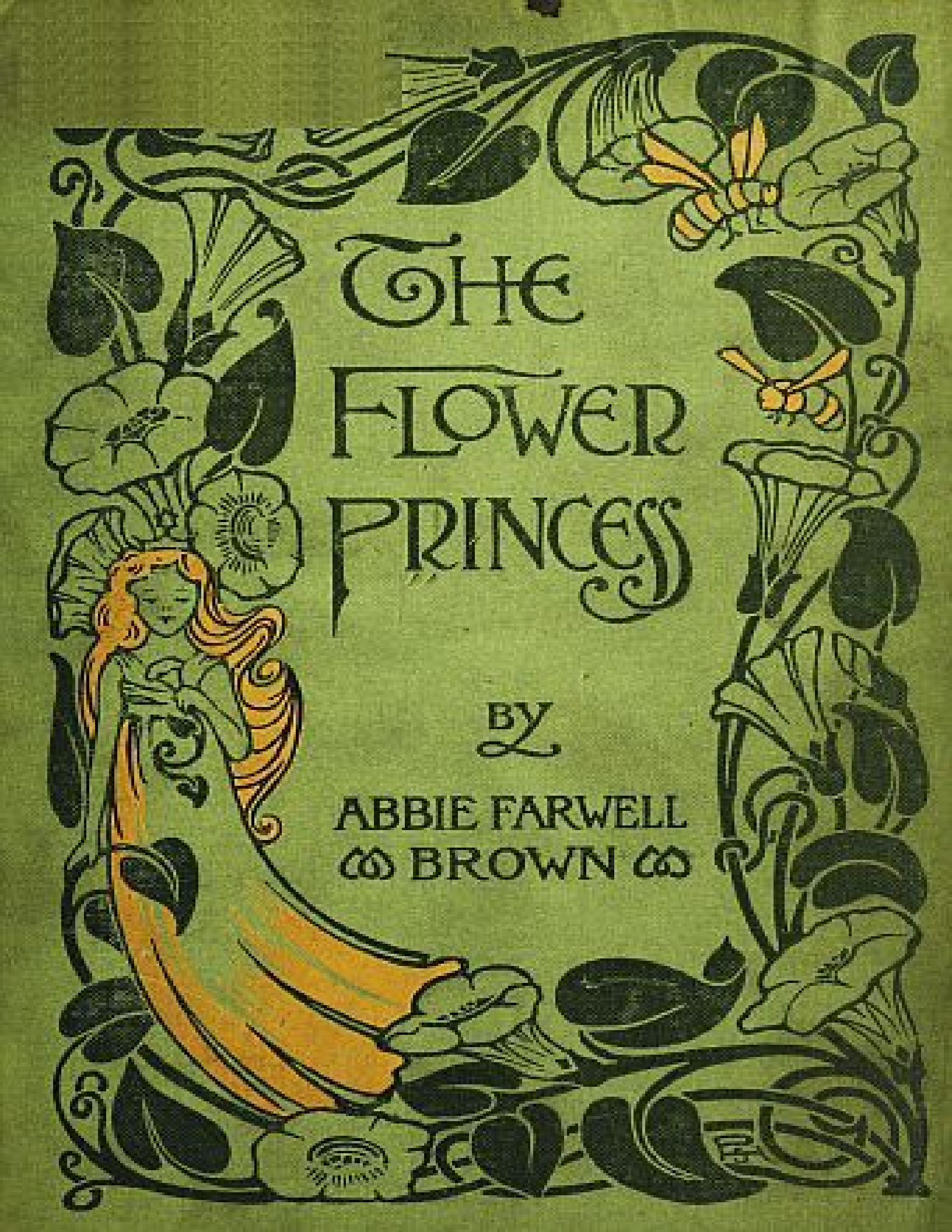




THE FLOWER PRINCESS

BY

ABBIE FARWELL
∞ BROWN ∞

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THE FLOWER PRINCESS

LET HIM PROVE IT

Title page

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*Oh, give me for a little space
To see with childlike eyes*

*This curious world, our dwelling-place
Of wonder and surprise. . . .*

*The long, long road from Day to Night
Winds on through constant change,
Whereon one hazards with delight
Adventures new and strange;*

*The wonders of the earth and sky!
The magic of the sea!
The mysteries of beast and fly,
Of bird and flower and tree!*

*One feels the breath of holy things
Unseen along the road,
The whispering of angel wings,
The neighboring of Good.*

*And Beauty must be good and true,
One battles for her sake;
But Wickedness is foul to view,
So one cannot mistake. . . .*

*Ah, give me with the childlike sight
The simple tongue and clear
Wherewith to read the vision right
Unto a childish ear.*

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The Flower Princess Heading

O

NCE upon a time there was a beautiful Princess named Fleurette, who lived in a white marble palace on the top of a high hill. The Princess Fleurette was very fond of flowers, and all around the palace, from the very gates thereof, a fair garden, full of all kinds of wonderful plants, sloped down to the foot of the hill, where it was snugly inclosed with a high marble wall. Thus the hill was like a great nosegay rising up in the midst of the land, sending out sweet odors to perfume the air for miles, bright with color in the sunshine, and musical with the chorus of birds and the hum of millions of bees.

One part of the garden was laid out in walks and avenues, with little vine-clad bowers here and there, where the Princess could sit and read, or lie and dream. There were fountains and statues among the trees, and everything grand and stately to make a garden beautiful. Another part of the

garden was left wild and tangled, like a forest. Here all the shyest flowers grew in their own wild way; and here ran a little brook, gurgling over the pebbles in a race to the foot of the hill. There never was seen a more complete and beautiful garden than this of the Princess Fleurette.

Now the fame of the Princess's beauty, like the fragrance of her garden, had been wafted a long way, and many persons came to prove it. A continual procession of princes from lands near and far traveled the long road that wound from the foot of the hill up and up and up to the entrance of the palace. They came upon their noble steeds, with gold and jeweled harness most gorgeous to see, riding curiously up amid the flowers, whose perfume filled their hearts with happiness and hope. The further they rode the more they longed to tarry forever in this fair place. And when each one at last dismounted at the palace gate, and, going into the great hall, saw the Princess herself, more fair than any flower, sitting on her golden throne, he invariably fell upon his knees without delay, and begged her to let him be her very ownest Prince.

But the Princess always smiled mischievously and shook her head, saying,—

"I have no mind to exchange hearts, save with him who can find mine, where it is hidden among my flowers. Guess me my favorite flower, dear Prince, and I am yours."

This she said to every prince in turn. She did not greatly care to have any prince for her very ownest own, for she was happy enough among her flowers without one. But the Prince, whoever he might be, when he heard her strange words, would go out eagerly into the garden and wander, wander long among the flowers, searching to find the sweetest and most beautiful, which must be his lady's favorite. And, of course, he selected his own favorite, whatever that was. It might be that he would choose a great, wonderful rose. At the proper time he would kneel and present it to the Princess, saying confidently,—

"O fair Princess, surely I have found the flower of your heart. See the beautiful rose! Give it then to me to wear always, as your very ownest Prince."

But the Princess, glancing at the rose, would shake her head and say,—

"Nay! I love the roses, too. But my heart is not there, O Prince. You are not to be my lord, or you would have chosen better."

Then she would retire into her chamber, to be no more seen while that Prince remained in the palace. Presently he would depart, riding sorrowfully down the hill on his gorgeous steed, amid the laughing flowers. And the Princess would be left to enjoy her garden in peace until the next prince should arrive.

It might be that this one would guess the glorious nodding poppy to be his lady's choice. But he would be no nearer than the other. A later comer would perhaps choose a gay tulip; another a fair and quiet lily; still another earnest soul would select the passion-flower, noble and mysterious. But at all of these the Princess shook her head and denied them. There had never yet come a prince to the hill who found her heart's true flower. And the Princess lived on among her posies, very happy and very content, growing fairer and fairer, sweeter and sweeter, with their bloom upon her cheek and their fragrance in her breath. There never was seen a more beautiful princess than Fleurette.

Now the Princess loved to rise very early in the morning, before any of her people were awake, and to steal down by a secret staircase into the garden while it was yet bright with dew and newly wakened happiness. She loved to put on a gown of coarse green stuff, wherein she herself looked like a dainty pink and white flower in its sheath, and with a little trowel to dig in the fragrant mould at the roots of her plants, or train the vines with her slender fingers.

No one suspected that she did this, and she would not have had them suspect it for the world. For if the palace people had known, they would have followed and annoyed her with attentions and suggestions. They would have brought her gloves to protect her pretty hands, and a veil, and parasol, and a rug upon which to kneel—if kneel she must—while weeding the flower-beds. Indeed, they would scarcely have allowed her to do anything at all. For were there not gardeners to attend to all this; and why should she bother herself to do anything but enjoy the blossoms when they were picked for her? They did not know, poor things, that the greatest joy in

a flower is to watch and help it grow from a funny little seed into a leaf, then a tall green stalk, then a waking bud, until finally it keeps the promise of its first sprouting, and becomes a blossom. They did not guess that the happiest hours of the Princess's life were those which she spent in the early morning tending her flower-babies, while her fond courtiers, and even the curious princes on their way to woo her, were still wasting the best part of the day on lazy pillows. Many a time the Gardener declared that a fairy must tend the royal flowers, so wonderfully did they flourish, free from weed or worm or withering leaf. It even seemed to him sometimes that he could trace a delicate perfumed touch which had blessed their leaves before his coming. When he told this to Fleurette she only smiled sweetly at him. But in her heart she laughed; for she was a merry Princess.

One beautiful morning the Princess arose as usual, soon after sunrise, and, putting on her green flower-gown, stole down the secret staircase into the garden. There it lay, all fresh and wonderful, sparkling with diamond dewdrops. The Princess Fleurette walked up and down the paths, smiling at the blossoms, which held up their pretty faces and seemed to smile back at her, as if she were another flower. Sometimes she kneeled down on her royal knees in the gravel, bending over to kiss the flowers with her red lips. Sometimes she paused to punish a greedy worm, or a rude weed which had crowded in among the precious roots. Sometimes with her little golden scissors she snipped off a withered leaf or a faded flower of yesterday. Up and down the paths she passed, singing happily under her breath, but seldom plucking a flower; for she loved best to see them growing on their green stalks.

THE PRINCESS FLEURETTE

She came at last to a little summer-house, up which climbed morning-glories, blue and pink and white—fairy flowers of early morning, which few of her people ever saw, because they rose so late. For by the time those lazy folk were abroad, the best part of the day was spent; and the little morning-glories, having lived it happily, were ready for their rest. They drowsed and nodded and curled up tight into a long sleep, in which they missed nothing at all of the later day.

When Fleurette spied the morning-glories she clapped her little hands, and, running up to the arbor, danced about on her tiptoes, whispering,—

"Good-morning, little dears! Good-morning, my beautiful ones. How fresh and sweet and fair you are!" And, plucking a single blossom, a cup of the frailest pink, she placed it in her yellow hair, her only ornament. Then she danced toward the little arbor, for it was her favorite early-morning bower. But when she came to the door, instead of entering, she started back with a scream. For through the morning-glory vines two bright eyes were peering at her.

"Peek-a-boo!" said a merry voice. And out stepped a lad with a smiling, handsome face. He was dressed all in green. By his side hung a sword, and over his shoulder he bore a little lute, such as minstrels use.

"Good-morning, merry maiden," he said, doffing his cap and bowing very low. "You, too, love flowers in the early morning. We have good taste, we two, alone of all this place, it seems."

"You are not of this place. How came you here?" asked the Princess, stepping back and frowning somewhat. "Do you not know that this is the garden of a Princess, who allows no one to visit it between dusk and the third hour after sunrise?"

"Ah!" cried the youth, with a merry laugh. "That I learned yesterday down below there in the village. And a foolish law it is. If the Princess knows no better than to forbid the sight of her garden when it is most beautiful, then the Princess deserves to be disobeyed. And for that matter, pretty maiden, are not you, too, a trespasser at this early hour? Aha! Oho!" The lad laughed, teasingly, shaking his finger at her.

The Princess bit her lip to keep from laughing. But she said as sternly as she could: "You are rude, Sir Greencoat. I am one of the best friends the Princess has. She allows me to come here at this hour, alone of all the world."

"Ah, share the right with me, dear maiden, share it with me!" exclaimed the Stranger. "Let me play with you here in the garden early in the morning. Do not tell her of my fault; but let me repeat it again, and yet again, while I remain in this land."

The Princess hesitated, then answered him with a question. "You are then of another country? You are soon to go away?"

"Yes, I am of a far country. My name is Joyeuse, and I am a merry fellow,—a traveler, a minstrel, a swordsman, an herb-gatherer. I have earned my bread in many ways. I was passing through this country when the fragrance of this wondrous garden met my flower-loving nose, guiding me hither. Ah, how beautiful it is! Because I wished to see it at its best in early morning I stole through the gates at sundown, and spent the night in yonder little arbor. I have been wandering ever since among the flowers, until I heard your voice singing. Then I stole back here to hide, for I was too happy to risk being discovered and sent away."

"You are a bold, bad fellow, Joyeuse," said Fleurette, laughing; "and I have a mind to tell the Princess about you and your wanderings."

"Would she be so very angry?" asked the Stranger. "I will not pluck a single bud. I love them all too dearly, just as you do, dear maiden, for I have watched you. Ay, I could almost tell which is your favorite flower—"

"Nay, that you cannot do," said the Princess hastily. "No one knows that."

"Aha!" cried the lad. "You make a secret of it, even as does your mistress, the Princess Fleurette. I have heard how she will choose for her Prince only him who finds the flower which holds her heart. I had thought one time to find that flower, and become her Prince."

"You!" cried the Princess, starting with surprise.

"Ay, why not? I could fight for her, and defend her with my life, if need be. I could sing and play to make her merry. I could teach her many things to make her wise. I am skilled in herbs and lotions, and I could keep her people in health and happiness. Moreover, I love flowers as well as she,—better, since I love them at their best in this early morning: even as you love them, fair maiden. I should not make so poor a prince for this garden. But now that I have seen you, little flower, I have no longing to be a prince. I would not win the Princess if I might. For you must be fairer than she—as you are fairer even than the flowers, your sisters. Ah, I have an idea! I

believe that *you* are that very flower, the fairest one, whereon the Princess has set her heart. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Indeed no!" cried the Princess, turning very pink at his flattery. "How foolishly you speak! But I must hasten back to the palace, or we shall be discovered and some one will be punished."

"And shall I see you among the maidens of the Princess when I present myself before her?" asked Joyeuse eagerly.

"Oh, you must not do that!" exclaimed Fleurette. "You must not try to see the Princess to-day. This is a bad time. Perhaps to-morrow—" She hesitated.

"But you will come again to the garden?" he begged.

She shook her head. "No, not to-day, Joyeuse."

"Then to-morrow you will come? Promise that you will be here to-morrow morning early, to play with me for a little while?" he persisted.

The Princess laughed a silvery little laugh. "Who knows whom you may find if you are in the garden again to-morrow morning early." And without another word she slipped away before Joyeuse could tell which way she went. For she knew every turning of the paths and all the windings between the hedges, which were puzzling to strangers.

II

The next morning at the same hour Joyeuse was wandering through the paths of the garden, seeking his flower-maiden. He looked for her first near the arbor of morning-glories, but Fleurette was not there. He had to search far and wide before he found her at last in quite another part of the garden, among the lilies. She wore a white lily in her yellow locks.

"Ah!" cried Joyeuse, when he spied her, "it is a lily to-day. But yesterday I thought I guessed your favorite flower. Now I find that I was wrong. Surely, this is your choice. So fair, so pure,—a Princess herself could choose no better."

Fleurette smiled brightly at him, shaking her hair from side to side in a golden shower. "One cannot so easily read my thoughts as he may suppose," she cried saucily.

"Dear maiden," said Joyeuse, coming nearer and taking her hand, "I have no wonderful garden like this where I can invite you to dwell as its little princess. But come with me, and we will make a tiny one of our very own, where no one shall forbid us at any hour, and where we will play at being Prince and Princess, as happy as two butterflies."

But Fleurette shook her head and said: "No, I can never leave the garden and my Princess. She could not live without me. I shall dwell here always and always, so long as the flowers and I are a-blooming."

UNTIL SHE CLAPPED HER HANDS FOR JOY

"Then I, too, must live here always and always!" declared Joyeuse. "Perhaps the Princess will take me for her minstrel, or her soldier, or her man of medicine,—anything that will keep me near you, so that we can play together here in the garden. Would that please you, little flower?"

Fleurette looked thoughtful. "I should be sorry to have you go," she said; "you love the flowers so dearly, it would be a pity."

"Yes, indeed I love them!" cried Joyeuse. "Let us then go to the Princess and ask her to keep me in her service."

The Princess looked long at Joyeuse, and at last she said: "How do I know what manner of minstrel you are? I cannot take you to her without some promise of your skill, for she is a Princess who cares only for the best. Come, let us go into the wilder part of the garden, where no one can hear us, and I will listen to your music."

So they went into a wild part of the garden, and sat down under a tree beside the little brook. And there he played and sang for her such sweet and beautiful music that she clapped her hands for joy. And when he had finished he said,—

"Well, dear maiden, do you think I am worthy to be your lady's minstrel? Have I the skill to make her happy?"

"Truly, Joyeuse, you have made *me* very happy, and you are a Prince of Minstrels," she answered. "Yet—I cannot tell. That is not enough. But hark! I hear the chapel bell. I must hasten back to the palace. To-morrow I will come again and listen to another song. Meanwhile do not try to see the Princess."

"I care not for the Princess, I," he called after her, "so long as I may see you, little flower!" And for an answer her laughter came back to him over the flowers.

So that day went by; and early the next morning Joyeuse took his lute and sought the flower-maiden in the garden. This time he sought her long and long before he found her among the roses. There was a crimson rose in her hair, and one upon either cheek when she glanced up, hearing his footsteps on the grass. There was also a crimson spot upon her white hand.

"See!" she cried, "a cruel thorn has pricked me. Let me test your skill in herbs, Sir Doctor."

With a sorry face, for it gave him pain to see her pain, Joyeuse ran to find the leaf of a certain plant which he knew. Presently he returned, and, taking a bit of linen from his scrip, tenderly bound the leaf about the poor wounded finger.

"Now will it be cured," he said. "This is a remedy which never fails."

"How wise you are," murmured Fleurette, "a very Prince of Doctors!"

"Say, may I not then hope to be the doctor of the Princess?" he asked eagerly.

But Fleurette shook her head. "We must see how the finger is to-morrow morning. If it is quite healed then, perhaps— But hark! That is the Gardener's whistle. It is late, and I must return to the palace, or he will find us trespassing." And away she ran, before Joyeuse had time to say another word.

Now when the morrow arrived, Joyeuse sought Fleurette in the garden, long and long. But at last he found her among the lavender. Her finger indeed was healed, so that she smiled upon him, and she said,—

"Now you shall teach me to play the lute. The Princess, I know, would fain master the lute. But I must see first what sort of teacher you make before I take you to her."

So they sat down beside a marble fountain in the fairest part of the garden; and there Joyeuse taught her how to pluck the lute and to make sweet music. He taught her so well, and they passed the time so pleasantly, that they forgot how the hours were flying.

"Joyeuse, you are the very Prince of Teachers!" said Fleurette.

At that moment a shadow fell upon the grass beside them, and lo! there stood the head Gardener, who had heard the sound of the music, and had hurried to see who might be in the Princess's garden at this forbidden hour. The Princess gave a little cry, and without a word slipped away through an opening in the hedge that she knew, before the Gardener had a chance to see her face.

"Huh!" grunted the Gardener. "She has escaped, whoever she is. But we shall soon know her name. You shall tell us that and other things, you minstrel fellow."

"That I will never tell you!" cried Joyeuse.

"Huh! We shall see about that, too," retorted the Gardener surlily. "You shall not escape, Sirrah. I will take you to my lady the Princess, and you will have a chance to explain how you came to be here playing the lute in her garden at a forbidden hour. Come along!" And he advanced to seize Joyeuse by the collar. He was a huge, burly fellow, almost a giant in size.

But Joyeuse laid his hand on his sword and said: "Keep back, Gardener, and do not attempt to lay hands on me! I promise to follow wherever you may lead, but you shall not touch me to make me prisoner."

"Huh! A valiant minstrel!" sneered the Gardener. But he looked twice at the Stranger's flashing eyes and at his strong right arm, and decided to

accept his promise. At once he led the way through the winding paths of the garden until they came to the palace gate. Now Joyeuse was shut into a dark dungeon to wait the hour when the Princess was wont to hold council, to listen to the prayers of her suitors and the wishes of her people.

Poor Joyeuse! "This is the end of my happy time," he said to himself. "The Princess will now dismiss me, if she does no worse. She will have no charity for a trespasser in her garden, of which she is so jealous. I may not tell her how her fair maiden met me there and urged me to remain. I cannot tell; for that might bring trouble upon the flower-maiden, whom, alas, I may never see again!"

So he mused, wondering wistfully that she should have left him without a word. But there was no blame for her in his heart; he loved her so very dearly.

III

It was afternoon when the Gardener opened the cell of Joyeuse and bade him follow to the great hall of the palace where the Princess would hear his crime and appoint his punishment.

With a heavy heart he followed down the white marble corridors on the heels of the giant Gardener, who muttered to himself as they went. Now and then he would turn to look at Joyeuse and shake his head, as though foreseeing for him some dreadful punishment. At last they came to a great hall, carpeted with green and ceiled with blue, while the walls were of rosy pink. At the further end of the hall was a throne of gold; and upon it sat the Princess Fleurette. But Joyeuse dared not lift his eyes to look at her.

He walked slowly down the hall after the Gardener, and they took their stand near the throne, but behind the first rank of people. These were the gayly dressed attendants upon a great Prince, who had come that day to woo the Princess. Even at that moment the Herald was calling out his name and titles—"Fortemain, Prince of Kalabria, Knight of the Silver Feather, Captain of a hundred spears!" The Prince Fortemain himself bowed before the throne, while his attendants stood behind him, bearing most wonderful

gifts for the royal lady. There were caskets of jewels, pieces of rich silks and ermine fur, singing birds in cages, little monkeys, and other curious pets from far lands. There were never finer presents than those which the Prince Fortemain brought to the Princess Fleurette.

A chorus of "Ohs!" went up from the maids of honor when they saw the richness of these gifts. But Joyeuse dared not even look up to see if his flower-maiden were among the white-robed band. He feared to betray her to the fierce eyes of the Gardener, who was watching him closely.

The Prince Fortemain made his speech very prettily, offering the Princess his heart and hand, and all his riches, as well as his kingdom beyond the seas, to which he hoped to carry her.

Then the Princess spoke in answer, very gently. And the sound of her voice was like music in the hall.

"I have no wish to leave my own little kingdom of flowers," she said. "I am happy and contented here. I have no wish to exchange hearts, save with him who understands mine well. Let him find it where it is already bestowed, among my flowers. Choose my favorite flower, dear Prince, and I am yours."

At the sound of her voice Joyeuse started, and for the first time looked up. There she sat upon the golden throne,—his own dear flower-maiden, she who had met him for three mornings in the garden! But now she wore no coarse gown of green. She was robed all in white, from her head to her little feet, which were shod with gold. A golden girdle she wore, and a golden band confined her golden hair. She glanced at Joyeuse as she spoke the last words to the Prince, and Joyeuse was sure that her eyes twinkled. Instantly a bold thought came into his head, for he was a bold fellow. He had been brought to her as a trespasser, ready for punishment. He would remain as a suitor! This Princess was his little playmate; he could not, would not lose her. Had she not thrice called him a Prince? He would woo her, then, like any prince.

But now the Princess was speaking again, and this time she looked straight at him. "Whom have we here, good Gardener?" she asked, trying to force a little frown.

"A trespasser, your Highness," answered the Gardener, in his gruff voice, hustling Joyeuse to the foot of the throne, "a trespasser whom I found in your royal garden this morning at a disgustingly early hour, sitting with a fair maiden among the lavender, strumming on a lute. I saw not the face of the girl, but I fancy she must be one of your own maids of honor. She also should be punished for listening to the music of the wicked youth."

A little cry of horror arose from the gay group about the Princess, as they looked at one another, wondering who the shocking early-riser could be. The Princess looked sharply at Joyeuse and said: "Tell us the name of the maiden, Sirrah, and you shall be pardoned of your grievous fault."

Joyeuse looked up at the Princess and said gently: "Lady, I will tell her name to you, and to you alone, if you ask it; though I think that you guess it already. But first, I pray you, hear my suit. For I also have come hither as a suitor."

At these words the Princess started, and her cheek flushed. The Gardener seized Joyeuse by the arm to drag him away. But Fleurette made a sign for him to stand back.

"Let the Stranger speak," she said, "and let him show, if he can, why, instead of being punished, he should be welcomed as one of our suitors."

Then Joyeuse knelt on the lowest step of the throne and laid at his maiden's feet his sword and his lute and the scrip, or little pocket, which he wore at his side.

"Fair Princess," he said, "I come with scanty gifts and with no attendants—poor and alone. But all that I have I offer you; my sword for your protection, my music for your joy, my little learning for your aid in sickness and in health. To atone for my boldness in forcing your garden gate I offer the service of all these for as long as you will have them. And withal I offer my merry heart, as true and faithful as that of any prince in the world; but more loving than any."

At this saying the Prince Fortemain pushed forward indignantly. "You shall not listen to these idle words, O Princess!" he cried. "This fellow has no right to speak thus to you. He is no prince; he is but a wandering minstrel and vagabond. Let him be flogged from the gates."

"Ay, let him be flogged away!" echoed the Gardener and others, and they jostled closer as if to seize him. But Joyeuse still knelt at the feet of his flower-maiden, not at all afraid. The Princess rose, and, stamping her little foot, angrily commanded her people to be quiet. Then she spoke to Joyeuse, and the anger was gone from her voice.

"It is true you are no prince," she said. "What have you to say in reply to this Prince's word?"

"Am I no prince?" he answered, looking her straight in the eyes. "The fairest Princess in the world has thrice named me Prince,—Prince of Minstrels, Prince of Doctors, Prince of Teachers. Does not that make me a prince indeed?"

There was a silence in the hall at this bold answer. Then Fleurette beckoned to her the Wise Man of the court, a wise man dressed all in black, with a long white beard and hair like silver thistledown.

"O Wise Man, if a princess gave him these titles, is he indeed a prince?" she asked, and her voice was eager.

The Wise Man thought for a little time, then nodded gravely thrice. "Ay, my Princess, so it is written in the Book of True Chivalry. If he has been so honored, he is in deed and in degree a prince."

"Nay!" cried the Prince Fortemain, "I say nay! She has not also named him the Prince of Courage. The Book of True Chivalry declares that he is no very prince who cannot do battle nobly for his lady's sake."

"That will I gladly do," said Joyeuse eagerly. "I can wield sword as well as any prince alive."

The cheeks of the Princess glowed brightly. "Let him prove it, Prince Fortemain," she cried. "You shall punish him for his fault and for his boast if his words prove false. But if he bear himself the better man he shall be called a worthy suitor like yourself, and shall have an equal chance with you."

Fortemain grumbled and looked sulky, for he felt ashamed to fight with a wandering adventurer. But, since the Princess so commanded, there was

nothing for him but to obey. He drew his jeweled sword, and Joyeuse lifted his plain one from where it lay on the step of the throne. The courtiers made a ring around the two, and the bout began.

One—two! One—two! The bright blades flashed, and the two lads turned one about the other, seeking each the advantage. They were both skillful fencers; but the watchers soon saw that Joyeuse was the better man. Dextrously he thrust and warily he parried. At last, with a sudden jump and twist, he sent the weapon spinning from the hand of Fortemain. Away across the hall it flew; and, with red face and scowling brow, the Prince was forced to seek it where it fell.

"Well done! Well done!" cried the crowd, clapping their hands, forgetting the fault of Joyeuse in the wonder of his bravery. And "Well done!" cried Fleurette. "I, a Princess, name you in addition to your other titles the Prince of Courage. Arise, Prince Joyeuse. Your suit is answered thus, as I answer every prince who does me the honor to seek my hand. If you be the very Prince for me you will know where to find my heart. Seek it where it is hidden in my garden. *My heart is with my favorite flower.* Farewell, my Princes both. An hour before noontide to-morrow I will hold audience. Then he who is to be punished and he who is to be rewarded shall learn their fate."

Saying thus she rose and, stepping lightly down from the throne, passed out of the hall. Immediately all the lords and ladies followed her, leaving the two suitors alone together.

Then the Prince Fortemain scowled at Joyeuse, and Joyeuse scowled back at him; and they went out of the hall by opposite doors. For they loved not each other.

Joyeuse was moving slowly away when the Gardener approached and touched him on the shoulder. "How now, must I return to the dungeon as a criminal?" asked Joyeuse, flushing red.

"Nay. Matters have changed, my Lord Prince," answered the Gardener sulkily. "You seem no longer a trespasser, but a suitor. I do not understand how the seesaw has tilted so suddenly. But certainly you are to be lodged in no dungeon cell. My Lady has given orders that you be shown to a chamber

as fine as that of the Prince Fortemain himself. Come with me, if it please you."

Joyeuse was then taken to a little chamber, not high, but very pleasant, looking out upon the garden through a window latticed with vines.

"You are free to come and go, Master," said the Gardener, and left him with a low bow.

Now by the time all these things were finished it was late in the day, and Joyeuse said to himself: "I will not search for the precious flower to-night. I know that my dear flower-maiden prefers the early morning garden, and among the freshly opened buds which I have seen her caress so kindly must be the one she loves the best. I will now seek sleep, for I am very weary. But early will I waken to-morrow morning, to seek the flower which is most dear to her."

So Joyeuse lay down on his bed, and was soon asleep, dreaming sweetly of the morrow. For he nothing doubted but that he should find the right and only flower, since he loved the Princess so dearly that he must at last read her secret.

IV

But the Prince Fortemain had no such peace of mind. He was wounded in his princely pride because of having been defeated by the wandering Minstrel. He could not sleep; but, resolving to be beforehand with Joyeuse, went out into the garden by night and sought high and low for the flower-favorite of the Princess. For he said to himself: "The precious time has been almost spent by that luckless fight. And by the hour when I arise to-morrow it will be time to present myself before the Princess." (He was a lazy, loitering Prince; which was one reason for his sour temper, I suppose.) "I must, then, find the flower to-night, before that villain Minstrel does so."

Up and down the flowery paths went Fortemain, in and out among the sleeping blossoms. Most of them had their eyes shut tightly, and he could not see how beautiful they were. At last he came upon a white, heavy-scented tuberose gleaming in the moonlight, and it seemed to him the fairest

of all. "Ha!" he said, "this is the sweetest blossom. Surely this must be the favorite of the Princess Fleurette. I will pluck this, and to-morrow I will take it to her and claim her hand."

He gathered the tuberose and took it with him to his chamber. But even then the Prince Fortemain could not rest. The odor of the flower was heavy and sickening, and it gave him troublous dreams. All night wretchedly he tossed and turned, and there was no refreshment in his sleep.

Joyeuse woke in the morning fresh and happy and full of eagerness. He woke very early—earlier even than usual, when he had been wont to join the flower-maiden in her garden. He began to think of her, and how she had looked at different times when he had thus seen her. He remembered her the day before among the lavender; and before that among the roses, with their dangerous thorns; once among the lilies, herself as pure and white. "Surely, surely," he said to himself, "one of these three is her favorite flower." And he lay staring up at the ceiling, trying to remember which of all her posies she had seemed most to love. "Which one of them has her heart? How curiously she said it: '*My heart is with my favorite flower.*' Surely, she meant something more by the words than the first thought which they bring. What did she mean?"

At this moment Joyeuse glanced toward the window, where the morning sunlight streamed in gloriously. The vines about the lattice trembled in a passing breeze. One of them, reaching out a slender tendril-finger, seemed to beckon him. He half rose in bed, smiling at the thought. Lo! a little pink and white flower nodded at him over the window sill. It was a morning-glory. How pretty, how fresh, how fairy-like it was, with the dew in its cup, and with its little green leaves so graceful,—like pointed hearts!

Suddenly Joyeuse sat straight up in bed. Those heart-shaped leaves! The heart of the Princess Fleurette! Her favorite flower—was it not the morning-glory? Now he remembered how he had first seen her peering in at the little arbor, herself a pink and white flower on a green stem, with the blossom in her hair. He remembered how she had kissed the little cups and called them her darlings. How could he ever have forgotten! How dull he had been!

He sprang from the bed and ran eagerly to the window. He stretched out his hand to the blossom, not to pick it,—it was too early for that,—but to caress it for his maiden's sake. Leaning out to do so, he heard a little laugh beneath his window, and, looking down, he saw the green flower-maiden with whom he had played in the mornings, standing at the foot of the morning-glory vine, on which her hand rested lovingly. She was looking up, but when she met his eyes she turned and ran away, laughing softly as she disappeared from sight.

The time passed, all too slowly for Joyeuse. But at last came the hour for the trial. The Herald blew his trumpet, "Tan-tara-tara!" and the courtiers flocked to the hall to witness a ceremony the like of which they had seen so many times before that they were bored at the very thought. But because Joyeuse had first come as a prisoner and was now a suitor for their lady's hand, they were somewhat more interested than usual in the day's decision.

Weary with a heavy night and with evil dreams, the Prince Fortemain stood on one side of the throne with his white tuberose in his hand. But alas! The flower was as faded and weary looking as himself. Plucked so early before the trial, all its fragrance and beauty were gone; and Fortemain's heart sank as he looked at it, wondering if, after all, it could be the Princess's favorite flower. But it was now too late to select another. Indeed, he had but just risen when he heard the great bell toll its warning to be ready for the trial. He showed a hasty toilet, and a mind as ill-prepared.

Joyeuse, on the other hand, was as bright and brisk as the sun whose rising he had seen. His suit of green velvet was fair to view, and his eyes shone happily. In his hand he held a few inches of little vine, with leaf and tendril and at the side a single pale pink blossom. The courtiers eyed it curiously. Most of them had never before seen a morning-glory; and they tittered to think one should suppose so simple a flower could be the choice of a royal Princess.

Now the trumpet sounded again, and in came the Princess Fleurette, dressed in a beautiful robe of green silk, in which she looked more than ever like a wonderful flower. She mounted to her throne, looking down kindly upon her people, but merely glancing toward the two suitors who stood on either side of the dais.

"Now to the business of the day," she said. "I will listen to the choice which my two suitors have made. And you first, Prince Fortemain—how have you selected? Have you found the flower of my heart? Have you guessed my secret choice, and are you therefore to be my very ownest Prince?"

Prince Fortemain knelt at the foot of the throne and held out the withered tuberose somewhat ruefully.

"This, my Princess, is your favorite flower, I think. All over the garden I sought, and I deemed it best of all. This queen of the night is less beautiful by day; but in the moonlight it was very fair and sweet. I think your heart lies in this flower. Give it to me to wear alway, dear Princess." He spoke beseechingly, for indeed he loved her very dearly. But the Princess shook her head.

"Not so, O Prince," she said. "This flower of the night is not my dearest one. It is sweet, but its breath is heavy and cloying; it takes away sleep and fills the brain with stupor. Nay, you have not chosen wisely, as your own haggard looks show. You are not to be my Prince. You know not my heart. Farewell, Prince Fortemain."

Then Fortemain rose and turned away, as so many princes had done before him. He went out of the palace very sadly, and was nevermore seen in that place.

The Princess turned next to Joyeuse. "And what has our Prince of Wanderers chosen?" she asked. "How well does Joyeuse know the heart of Fleurette?"

"I have chosen thus," said the lad, as he knelt at the feet of the flower-maiden and held out to her the bit of vine, with its frail blossom. "The sweet and simple blossom of early morning; the favorite of the early-riser. This has your heart, O my Princess—see, its heart-shaped leaf! Have I not guessed aright?"

Then the Princess went down the steps of the throne and took the vine from the hand of Joyeuse and placed its flower in her hair. But her hand holding the heart-shaped leaf she placed within that of Joyeuse, and she said: "Prince Joyeuse, you have chosen well, because you know my heart,

and because you love what I love. You have guessed my secret. You found my heart among the morning-glories, and now it is yours forever. Take it, Prince Joyeuse, and with it my hand. I have yet to punish you for your fault in entering my garden at a forbidden hour. Your punishment shall be this: you shall without reward for a year and a day be my minstrel, my soldier, my teacher, my doctor. But from thenceforth forever you shall be my very ownest Prince, sharer of my kingdom of flowers. This is the doom and the decree which I pronounce."

Then she kissed him very sweetly, and, leading him up to the throne, they sat down side by side upon the golden chairs.

"Sing to them, my Minstrel," said the Princess. And he sang as she commanded, until the courtiers hugged one another for joy of his wondrous music. He sang a song of Fleurette and her heart like a flower. But he sang not the story of the flower-maiden, for that was a secret between him and the Princess, while they lived happily ever after.

From that time forward, each morning Joyeuse and Fleurette stole down into the garden while the others were yet asleep and enjoyed the flowers at their fairest. And no one, not even the surly Gardener, suspected anything about it, which was the greatest fun of all to the merry pair. Nor did any one ever hear aught of the tale until this day, when I tell it to you.

But it was a morning-glory which telephoned it to me this morning, very, very early, while lazy folk were abed.

THE LITTLE FRIEND

I

"OH! I am so cold, so cold!" sobbed little Pierre, as he stumbled through the snow which was drifting deep upon the mountain side. "Oh, I am so cold! The snow bites my face and blinds me, so that I cannot see the road. Where are all the Christmas candle-lights? The people of the village must have forgotten. The little Jesus will lose His way to-night. I never forgot to set our window at home full of lights on Christmas Eve. But now it is Christmas Eve, and there is no home any more. And I am so cold, so cold!"

Little Pierre sobbed again and stumbled in the snow, which was drifting deeper and deeper upon the mountain side. This was the stormiest Christmas Eve which had been seen for years, and all the little boys who had good homes were hugging themselves close to the fire, glad that they were not out in the bleak night. Every window was full of flickering tapers to light the expected Holy Child upon His way through the village to the church. But little Pierre had strayed so far from the road that he could not see these rows and rows of tiny earth-stars, any more than he could see through the snow the far-off sky-stars which the angels had lighted along the streets of heaven.

Pierre was on his way to the village from the orphan boys' home at the Abbé's charity school. And that was not like a happy real home, for the little Brothers were rough and rude and far from loving one another. He had started at dusk from the school, hoping to be at the village church before curfew. For Pierre had a sweet little voice, and he was to earn a few pennies by singing in the choir on Christmas morning. But it was growing late. The church would be closed and the Curé gone home before Pierre could reach it; and then what should he do?

The snow whirled faster and faster, and Pierre's legs found it harder and harder to move themselves through the great drifts. They seemed heavy and numb, and he was growing oh, so tired! If he could but lie down to sleep until Christmas Day! But he knew that he must not do that. For those who choose this kind of soft and tempting bed turn into ice-people, and do not wake up in the morning. So he bent his head and tried to plough on through the drifts.

Whish! A soft white thing flapped through the snow and struck Pierre in the face, so that he staggered and almost lost his balance. The next moment

he had caught the thing as it fell and was holding it tenderly in his numb hands. It was a beautiful dove, white as the snow from which it seemed to come. It had been whirled about by the storm until it had lost strength to fly, and it now lay quite still, with closed eyes. Pierre stroked the ruffled feathers gently and blew upon its cold body, trying to bring it back to life.

"Poor bird!" he said softly. "You are lost in the snow, like me. I will try to keep you warm, though I am myself a cold little body." He put the bird under his jacket, holding it close to his heart. Presently the dove opened its eyes and stirred feebly, giving a faint "Coo!"

"I wish I had something for you to eat, poor bird," said Pierre, forgetting his own cold and hunger. "If I could but take you into my own house and feed you as I used to feed the birds upon Christmas Eve! But now I have no home myself, and I can scarcely keep you warm."

Pierre shivered and tried to move forward. But the storm seemed to grow even fiercer, and the wind blew so keenly in his face that he could scarcely stand. "I cannot go another step," he said, and down he sank in the snow, which began to cover him with a downy blanket, pretending to be a careful mother. He hugged the bird closer and began to feel afraid. He knew that he was in great danger. "Dear Dove," he whispered, "I am sorry that I cannot save you. We shall turn into ice-images together. But I will keep you warm as long as I can." Then he closed his eyes, for he was very sleepy.

In a little while something made Pierre open his eyes. At first he could see only the whirling snow, which seemed to be everywhere. But presently he found that some one was bending over him, with face close to his; some one chubby and rosy and young,—a child like himself, but more beautiful than any child whom Pierre had ever seen. He stared hard at the face which seemed to smile at him through the snow, not minding the cold.

"You have my dove inside your coat," said the Child, pointing. "I lost her in the storm. Give her to me."

Pierre held his coat the closer. "She was cold," he answered. "She was dying in the snow. I am trying to keep her warm."

"But she is warm when she is with me, though I have no coat to wrap her in," said the Child. And, indeed, he was clad only in a little shirt, with his

rosy legs quite bare. Yet he looked not cold. A brightness glowed about him, and his breath seemed to warm the air. Pierre saw that, though it was still snowing beyond them, there were no whirling flakes between him and the Child.

The little Stranger held out his hand once more. "Please give me the dove," he begged. "I must hasten on my way to the village yonder. The dove strayed from my bosom and was lost. You found her here, far from the road. Thank you, little boy. Are you often so kind to poor lost birds?"

"Why, they are the Lord's own birds!" cried little Pierre. "How should one not be kind and love them dearly? On the Lord's birthday eve, too! It is little that I could do for this one,—I who have saved and fed so many on other Christmas Eves. Alas, I wish I was back in those good old days of the wheat-sheaf and the full pan of milk and the bright warm fire!" Pierre's eyes filled with tears.

"What! Did you set a sheaf of wheat for the birds on Christmas Eve?" asked the Child, drawing closer and bending kindly eyes upon Pierre.

Now the boy saw that where the Stranger stood the snow had melted all away, so that they were inclosed in a little space like a downy nest, which seemed almost warm to his limbs.

"Yes, I set out a wheat-sheaf," said Pierre simply. "Why not? I love all the little creatures whom our Lord Himself so dearly loved, and to whom He bade us be kind. On Christmas Eve especially I always tried to make happy those which He sent in my way,—poor little wanderers as well as our own friends at home."

The Child drew yet closer and sat down in the snow beside Pierre. His beautiful eyes shone like stars, and his voice was like sweet music. "What," he said, "you are the boy who stood in the doorway with a pan of bread and milk,—part of your own supper,—and called the hungry kitten to feast? You are the same who tossed a bone to the limping dog and made him a bed in the stable? You stroked the noses of the ox and the ass and said gentle things to them, because they were the first friends of the little Jesus? You set the sheaf of wheat for the snowbirds, and they lighted upon your hands and shoulders and kissed your lips in gratitude? You are that boy, friend of

God's friends. No wonder that my white dove flew to you out of the storm. She knew, she knew!"

The Child bent near and kissed Pierre on the cheeks, so that they grew rosy, and the warm blood went tingling through his little cold limbs. Sitting up, he said: "Yes, I am that boy who last year was so happy because he could do these pleasant things. But how do you know, little Stranger? How did you see?"

"Oh, I know, I saw!" cried the Child, gleefully clapping his hands as a child will. "I was there. I passed through the village last Christmas Eve, and I saw it all. But tell me now, how do you come here, dear boy? Why are you not in that happy home this stormy night, once more making the Lord's creatures happy?"

Pierre told all to the Child: how his dear father and mother had died and left him alone in the world; how the home had been sold, and now he lived in the charity school kept by the good Abbé; how he had learned of the chance to earn a few pennies by singing on Christmas Day in the neighboring village church, which lacked a voice among the choir-boys; how he was on his way thither when the storm had hidden the road, and he had grown so cold, so cold!

UNTIL HELP COMES

"Then your dove came to me, little Stranger," Pierre concluded. "She came, and I folded her in my jacket to keep her warm. But, do you know, it must be that she has kept *me* warm. Although I could walk no further, I am not cold at all, nor frightened, and no longer hungry. Sit close to me, little Stranger. You shall share my jacket, too, and we will all three warm one another."

The Child laughed again, a low, soft, silvery laugh, like a happy brook slipping over the pebbles. "I am not cold," he said. "I cannot stay with you. I must go yonder." And he pointed through the snow.

"Whither, oh, whither?" cried Pierre eagerly. "Let me go with you. I am lost; but if you know the way we can go together, hand in hand."

The Child shook his head. "Not so," he said. "I do not follow the path, and your feet would stumble. I shall find a way without sinking in the snow. I must go alone. But there is a better way for you. I leave my dove with you: she will keep you warm until help comes. Farewell, friend of the Lord's friends." Stooping the Child kissed Pierre once more, upon the forehead. Then, before the boy saw how he went, he had vanished from the little nest of snow, without leaving a footprint behind.

Now the dove, clasped close to Pierre's heart, seemed to warm him like a little fire within; and the Child's kiss on his forehead made him so happy, but withal so drowsy, that he smiled as he closed his eyes once more repeating, "'Until help comes.' 'There is a better way' for me."

II

On the side of the mountain, away from the village street, perched the little hut of Grandfather Viaud. And here, on Christmas Eve, sat the old man and his wife, looking very sad and lonely. For there was no sound of childish laughter in the little hut, no patter of small feet, no whispering of Christmas secrets. The little Viauds had long since grown up and flown away to build nests of their own in far-off countries. Poor Josef Viaud and old Bettine were quite alone this Christmas Eve, save for the Saint Bernard dog who was stretched out before the fire, covering half the floor with his huge bulk, like a furry rug. He was the very Prince of dogs, as his name betokened, and he was very good to Grandfather and Grandmother, who loved him dearly. But on Christmas Eve even the littlest cottage, crowded with the biggest tenants, seems lonely unless there are children in the corners.

The Viauds sat silently gazing into the fire, with scarcely a word for each other, scarcely a caress for faithful Prince. Indeed, the great dog himself seemed to know that something was lacking, and every once in a while would lift his head and whine wistfully.

In each of the two small windows burned a row of candles, flickering in the draught that blew down the great chimney and swept through the little chamber. And these, with the crackling blaze upon the hearth, sent queer shadows quivering up the smoky walls.

Grandfather Viaud looked over his shoulder as a great gust blew the ashes into the room. "Hey!" he cried. "I almost fancied the shadow of one looking in at the window. Ha, ha! What foolishness! Eh! but it is a fearsome storm. Pray the good Lord that there may be no poor creatures wandering on the mountain this night."

"The Lord's birthday, too!" said Grandmother Bettine. "The dear little Child has a cold way to come. Even He might become confused and be driven to wander by such a whirl of snow. I am glad that we set the tapers there, Josef, even though we be so far from the village street down which they say He passes. How pleasant to think that one might give light to His blessed feet if they were wandering from the way,—the dear little Child's feet, so rosy and soft and tender!" And good Grandmother Viaud dropped a tear upon her knitting; for she remembered many such little feet that had once pattered about the cottage floor. Prince lifted his head and seemed to listen, then whined as he had done before.

"You are lonely, old fellow, are you not?" quavered old Josef. "You are waiting for the children to come back and make it merry, as it used to be in the old days when you were a pup. Heigho! Those were pleasant days, but they will never come again, Prince. We are all growing old, we three together."

"Ah, peace, Josef, peace!" cried old Bettine, wiping her eyes again. "It is lonely enough and sad enough, God knows, without speaking of it. What use to sigh for that which cannot be? If the good Lord wished us to have a comforter in our old age, doubtless He would send us one. He knows how we have longed and prayed that a child's feet might echo through our house once more: how we have hoped from year to year that one of the grandchildren might return to bless us with his little presence." At this moment Prince jumped to his feet with a low bark, and stood trembling, with pointed ears.

"What dost thou hear, old dog?" asked the Grandfather carelessly. "There is naught human abroad this night, I warrant you. All wise folk are hugging the fire like us. Only those bad spirits of Christmas Eve are howling about for mischief, they say. Best keep away from the door, old Prince, lest they nip your toes or bite your nose for spite."

"Hush!" cried the Grandmother, laying her hand upon his arm. "You forget: there is the Other One abroad. It may be that He—"

She was interrupted by Prince, who ran eagerly to the door and began sniffing at the latch in great excitement. Then he gave a long, low howl. At the same moment the latch rattled, and the Viauds distinctly heard a little voice cry, "Open, open, good people!"

The old couple looked at each other; the cheeks of one flushed, and the other's paled. At the same moment they rose stiffly from their chairs by the fire. But Grandmother Bettine was first at the door. She lifted the latch, the door blew open violently, and with a loud bark Prince dashed out into the storm.

"What is it? Who is there?" cried Josef Viaud, peering over his wife's shoulder. But no one answered save the rough storm, which fiercely blew into the faces of the old couple, whirling and screaming about their heads. "H'm! It was only a fancy," muttered the old man. "Come in, Mother. Come, Prince!" and he whistled out into the storm. But the wind whistled too, drowning his voice, and Prince did not return. "He is gone!" cried Josef impatiently. "It is some evil spirit's work."

"Nay, Father!" and, as she spoke, the door banged violently in Josef's face, as if to emphasize the good wife's rebuke. "It was a little child; I heard it," insisted Bettine, as they staggered back to the fire and sank weakly into their chairs. "Perhaps it was the Holy Child Himself, who knows? But why would He not enter? Why, Josef? Oh, I fear we were not good enough!"

"I only know that we have perhaps lost our good dog. Why did you open the door, Bettine?" grumbled Josef sleepily.

"Prince is not lost. For what was he bred a snow-dog upon the mountains if a storm like this be danger to him? He is of the race that rescues, that finds and is never lost. Mayhap the Holy Child had work for him this night. Ah, the Little One! If I could but have seen Him for one moment!" And good Bettine's head nodded drowsily on her chair-back. Presently the old couple were fast asleep.

Now when they had been dreaming strange things for some time, there came a scratching at the door, and a loud bark which woke them suddenly.

"What was that?" exclaimed Grandfather, starting nervously. "Ho, Prince! Are you without there?" and he ran to the door, while Grandmother was still rubbing from her eyes the happy dream which had made them moist,—the dream of a rosy, radiant Child who was to be the care and comfort of a lonely cottage. And then, before she had fairly wakened from the dream, Prince bounded into the room and laid before the fire at her feet a soft, snow-wrapped bundle, from which hung a pale little face with golden hair.

"It is the Child of my dream!" cried Bettine. "The Holy One has come back to us."

"Nay, this is no dream-child, mother. This is a little human fellow, nearly frozen to death," exclaimed Josef Viaud, pulling the bundle toward the fire. "Come, Bettine, let us take off his snow-stiff clothes and get some little garments from the chests yonder. I will give him a draught of something warm, and rub the life into his poor little hands and feet. We have both been dreaming, it seems. But certainly this is no dream!"

"Look! The dove!" cried Grandmother, taking the bird from the child's bosom, where it still nestled, warm and warming. "Josef! I believe it is indeed the Holy Child Himself," she whispered. "He bears a dove in his bosom, like the image in the Church." But even as she spoke the dove fluttered in her fingers, then, with a gentle "Coo-roo!" whirled once about the little chamber and darted out at the door, which they had forgotten quite to close. With that the child opened his eyes.

"The dove is gone!" he cried. "Yet I am warm. Why—has the little Stranger come once more?" Then he saw the kind old faces bent over him, and felt Prince's warm kisses on his hands and cheeks, with the fire flickering pleasantly beyond.

"It is like coming home again!" he murmured, and with his head on Bettine's shoulder dropped comfortably to sleep.

On the morrow all the village went to see the image of the Christ Child lying in a manger near the high altar of the church. It was a sweet little Child in a white shirt, clasping in his hands a dove. They believed him to have come in the stormy night down the village street. And they were glad that their pious candles in the windows had guided Him safely on the road. But little Pierre, while he sang in the choir, and his adopted parents, the Viauds, kneeling happily below, had sweet thoughts of a dream which had brought them all together.

Who knows but that Prince at home happily guarding Pierre's snow-wet old shoes—who knows but that Prince was dreaming the happiest dream of all? For only Prince knew how and where and under what guidance he had found the little friend of the Lord's friends sleeping in the snow, with but a white dove in his bosom to keep him from becoming a boy of ice.

THE MERMAID'S CHILD

IN the rocks on the seashore, left bare by the tide, one often finds tiny pools of water fringed with seaweed and padded with curious moss. These are the cradles which the Mermaids have trimmed prettily for the sea-babies, and where they leave the little ones when they have to go away on other business, as Mermaids do. But one never spies the sea-children in their cradles, for they are taught to tumble out and slip away into the sea if a human step should approach. You see, the fishes have told the Mer-folk cruel tales of the Land-people with their nets and hooks and lines.

In the softest, prettiest little cradle of all a Sea-child lay one afternoon crying to himself. He cried because he was lonesome. His mother did not love him as a baby's mother should; for she was the silliest and the vainest of all the Mermaids. Her best friend was her looking-glass of polished pearl, and her only care was to remain young and girlish. Indeed, she bore her thousand-odd years well, even for a Mermaid. She liked the Sea-baby well enough, but she was ashamed to have him follow her about as he loved to do, because she imagined it made her seem old to be called "Mer-mother" by his lisping lips. She never had time to caress or play with him; and finally she forbade him ever to speak to her unless she spoke first. Sometimes she seemed to forget him altogether, as she left him to take care of himself, while she sat on the rocks combing her long green hair, or playing with the giddy Mermen in the caves below the sea.

So while the other sea-people sported or slept and were happy, her poor little Sea-child lay and cried in the green pool where the sea-anemones tickled his cheek with their soft fingers, seeking to make him laugh, and the sea-fringe curled about the scaly little tail which, like a fish, he had in place of legs. On this particular afternoon he was particularly lonesome.

"Ahoo!" he sobbed. "I am so unhappy! Ahoo! I want some one to love me very much!"

Now a kind old Stork was sitting on a rock above the baby's head, preening his feathers in a looking-glass pool. He heard the Sea-child's

words, and he spoke in his kind, gruff voice.

"What is the matter, little one?" he asked.

At first the Sea-child was surprised to be addressed by a land bird. But he soon saw that this creature was friendly, and told him all his trouble, as babies do. "Tut tut!" said the Stork, frowning. "Your Mer-mother needs a lesson sadly."

"What is a lesson?" lisped the Sea-child.

But the Stork was busy thinking and did not reply at once. "How would you like a change?" he asked after a time.

"What is a change?" asked the baby, for he was very young and ignorant.

"You shall see," answered the Stork, "if you will take my advice; for I am your friend. Now listen. When next you hear a step upon the rocks do not stir from your cradle, but wait and see what will happen." Without another word the Stork flapped away, leaving the baby to stare up at the blue sky with the tears still wet upon his cheeks, wondering what the Stork could have meant.

"I will not stir," he said to himself. "Whatever happens I will wait and see."

It was the Stork's business to bring babies to the homes where babies were needed; and sometimes it was very hard to find babies enough. Even now he knew of a house upon the hill where a boy was longing for a little brother to play with. Every night Gil mentioned the matter in his prayers; every night he begged the Stork to bring him a playmate. But though the Stork had hunted far and wide through all the land he could not find a human baby to spare for the cottage on the hill. Now he had a happy idea.

With his long legs dangling he flew swiftly up towards the hill; and halfway there he met the boy wandering about sulkily all alone. The Stork had never before spoken to this boy, because he well knew what Gil wanted, and he hated to be teased for what he could not give. So, though he had listened sadly to the boy's prayers, by day he had kept carefully out of

sight. But now he came close overhead, and settling down stood upon one leg directly in Gil's path.

"Good-afternoon," he said. "I think I have heard you say that you wanted a little brother."

Gil was surprised to have a Stork address him like this, but he was still more pleased at the happy word. "I do! Oh, I do indeed!" he cried.

"Would you make a good brother to him?" asked the Stork.

"Oh yes!" answered the boy eagerly. "A very good brother I should be."

"H'm," said the Stork. "One never can tell about these boys. I think you are selfish and jealous. But a little brother may be a good thing for you. In any case, there is little for him to lose. Will you be so good as to come with me?"

Without another word the Stork flew up and away toward the beach, leaving Gil staring. This certainly was a most extraordinary bird! But Gil soon decided to follow him and see what would happen, for who could tell what the Stork's mysterious words might mean?

Presently, lying in his little cradle, the Sea-child heard the sound of feet scrambling up the rocks,—the sound he had been taught to fear more than anything in the world. It was his first thought to flop out of the cradle, over into the sea below; and he half turned to do so. But in a moment he remembered the Stork's last words, and although he was trembling with fear he remained where he was.

Soon over the top of the rock peered the face of the boy, Gil of the hill cottage, looking straight down into the pool where the Sea-baby lay snugly on the seaweed.

"Oh!" cried the boy, with round black eyes fixed upon the baby's round blue ones. "Oh!" cried the Sea-child. And it would be hard to say which of the two was more astonished. For to a Sea-child the sight of a clothed, two-legged land-boy is quite as strange as a naked little fish-tailed infant is to a human. But after the first look neither felt afraid, in spite of the terrible tales which each had heard of the other's kind. They stared wistfully at each

other, not knowing what to do next, until the Stork came forward and spoke wise words.

"You, land-boy Gil," he said, "you want a little brother, do you not?" Gil nodded. "And you, Sea-child, want some one to love you? I think I can manage to please you both. But first you must kiss each other."

Gil hesitated. He was a big boy of five or six, too old for kissing. Moreover the Sea-child looked cold and wet and somewhat fishy. But already the red lips of the little fellow were pouted into a round O, and the sad blue eyes were looking up at him so pleadingly that Gil bent low over the watery cradle. Then two little soft arms went about his neck, and Gil felt the heart of the Sea-child thump happily against his own.

"Very good," said the Stork approvingly.

The Sea-child could not stand, on account of having no feet, but he lay in his pool holding Gil's hand.

"Now the change is coming," went on the Stork, and as he spoke the baby began to fall asleep. "In twelve hours," he said to Gil, "he will become a tiny human child, and I shall carry him to the house on the hill, where he will find a loving family awaiting him. Look! Already he is losing the uniform of the sea," and he pointed at the Sea-child's fishy tail. Sure enough, the scales were falling away one by one, and already the shape of two little chubby legs could be seen under the skin, which was shrinking as a tadpole's does before he becomes a frog. "When this tail is wholly gone," declared the Stork, "he will forget what we have said to-night. He will forget his sea-home and the caves of the Mer-people. He will forget that he was once a Sea-child; and no one will ever remind him. For only you, Gil, and I shall know the secret."

"And I shall never tell," declared Gil.

"No, surely you will never tell," answered the Stork gravely, "for if you tell that will be the end of all. You will lose the little brother, and you will be sorry all the rest of your life. Do not forget, Gil. Do not forget."

"I shall not forget," said Gil.

Again they looked at the Sea-child, and he had fallen sound asleep, still holding Gil's hand. Now there was scarcely anything of the fish left about his little pink body; he was growing younger and younger, smaller and smaller.

"You must go home now, Gil," said the Stork. "Go home and go to bed. And to-morrow when you wake there will be a little brother in the house, and you ought to be a very good boy because you have your wish."

Gil gently loosened the Sea-child's hand and ran home as the Stork bade him, but said no word of all this to any one.

Now early in the morning the Stork came to the house on the hill, bringing a rosy little new baby which he laid on the bed beside Gil's mother, and then flew away. What a hullabaloo there was then, to be sure! What a welcome for the little stranger! Gil was not the only one who had longed for a new baby in the house, and this was the prettiest little fellow ever seen. Loudest of all cheered Gil when he saw the present which the Stork had brought. "Hurrah for my little new brother!" he cried. "Now I shall have some one to play with." That was Gil's chief thought: now he would have some one to play with.

They called the baby's name Jan. And from the first little Jan was very happy in his new home. He was happy all day in his mother's arms; happy when his foster-father came home at night and tossed him high to the ceiling; happiest of all when Gil held him close and begged him to hurry and grow up, so that they could play together.

Little Jan did hurry to grow up, as fast as health and strength and happiness could make a baby grow. He grew bigger and bigger, handsomer and handsomer, the finest baby in the village, and his family loved him dearly. Every day he became more of a playmate for Gil, whom he admired more than any one in the world. Gil petted and teased the little fellow, who, as soon as he could walk, began to follow him about like a faithful dog. Grand times the brothers had together then. They dug in the sand on the seashore, and scrambled about the cliffs. They rowed out in the harbor boats with hooks and lines, and played at being fishermen like their father, who sailed away early and came home late. They grew bigger and sturdier and

handsomer, and their parents were very proud of them both, the finest lads in all the country round.

The years went by, and during all this time Jan never dreamed the truth which only Gil and the Stork knew about the bargain made at the sea-pool cradle. To Jan, indeed, the sea was full of strange thoughts which were not memories but were like them. He loved to look and listen alone upon the water, or in the water, or by the water. Gil often caught him staring down into the blue waves, and when he raised his head there would be a puzzled look in the little fellow's blue eyes, as though he were trying to solve a riddle. Then Gil would laugh; whereat the wrinkle would smooth itself from Jan's forehead, and a smile would come about his mouth. He would throw his arm about his brother's shoulder, saying,—

"What strange thing is it, brother, that the old sea does to me? I think sometimes that I am bewitched." But Gil would only laugh again, thinking his own thoughts. It gave him a pleasant important feeling to know that he was the keeper of Jan's secret.

Meantime what had become of the Sea-baby's forgotten mother? What was the pretty Mermaid doing in her home under the waves? She was learning the lesson which the Stork had meant to teach.

At first she had not greatly missed the Sea-baby, having other things to interest her in the lovely world where she lived. But as the sea-days went by she began to find the grotto which had been their pretty home a very lonely place indeed. She missed the little fellow playing with the shells and starfish on the floor of shining sand. She longed to see him teasing the crabs in the crevices of the rocks, or tickling the sea-anemones to make them draw in their waving fingers. She missed the round blue eyes which used to look at her so admiringly, and the little hands which had once wearied her with their caresses. She even missed the mischievous tricks which the baby sometimes used to play upon his mother, and she would have been glad once more to see him running away with her pearly mirror, or with the golden comb with which she combed her long green hair.

As she watched the other sea-children playing merrily with the fishes the lonely Mermaid grew very sad, for she knew that her own baby had been the prettiest of them all, and she wondered how she could ever have been

ashamed of him. The other mothers were proud of their darlings, and now they scorned her because she had no little one to hold her mirror when she made her toilet, or to run her errands when she was busy at play. But the poor Mermaid was too sad to play nowadays. She no longer took any pleasure in the gay life which the Mer-folk lived beneath the waves. She wandered instead here and there, up and down the sea, calling, calling for her lost baby. The sound of her sobbing came from the sea at morning, noon, and night.

She did not know her child's fate, but she feared that he had been captured by the dreadful Men-folk, who, so her people said, were ever seeking to snare the sea-creatures in their wicked nets. Day after day the unhappy Mermaid swam along the shore trying to see the places where the Men-folk dwelt, hoping that she might catch a glimpse of her lost darling. But that good hap never befell her. Indeed, even if she had seen Jan, she would not have known her baby in the sturdy boy dressed all in blue, like the other fisher-lads. Nor would Jan have known his mother in this beautiful creature of the sea. For he had quite forgotten the Mermaid who had neglected him, and if he thought of the Mer-folk at all it was as humans do, with wonder and with longing, and yet with fear.

Now the good old Stork who had first meddled in these matters kept one eye upon the doings in that neighborhood, and he had seen the sorrowful Mermaid wandering lonely up and down the shore. He knew it must be the Sea-child's mother, sorry at last for her long carelessness. As the years passed he began to pity the poor creature; but when he found himself growing too soft-hearted he would shake his head firmly and say to himself,

"It will not do. She is not yet punished enough, for she was very cruel. If now she could have her baby again she would soon be as thoughtless as ever. Besides, there is my promise to Gil. So long as he keeps the secret so must I."

But one day, several years later, when the Stork was flying over the harbor, he spied the Mermaid lying upon a rock over which the waves dashed merrily, and she was weeping bitterly, tearing her lovely green hair. She looked so pretty and so forlorn that the bird's kind heart was touched,

and he could not help stopping to comfort her a bit. Flying close to her head he said gently,—

"Poor Mermaid! What is the matter?"

"Oh, oh!" wailed the Mermaid. "Long, long ago I lost my pretty little Sea-child, and he is not to be found anywhere, anywhere in the whole sea, for I have looked. I have been from ocean to ocean, from pole to pole. Oh, what shall I do? He is on the land, I know he is, and the wicked humans are ill-treating him."

The Stork spoke slowly and gravely. "Was he so happy, then, in his sea-home? Did you love him and care for him very dearly?"

"No, no!" sobbed the Mermaid. "I did not love him enough. I did not make him happy. I neglected him and found him in the way, till one day he disappeared, and I shall never see him again. Oh, my baby, my little Sea-child!"

The Stork wiped a tear from his eye. "It is very sad," he said. "But perhaps it will comfort you to know that he is not far away."

"Oh!" cried the Mermaid, clasping her hands. "You know where he is? You will bring him back to me? Dear, dear Stork! I will give you a necklace of pearls and a necklace of coral if you will bring my baby to me again."

The Stork smiled grimly, looking down at his long neck. "A necklace of pearls and a necklace of coral!" he repeated. "How becoming they would be!" Then he grew grave once more and said: "I cannot return your child to you, but I can tell you something of him. He is indeed among the humans, but he is very happy there. They love him and he loves them, and all is well—so far."

"Oh, show him to me that I may take him away!" cried the Mermaid.

YOU WILL BRING HIM BACK TO
ME?

But the Stork shook his head. "No, no, for you deserted him," he said solemnly; "now he has another mother in yonder village who loves him

better than you did. He has a brother, also, whom he loves best of all. You cannot claim him so long as he is happy there."

"Then shall I never see him again, wise Bird?" asked the Mermaid sadly.

"Perhaps," answered the Stork. "If he should become unhappy, or if the secret should be betrayed."

"Ah, then I must be again a cruel mother and hope that he may become unhappy," sobbed the Mermaid. "I shall look for him every day in the harbor near the village, and when his face is sad I shall claim him for my own."

"You will not know him," cried the Stork, rising on his wings and flapping away. "He wears a disguise. He is like a human,—like any other fisher-boy; and he bears a human name."

"Oh, tell me that name!" begged the Mermaid.

But the Stork only cried, "I must not tell. I have told too much already," and he was gone.

"Oh, then I will love all fisher-boys for his sake," sobbed the Mermaid as she dived down into the sea. "And some day, some day I shall find him out; for my baby is sure to be the finest of them all."

Now the years went by, and the parents of Gil and Jan were dead. The two brothers were tall and sturdy and stout, the finest lads in the whole country. But as their shadows grew taller and broader when they walked together across the sand, so another shadow which had begun to fall between them grew and grew. It was the shadow of Gil's selfishness and jealousy. So long as Jan was smaller and weaker than he, Gil was quite content, and never ceased to be grateful for the little brother who had come to be his playmate. But suddenly, as it seemed, he found that Jan was almost as big as himself; for the boy had thriven wondrously, though there were still several years which Jan could never make up. Gil was still the leader, but Jan was not far behind; and Jan himself led all the other boys when his brother was not by. Every one loved Jan, for he was kind and merry, while Gil was often gloomy and disagreeable. Gil wanted to be first in everything, but there began to be some things that Jan could do better than he. It made

Gil angry to hear his brother praised; it made him sulky and malicious, and sometimes he spoke unkindly to Jan, which caused the blue eyes to fill with tears. For, big fellow though he was, Jan was five years younger, and he was a sensitive lad, loving Gil more than anything else in the world. Gil's unkindness hurt Jan deeply, but could not make him love his brother less.

Both boys were famous swimmers. Gil was still the stronger of the two, and he could outswim any lad in town. As for Jan, the fishermen declared that he took to the water like a fish. No one in all the village could turn and twist, dive and glide and play such graceful pranks, flashing whitely through the waves, as did Jan. This was a great trouble to Gil, who wished to be foremost in this as in everything else. He was a selfish fellow; he had wanted a playmate to follow and admire him. He had not bargained for a comrade who might become a rival. And he seemed to love his brother less and less as the days went by.

One beautiful summer day Gil and Jan called together the other boys, the best swimmers in the village, and they all went down to the bay to swim. They played all sorts of water-games, in which the two brothers were leaders. They dived and floated and chased one another like fishes through the water. Jan, especially, won shouts of applause for his wonderful diving, for the other boys liked him, and were proud of him, glad to see him win. This again made Gil jealous and angry. Jan dived once more and remained under water so long that the boys began to fear that he would never come up; and in his wicked heart Gil half hoped that it was to be so. For it had come about that Gil began to wish he had no brother at all. So different was he from the boy who made the eager bargain with the good old Stork.

At last Jan's head came out of the water, bubbling and blowing, and the boys set up a cheer. Never before had any one in the village performed such a feat as that. But Jan did not answer their cheers with his usual merry laugh. Something was troubling him which made him look strange to the others. As soon as he reached the shore he ran up to Gil and whispered in his brother's ear a curious story.

"Oh, Gil!" he cried. "Such a strange feeling I have had! Down below there as I was swimming along I seemed to hear a strange sound like a cry, and then, surely, I felt something cling close to me, like soft arms. Gil, Gil,

what could it have been? I have heard tell of the Mermaidens who are said to live in these waters. Some even say that they have seen them afar off on the rocks where the spray dashed highest. Gil, could it have been a Mermaid who touched me and seemed to pull me down as if to keep me under the water forever? I could hardly draw away, Gil. Tell me what you think it means?"

Gil was too angry at Jan's success to answer kindly. He sneered, remembering the secret which only he and the Stork knew.

"There are slimy folk, half fish and half human, people say. The less one has to do with them the better. I think you are half fish yourself, Jan. It is no credit to you that you are able to swim!" So spoke Gil, breaking the promise which he had once given.

On the minute came a hoarse cry overhead, and a great Stork flapped down the sky, fixing his sharp eyes upon Gil, as if in warning.

"Why, how strangely the Stork acts!" cried Jan.

Gil bit his lip and said no more, but from that moment he hated his brother wickedly, knowing that the Stork was still watching over the child whom he had taken from the sea.

But Jan had no time to ask Gil what he meant by the strange words which he had just spoken, for at that moment several of the boys came running up to them. "Ho, Gil! Ho, Jan!" they cried. "Let us have a race! Come, let us swim out to the Round Rock and back. And the winner of this race shall be champion of the village. Come, boys, make ready for the race!"

Gil's face brightened, for he had ever been the strongest swimmer on the bay, and now he could afford to be kind to poor Jan, whose blue eyes were clouded and unhappy, because of Gil's former harsh words and manner.

"Ho! The race, the race!" cried Gil. "Come, Jan, you can dive like a fish. Now let us see how you can swim. One, two, three! We are off!"

The boys sprang, laughing, into the water. Jan needed but a kind word from his brother to make him happy again. Off they started for the Round

Rock, where the spray was dashing high.

The black heads bobbed up and down in the waves, drawing nearer and nearer to the rock. Gradually they separated, and some fell behind. The lads could not all keep up the gay strokes with which they had begun the race. Four held the lead; Boise and Cadoc, the lighthouse-keeper's sons, Gil, and Jan.

Almost abreast they rounded the rock, and began the long stretch back to the beach. Soon Boise began to fall behind. In a little while Cadoc's strength failed also. They shouted, laughingly, that they were fairly beaten, and those who were on shore began to cry encouragement to the two brothers, who alone were left in the race.

"Gil! Jan! Oh, Gil! Oh, Jan! Hasten, lads, for one of you is the champion. Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Gil was in high spirits, for he was still in the lead. "Hurry, little brother," he cried, "or I shall beat you badly. Oho! You can dive, but that is scarcely swimming, my fine lad. You had better hurry, or I win."

And Jan did hurry. He put forth all his strength as he had never done before. Soon the black heads bobbed side by side in the water, and Gil ceased to laugh and jest, for it was now a struggle in good earnest. He shut his teeth angrily, straining forward with all his might. But push as he would, Jan kept close beside. At last, when within a few yards of the beach, Jan gave a little laughing shout and shot through the water like a flash. He had been saving his strength for this,—and he had won!

The other boys dragged him up the beach with shouts and cheers of welcome to the new champion, while Gil, who had borne that title for so long, crawled ashore unaided.

"Hurrah for Jan!" they cried, tossing their caps and dancing happily, for Jan was a great favorite. "Hurrah for the little brother! Now Gil must take the second place. You are the big brother now!" And they laughed and jeered at Gil,—not maliciously, but because they were pleased with Jan.

Jan ran to Gil and held out his hand for his brother's congratulations, but Gil thrust it aside. "It was not a fair race!" he sputtered. "Unfair, unfair, I

vow!"

The others gathered around, surprised to see Gil so angry and with such wild eyes.

"Gil, oh, Gil! What do you mean?" cried Jan, turning very pale. "Why was it not a fair race, brother?"

"Brother! You are no brother of mine!" shouted Gil, beside himself with rage. "You are a changeling,—half fish, half sea-monster. You were helped in this race by the sea-people; you cannot deny it. I saw one push you to the shore. You could not have beaten me else. Every one knows that I am the better swimmer, though I am no fish."

"Nonsense!" cried Boise, clapping Gil on the shoulder with a laugh. "You talk foolishness, Gil. There are no sea-folk in these waters; those are old women's tales. It was a fair race, I say, and Jan is our champion."

But Jan heeded only the cruel words which his brother had spoken. "Gil, what do you mean?" he asked again, trembling with a new fear. "I was not helped by any one."

"Ha!" cried Gil, pointing at him fiercely, "see him tremble, see his guilty looks! He knows that I speak true. The Mermaid helped him. He is half fish. He came out of the sea and was no real brother of mine, but a Merbaby. A Mermaid was his mother!"

At these words a whirring sound was heard in the air overhead, and a second time the Stork appeared, flapping across the scene out to sea, where he alighted upon the Round Rock. But Gil was too angry even to notice him.

"Gil, Gil, tell me how this can be?" begged Jan, going up to his brother and laying a pleading hand upon his arm.

But Gil shook him off, crying, "It is true! He is half fish and the sea-folk helped him. It was not a fair race. Let us try it again."

"Nonsense!" cried the other boys indignantly. "It was a fair race. Jan need not try again, for he is our champion. We will have it so."

But Jan was looking at Gil strangely, and the light was gone out of his eyes. His face was very white. "I did not know that you cared so much to win," he said to Gil in a low voice. Then he turned to the others. "If my brother thinks it was not a fair race let us two try again. Let us swim once more to the Round Rock and back; and the winner shall be declared the village champion." For Jan meant this time to let his brother beat. What did he care about anything now, since Gil hated him so much that he could tell that story?

"Well, let them try the race again, since Jan will have it so," cried the boys, grumbling and casting scornful looks at Gil, who had never been so unpopular with them as at this moment.

Once more the two sprang into the waves and started for the Round Rock, where the spray was dashing merrily over the plumage of the Stork as he stood there upon one leg, trying not to mind the wetness which he hated. For he was talking earnestly with a pretty Mermaid who sat on the rock in the surf, wringing her hands.

"It is he! It is he!" she cried. "I know him now. It is the lad whom they call *Jan*, the finest swimmer of them all. Oh, he dives like a fish! He swims like a true Sea-child. He is my own baby, my little one! I followed, I watched him. I could hardly keep my hands from him. Tell me, dear Stork, is he not indeed my own?"

The Stork looked at her gravely. "It is no longer a secret," he said, "for Jan has been betrayed. He who is now Jan the unhappy mortal boy was once your unhappy Sea-baby."

"Unhappy! Oh, is he unhappy?" cried the Mermaid. "Then at last I may claim him as you promised. I may take him home once more to our fair sea-home, to cherish him and make him happier than he ever was in all his little life. But tell me, dear Stork, will he not be my own little Sea-child again? I would not have him in his strange, ugly human guise, but as my own little fish-tailed baby."

"When you kiss him," said the Stork, "when you throw your arms about his neck and speak to him in the sea-language, he will become a Sea-child once more, as he was when I found him in his cradle on the rocks. But look!

Yonder he comes. A second race has begun, and they swim this way. Wait until they have turned the rock, and then it will be your turn. Ah, Gil! You have ill kept your promise to me!"

Yes, the race between the brothers was two thirds over. Side by side as before the two black heads pushed through the waves. Both faces were white and drawn, and there was no joy in either. Gil's was pale with anger, Jan's only with sadness. He loved his brother still, but he knew that Gil loved him no more.

They were nearing the shore where the boys waited breathlessly for the end of this strange contest. Suddenly Jan turned his face towards Gil and gave him one look. "You will win, brother," he breathed brokenly, "my strength is failing. You are the better swimmer, after all. Tell the lads that I confess it. Go on and come in as the champion."

He thought that Gil might turn to see whether he needed aid. But Gil made no sign save to quicken his strokes, which had begun to lag, for in truth he was very weary. He pushed on with only a desire to win the shore and to triumph over his younger brother. With a sigh Jan saw him shoot ahead, then turning over on his back he began to float carelessly. He would not make another effort. It was then that he saw the Stork circling close over his head; and it did not seem so very strange when the Stork said to him,—

"Swim, Jan! You are the better swimmer; you can beat him yet."

"I know; but I do not wish to beat," said Jan wearily. "He would only hate me the more."

"There is one who loves you more than ever he did," said the Stork gently. "Will you go home to your sea-mother, the beautiful Mermaid?"

"The Mermaid!" cried Jan; "then it is true. My real home is not upon the shore?"

"Your real home is here, in the waves. Beneath them your mother waits."

"Then I need not go back to that other home," said Jan, "that home where I am hated?"

"Ah, you will be loved in this sea-home," said the Stork. "You will be very happy there. Come, come, Mermaid! Kiss your child and take him home."

Then Jan felt two soft arms come around his neck and two soft lips pressed upon his own. "Dear child!" whispered a soft voice, "come with me to your beautiful sea-home and be happy always." A strange, drowsy feeling came over him, and he forgot how to be sad. He felt himself growing younger and younger. The world beyond the waves looked unreal and odd. He forgot why he was there; he forgot the race, the boys, Gil, and all his trouble. But instead he began to remember things of a wonderful dream. He closed his eyes; the sea rocked him gently, as in a cradle, and slowly, slowly, with the soft arms of the Mermaid about him, and her green hair twining through his fingers, he sank down through the water. As he sank the likeness of a human boy faded from him, and he became once more a fresh, fair little Sea-child, with a scaly tail and plump, merry face. The Mer-folk came to greet him. The fishes darted about him playfully. The sea-anemones beckoned him with enticing fingers. The Sea-child was at home again, and the sea was kind.

So Gil became the champion; but that was little pleasure to him, as you can fancy. For he remembered, he remembered, and he could not forget. He thought, like all the village, that Jan had been drowned through his brother's selfishness and jealousy. He forgave himself less even than the whole village could forgive him for the loss of their favorite; for he knew better than they how much more he was to blame, because he had broken the promise which kept Jan by him. If he had known how happy the Sea-child now was in the home from which he had come to be Gil's brother, perhaps Gil would not have lived thereafter so sad a life. The Stork might have told him the truth. But the wise old Stork would not. That was to be Gil's punishment,—to remember and regret and to reproach himself always for the selfishness and jealousy which had cost him a loving brother.

THE TEN BLOWERS

I

ONCE upon a time there was a fat Miller who lived in the Land of Windmills. Now that is a queer country, where the people look queer, talk and live and dress queerly, and where queer things are likely to happen at any time. So you must not be surprised if this should be a queer tale of the Miller and his mill and his family; but you must take my queer word for it that the happenings were all queerly true as I shall tell them.

The Miller was a thoughtful fellow, as the folk of the Land of Windmills are apt to be; and he had ideas. When his first son was born he sat down and thought for a long time. His baby had fine lungs; he cried louder and longer than any baby of whom the Miller had ever heard, so that the father had to go out of doors to think.

"He is a very remarkable child!" said the Miller to himself. "His talents in the way of lung-power are extraordinary; they must be developed. I believe in deciding as soon as possible what a child shall be, according to his earliest inclinations. With his fine lungs he must become a Blower of some kind; a Musician,—perhaps a Corneter or a Flutist. But that we can decide later. I shall begin to train him immediately."

So the Miller trained the lungs of his son. His first gift to the baby was an ivory whistle, and the little fellow soon learned to blow it so that his mother was nearly deafened. When he grew stronger he had a penny trumpet, and then there was a racket, to be sure! But the more noise he made the more were the Miller and his good wife delighted. For they said to each other: "What wonderful talents has our son! Surely he will become a great blowing Musician in the days that are to be."

Before he was a year old Hans could blow a little bugle so loudly that all the dogs of the neighborhood would rush to the house and surround it, barking. But he made no tunes on the bugle; only noise.

Not long after this came a little brother for Hans; and this baby showed the same talents as the first one, by day and by night filling the cottage with his sturdy bellows. You might think that this would have disturbed the peace of the Miller and his wife, who could get no sleep at all. But no, indeed! They were twice delighted.

"Look now!" they said, "we shall have two little Blowers in the family, —perhaps a flute and a trombone; perhaps a cornet and a fife,—who knows?" And they began to put Piet through the same training that Hans had received; which was very pleasant for the little brothers, as you can imagine. There was no crying of "Oh, children! Don't make such a racket!" in that house. There was no hiding of whistles and trumpets and bugles. When one noisy toy wore out they were immediately given a new one, for fear that they should forget how to blow. And they played at nothing else all day long but blowing, and blowing, and blowing. The house was so noisy that the neighbors did not often visit the Miller's wife. But she cared nothing at all for that.

Then another baby came; and as the years went by more little brothers blessed the Miller's cottage, each with the same wonderful lung-power, the same puffy cheeks, the same fondness for blowing. Till before the Miller fairly had counted them all, he found himself sitting at the head of a table around which ten little Blowers kicked their heels and blew on their porridge to cool it.

Now ten little Blowers, each blowing all day long for dear life, have ten big appetites; and the Miller had hard work to supply them with food. The children were not helping him by earning money. Oh no! They were too busy blowing,—practicing on the flutes, trombones, trumpets, bugles, fifes, horns, oboes, cornets, bassoons, and piccolos which their father had bought them, hoping that they would be Musicians. But it was very strange; although they were becoming skillful indeed in making a loud noise, they had never yet made any music. The more they practiced the further they seemed to be from any tune. When they all got together and blew their instruments as hard as they could, you cannot imagine a more wonderful noise than that which they produced! They could blow the panes out of the windows and the leaves from the trees, but they could not make the least little tune to save their lives.

At last the poor Miller saw that they never would make any tune, because there was no music in them, not in one of them. They could never be Musicians, though they were wonderful Blowers. You see, unless they could blow tunes on their instruments no one would ever pay merely to hear them blow; indeed, nowadays folk seldom ventured near the mill, the

family made such a din. And this blew trade away, even on windy days. The Miller was growing poorer and poorer, and it seemed unlikely that his children would ever help him to earn their bread, for they had been brought up to blow, and that was all they knew how to do.

One morning the Miller went out to grind some grain which Farmer Huss had left the night before. Huss, who was stone deaf, was the only neighbor who cared nowadays to come to the noisy mill, and naturally the Miller was anxious to please him. But when he looked up at the cloudless sky he saw that there would be no grinding done that morning. There was no breeze anywhere, and the mill was sound asleep. The windmill was lazy, like all its race, and unless an urging wind was blowing it would not work at all. On breezeless days the mill slept from morning until night, and then the farmers who had brought their grain grumbled and were angry with the poor Miller; which, of course, was very unreasonable. Farmer Huss had vowed that if his grain was not ground before noon he would never come near the Miller again; and that would be bad indeed, for, deaf though he was, he remained the Miller's best customer. Worst of all, there was not a crust in the house, not a penny to buy bread. And although the children were now so busy blowing that they had forgotten to be hungry, before night they would be crying for food. What was to be done?

Hollow-eyed with hunger and anxiety, the Miller sat down and stared at the motionless mill. Something must be done! Unless the children could help him earn a penny he must sell their flutes, trombones, trumpets, bugles, fifes, horns, oboes, cornets, bassoons, and piccolos; but what then would become of their wonderful talents for blowing?

"Must all their practice be wasted?" thought the Miller. "They have blown, they have blown until their breath is as strong as the wind. Ha! I have an idea!" And jumping up he ran as fast as his legs would carry him to gather his little flock. "It is an ill babe that blows no good!" said the Miller to himself.

The Miller found his boys in the mill yard blowing on their ten instruments. Hans the eldest, who was head and shoulders taller than his father, had the huge bassoon, and the baby, who was just able to toddle, grasped a piccolo. All the other brothers big and little, tall and short, were

tootling upon their various instruments with their cheeks bulging out like balloons; and the noise was so deafening that the bugs and beetles burrowed down into the ground to escape it, while even the fishes in the well turned over on their backs and fainted from the vibrations. Whenever they were hungry the Miller's sons always blew hardest, because then they forgot about their empty stomachs. Although it was a still day,—so still that the windmill's arms were quite motionless,—when the children blew the notes from their instruments the smoke about the cottage chimney huddled itself together and scudded horizontally away. The trees swayed as if blown by a tempest, and the waters of the duck-pond became humpy with waves; so that the ducks were in danger of drowning. When the Miller saw all this he was delighted, and his face beamed like the sun after a shower.

"Good, my children, good!" he cried. "You are wonderful little Blowers, and you shall make my fortune yet, though there is not one note of music in the ten of you. But look now; I have an idea! Gather around me and I will tell you."

The ten children dropped their instruments and crowded eagerly about the Miller, for they hoped that he was going to tell them some way to get a dinner. But instead of this, he led them in a procession straight to the windmill, where it stood lazily holding out its arms for the breeze which did not come.

"Look at that lazy windmill!" said the Miller. "He has ground no meal for a whole day, and we have no money to buy food. Now, children, open your mouths and blow, *blow*, as hard as you know how, to see whether you cannot blow wind into his sails and make him go."

So the ten boys stood in a row, and at a signal took in a deep breath. When the Miller counted "One—two—*three!*" they made round mouths and blew out a long breath, straight towards the windmill's nearest arm. And lo! Instantly the sails filled, and the great windmill spun around like mad, whether it would or no. The Miller's idea was wonderful! The children jumped up and down, clapping their hands. Why had they never thought of this before? This was better than blowing instruments!

The Miller told the children to keep on blowing, and ran into the mill to fill the hopper with grain. The white flour went sifting into the bags till their

sides were plump and firm. In a few moments all the grain was ground, and the Miller was on his way to deliver the bags to neighbor Huss. And deaf old Huss was so pleased to have his meal ready before he expected it that he paid the Miller double, promising to call again very soon. So now the Miller had money to buy bread for his children; and a fine supper they enjoyed that night, you may be sure.

Best of it all was that their good luck had come to stay. The children gave up their flutes, trombones, trumpets, bugles, fifes, horns, oboes, cornets, bassoons, and piccolos, because they had decided not to be musicians, but mill-blowers instead,—which was a blow to music. After all, they said, their new profession was a more distinguished one. For with practice any one can blow a blast on a trombone, but few families of ten have lungs so mighty that they can blow a windmill when it wants to stand still.

They practiced and they practiced, before and after school. And they grew so skillful that the Miller declared them to be better than any breeze, for they were always ready when he wanted them. On days when no breeze was blowing and all the other windmills in the land were as quiet as the market on Sunday,—then the neighbors flocked to the Miller of the wonderful blowing family, and at his mill they were sure of having their grain ground quickly and well. The Miller was fast growing rich. He charged double price, always; and, indeed, folk thought it was worth paying a double price to see the Miller's Ten Blowers at their work.

They had neat little uniforms of blue and white, like figures on a tile,—blue trousers and white millers' smocks, and wooden shoes. And they were trained to stand in an orderly row, with big Hans at the head and chubby baby Tod at the foot, all puff-cheeked, ruddy, and broad-chested from much blowing. And they blew all together,—one—*two!* one—*two!* one—*two!*—with a sound like a great wind in the chimney on a January night, while the windmill whirled around like a mad thing and seemed ready to blow to pieces. But the on-lookers had to be careful to put a rock in their pockets, or to hold on to something steady, lest they be blown from their feet by the blast which the children blew.

Stories of the Miller's wonderful family spread far and wide, and many folk came to see the little Blowers at their work. They were often asked to show their skill in various ways. Hans might easily have earned his living as a blacksmith's bellows, could his father have spared him from the mill. The village children often coaxed the younger Blowers to blow their kites up into the sky or their sailboats down the canals. Even the baby earned many a penny by blowing the soot out of the cottage chimneys and the dust from corners in the goodwives' spandy floors. But the Miller himself did not encourage all this. "Best stick to your home mill, my sons," he said, "and good will come of it. Do not waste your breath in blowing small things, and one day your breath shall blow us into fortune." And this seemed likely to be true; for every day they were becoming more famous and more rich. And all the other millers in the land were so jealous that they could not sleep o' nights.

II

There came a time when the Miller was kept busy indeed, and proudly so. For he had been commanded by the King himself to grind one thousand sacks of flour for the wedding-cookery of the young Prince, his son. The Prince was to cross the sea to be married to the daughter of the proud King of Outland; and when he had brought his fair bride home there was to be great rejoicing,—feasting and merrymaking at the capital of the Land of Windmills. And the Miller's flour was to make the huge wedding-cake and a little cake for each of the guests. For his share in all this preparation the Miller was to receive a great price,—a bag of gold. So he hurried about, and the children blew, and the windmill whirled, and dusty flour went pouring into the King's sacks, until all was done. Then the Miller sat proudly at the head of his table, surrounded by his proud family, and with the sack of gold in the middle of the board for them to admire.

They were eating their goodly supper and drinking the health of the Prince and his bride, for the morrow was to be the wedding-day. Every one was talking and laughing under his breath—for they dared not laugh aloud nowadays, for fear of blowing out all the lights. Suddenly there came the

galloping of horses' hoofs along the highway and a thundering knock at the door.

"Open!" cried a voice. "A messenger of the King!"

The fat Miller ran to the door and undid the bolts as fast as he could, while his children crowded around to hear the King's message. But they held their breaths, lest the message be blown away as soon as spoken.

There sat a rider on a great black horse; and behind him eleven grooms held eleven horses, of different sizes, the smallest one being the prettiest, tiniest white pony you ever saw.

"Ho! Miller!" shouted the messenger. "I bring the King's command that you and your family of Blowers mount and ride with me to the Capital, for the King has need of you. I bring steeds for all; lose no time in obeying the King's message."

The Miller and his sons were startled and amazed; they could not guess whether for joy or for sorrow they were thus called to court. But of course there was nothing for them but to obey the King. Quickly they mounted the eleven steeds which the eleven grooms had brought. The fat Miller went first, on a fat little brown horse which looked like him; and behind him came long, lanky Hans on a long-limbed bay. After him followed Piet on a gallant chestnut, behind whom galloped all the other brothers, with Tod the baby on the tiny white pony bringing up the rear. But the Miller's poor wife was left behind, not knowing whether to be sorry or glad because of the King's summons to her family.

Nearly all night they galloped, thud-thud! over the quiet roads, past shut-eyed houses and dozy windmills, drowsy canals and dreaming villages. And at early dawn they came to the Capital City. Here the tired King himself rode out to meet them, accompanied by a crowd of sleepy soldiers and cross-looking nobles. The Miller and his ten boys slipped from their saddles and knelt in a row before the King, awaiting his commands. But he had no time for ceremony this morning.

"Rise!" he cried impatiently. "Do not kneel there when time is so precious! Rise and hasten to the seashore, Miller. I have heard what wonderful Blowers your children are. It is for this reason I have sent for

you. Out yonder on the sea lies the ship of my son, the Prince, who has sailed for Outland to bring home a bride. Yesterday morn he started; but he has not gone far. My telescopes show that the ship still lies helpless, as she has lain for twelve hours, becalmed between the Windless Headlands in the Bay of Calms. The wedding was to have been this morning at ten in the Outland King's cathedral. Hasten, Miller! He has yet many leagues to go. You and your children must blow the Prince into port in season for the ceremony, or his life is lost. For if he be late, even by five minutes, the Outland King has bargained that he must die. He is a proud father; she is a proud Princess, and must be kept waiting by no one. My word is pledged; my son is in danger! Save the Prince, Miller, and you shall be made a Duke, and all your children Earls."

The King ceased speaking, and the crowd of nobles hustled the Miller and his family down to the shore, whence, far off against the dawn, sharp eyes could dimly see the Prince's ship lying on the water, like a leaf on the surface of a calm well. The Miller ranged his Ten Blowers in a row, as they always stood when about to make the windmill whirl; and they were a flight of steps, one above the other, good to see. Then the Miller cried,—

"Blow, my children! Blow with all your might, when I speak the word; for a great matter is at stake. Now; one, two, *three!*"

The boys drew in a long breath, puffed their cheeks, let out their breath, expanded their chests, and at the third count blew with all their might, till their eyes bulged and they were purple in the face. The trees bent to the ground, and the birds flew out of their nests, chirping wildly. And soon after this the watchmen on the palace wall, who were spying at the Prince's ship with their telescopes, gave a great cheer. The sails had filled with wind, and the vessel was moving ever so slowly towards Outland.

"Again, my babes!" roared the Miller. "One, two, *three!*" and once more a blast blew from the shore, so mighty that the hats of the nobles went flying off into the sea, and the King himself nearly lost his crown of pearls and rubies; which would have been a scandalous thing! Once more the lookouts on the battlements cheered. The Prince's ship was moving steadily forward past the Windless Headlands, out of the Bay of Calms.

"Once more!" shouted the Miller, encouraged by the King's nod of delight. "One more blow for our King and Prince, my children!" And a third time the Ten filled their lungs and puffed their cheeks in the good cause.

This time the watchers danced wildly on the palace walls, and waved a golden banner to the King, which was the signal that all was well. For the Prince's ship had scudded clean out of sight, straight towards Outland and the Bride. Once in the open gulf the ship was in no further danger of being becalmed.

One more blow for our King
ONE MORE BLOW FOR OUR KING

This is how the Miller and his Ten saved the life of the Prince of the Land of Windmills, and became very dear to their King. For, aided by the breath of the Miller's sons, the Prince reached Outland in time,—yes, even with time to spare; the Princess was not ready for him! And her father was so pleased by this promptness of the bridegroom that, when the newly married pair left Outland after the grand wedding, they took with them as a gift from the King one hundred buckets of silver and one hundred buckets of gold and one hundred buckets of shining jewels, the most beautiful that ever were seen. So that when the Prince reached the Land of Windmills he was able to give fine presents to all who had done services for him. And you may be sure that the Miller and his boys were not among the last of this number.

The Miller was made Duke of Millwind, and he received one of the one hundred buckets of jewels; while each of the Earls, his sons, had one of the buckets of gold. And the Miller's wife received one of the buckets of silver; though she had done nothing at all but stay at home and worry.

After that there was no longer any need for the Miller and his family to weaken themselves with work. They were rich and noble; and now it was fair to give the other millers in the land a chance. But no other Miller had so talented a family, you see. The best thing of all was that the Prince and Princess, who, upon the old King's death, themselves became King and Queen, lived to have ten daughters, each more beautiful than the others. And when they were grown up, the King their father married them to the ten young Earls, the sons of the Duke of Millwind, in token of his gratitude

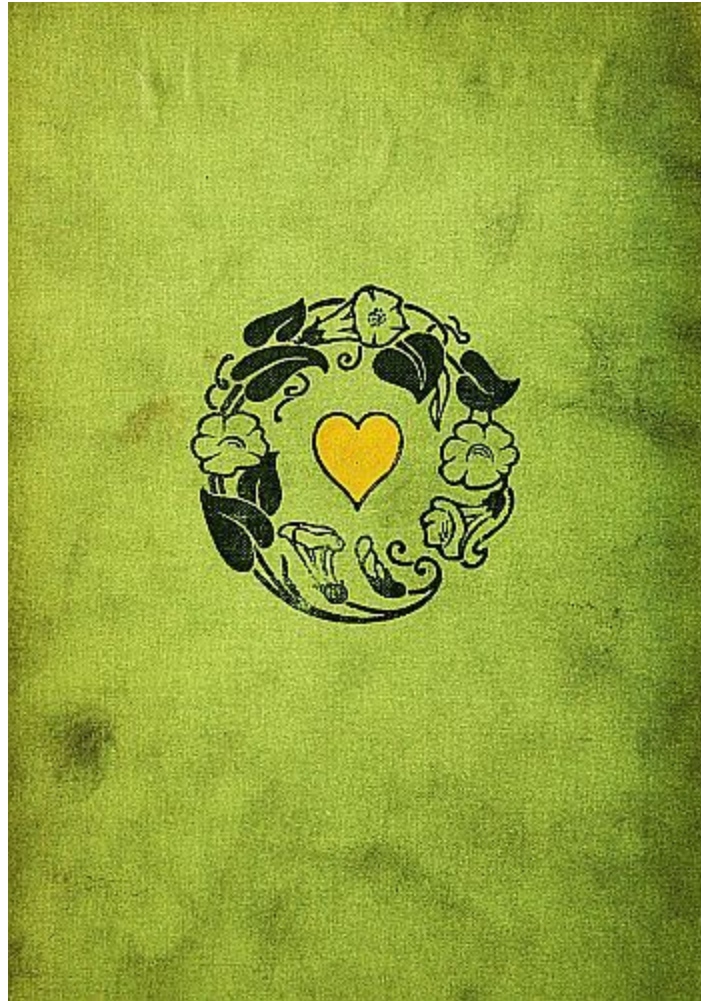
to that fine fat gentleman who was once a Miller. And Hans the eldest son, who married the eldest Princess,—he who had first shown his talent as a Blower,—Hans himself became in time King of the Land of Windmills; which was great fortune for the Miller's son, as I think you must agree. So the Miller's saying proved true, that they would "blow themselves into fortune."

Now it was in the reign of this illustrious pair that two wonderful inventions were made,—squeaker-balloons and soap-bubbles. They were invented at the command of King Hans in honor of his first infant, who was born with a perfectly wonderful talent for blowing.

windmill

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Transcriber's Notes:

Each chapter title was printed on a separate page and then repeated on the page where the chapter began. In this e-book chapter titles are used only once to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Page 26, "See" changed to "She" (She glanced at Joyeuse)

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