

The Red Fairy



Book



Andrew Lang

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The Red Fairy Book

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PREFACE

In a second gleaning of the fields of Fairy Land we cannot expect to find a second Perrault. But there are good stories enough left, and it is hoped that some in the Red Fairy Book may have the attraction of being less familiar than many of the old friends. The tales have been translated, or, in the case of those from Madame d'Aulnoy's long stories, adapted, by Mrs. Hunt from the Norse, by Miss Minnie Wright from Madame d'Aulnoy, by Mrs. Lang and Miss Bruce from other French sources, by Miss May Sellar, Miss Farquharson, and Miss Blackley from the German, while the story of 'Sigurd' is condensed by the Editor from Mr. William Morris's prose version of the 'Volsunga Saga.' The Editor has to thank his friend, M. Charles Marelles, for permission to reproduce his versions of the 'Pied Piper,' of 'Drakestail,' and of 'Little Golden Hood' from the French, and M. Henri Carnoy for the same privilege in regard to 'The Six Sillies' from *La Tradition*.

Lady Frances Balfour has kindly copied an old version of 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' and Messrs. Smith and Elder have permitted the publication of two of Mr. Ralston's versions from the Russian.

A. L.

THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

I

Once upon a time there lived in the village of Montignies-sur-Roc a little cow-boy, without either father or mother. His real name was Michael, but he was always called the Star Gazer, because when he drove his cows over the commons to seek for pasture, he went along with his head in the air, gaping at nothing.

As he had a white skin, blue eyes, and hair that curled all over his head, the village girls used to cry after him, 'Well, Star Gazer, what are you doing?' and Michael would answer, 'Oh, nothing,' and go on his way without even turning to look at them.

The fact was he thought them very ugly, with their sun-burnt necks, their great red hands, their coarse petticoats and their wooden shoes. He had heard that somewhere in the world there were girls whose necks were white and whose hands were small, who were always dressed in the finest silks and laces, and were called princesses, and while his companions round the fire saw nothing in the flames but common everyday fancies, he dreamed that he had the happiness to marry a princess.

II

One morning about the middle of August, just at mid-day when the sun was hottest, Michael ate his dinner of a piece of dry bread, and went to sleep under an oak. And while he slept he dreamt that there appeared before him a beautiful lady, dressed in a robe of cloth of gold, who said to him: 'Go to the castle of Beloeil, and there you shall marry a princess.'

That evening the little cow-boy, who had been thinking a great deal about the advice of the lady in the golden dress, told his dream to the farm people. But, as was natural, they only laughed at the Star Gazer.

The next day at the same hour he went to sleep again under the same tree. The lady appeared to him a second time, and said: 'Go to the castle of Beloeil, and you shall marry a princess.'

In the evening Michael told his friends that he had dreamed the same dream again, but they only laughed at him more than before. 'Never mind,' he thought to himself; 'if the lady appears to me a third time, I will do as she tells me.'

The following day, to the great astonishment of all the village, about two o'clock in the afternoon a voice was heard singing:

‘Raleô, raleô,
How the cattle go!’

It was the little cow-boy driving his herd back to the byre.

The farmer began to scold him furiously, but he answered quietly, ‘I am going away,’ made his clothes into a bundle, said good-bye to all his friends, and boldly set out to seek his fortunes.

There was great excitement through all the village, and on the top of the hill the people stood holding their sides with laughing, as they watched the Star Gazer trudging bravely along the valley with his bundle at the end of his stick.

It was enough to make anyone laugh, certainly.

III

It was well known for full twenty miles round that there lived in the castle of Beloeil twelve princesses of wonderful beauty, and as proud as they were beautiful, and who were besides so very sensitive and of such truly royal blood, that they would have felt at once the presence of a pea in their beds, even if the mattresses had been laid over it.

It was whispered about that they led exactly the lives that princesses ought to lead, sleeping far into the morning, and never getting up till mid-day. They had twelve beds all in the same room, but what was very extraordinary was the fact that though they were locked in by triple bolts, every morning their satin shoes were found worn into holes.

When they were asked what they had been doing all night, they always answered that they had been asleep; and, indeed, no noise was ever heard in the room, yet the shoes could not wear themselves out alone!

At last the Duke of Beloeil ordered the trumpet to be sounded, and a proclamation to be made that whoever could discover how his daughters wore out their shoes should choose one of them for his wife.

On hearing the proclamation a number of princes arrived at the castle to try their luck. They watched all night behind the open door of the princesses, but when the morning came they had all disappeared, and no one could tell what had become of them.

IV

When he reached the castle, Michael went straight to the gardener and offered his services. Now it happened that the garden boy had just been sent away, and though the Star Gazer did not look very sturdy, the gardener agreed to take him, as he thought that his pretty face and golden curls would please the princesses.

The first thing he was told was that when the princesses got up he was to present each one with a bouquet, and Michael thought that if he had nothing more unpleasant to do than that he should get on very well.

Accordingly he placed himself behind the door of the princesses' room, with the twelve bouquets in a basket. He gave one to each of the sisters, and they took them without even deigning to look at the lad, except Lina the youngest, who fixed her large black eyes as soft as velvet on him, and exclaimed, 'Oh, how pretty he is—our new flower boy!' The rest all burst out laughing, and the eldest pointed out that a princess ought never to lower herself by looking at a garden boy.

Now Michael knew quite well what had happened to all the princes, but notwithstanding, the beautiful eyes of the Princess Lina inspired him with a violent longing to try his fate. Unhappily he did not dare to come forward, being afraid that he should only be jeered at, or even turned away from the castle on account of his impudence.

V

Nevertheless, the Star Gazer had another dream. The lady in the golden dress appeared to him once more, holding in one hand two young laurel trees, a cherry laurel and a rose laurel, and in the other hand a little golden rake, a little golden bucket, and a silken towel. She thus addressed him:

'Plant these two laurels in two large pots, rake them over with the rake, water them with the bucket, and wipe them with the towel. When they have grown as tall as a girl of fifteen, say to each of them, "My beautiful laurel, with the golden rake I have raked you, with the golden bucket I have watered you, with the silken towel I have wiped you." Then after that ask anything you choose, and the laurels will give it to you.'

Michael thanked the lady in the golden dress, and when he woke he found the two laurel bushes beside him. So he carefully obeyed the orders he had been given by the lady.

The trees grew very fast, and when they were as tall as a girl of fifteen he said to the cherry laurel, 'My lovely cherry laurel, with the golden rake I have raked thee, with the golden bucket I have watered thee, with the silken towel I have wiped thee. Teach me how to become invisible.' Then there instantly appeared on the laurel a pretty white flower, which Michael gathered and stuck into his button-hole.

VI

That evening, when the princesses went upstairs to bed, he followed them barefoot, so that he might make no noise, and hid himself under one of the twelve beds, so as not to take up much room.

The princesses began at once to open their wardrobes and boxes. They took out of them the most magnificent dresses, which they put on

before their mirrors, and when they had finished, turned themselves all round to admire their appearances.

Michael could see nothing from his hiding-place, but he could hear everything, and he listened to the princesses laughing and jumping with pleasure. At last the eldest said, 'Be quick, my sisters, our partners will be impatient.' At the end of an hour, when the Star Gazer heard no more noise, he peeped out and saw the twelve sisters in splendid garments, with their satin shoes on their feet, and in their hands the bouquets he had brought them.

'Are you ready?' asked the eldest.

'Yes,' replied the other eleven in chorus, and they took their places one by one behind her.

Then the eldest Princess clapped her hands three times and a trap door opened. All the princesses disappeared down a secret staircase, and Michael hastily followed them.

As he was following on the steps of the Princess Lina, he carelessly trod on her dress.

'There is somebody behind me,' cried the Princess; 'they are holding my dress.'

'You foolish thing,' said her eldest sister, 'you are always afraid of something. It is only a nail which caught you.'

VII

They went down, down, down, till at last they came to a passage with a door at one end, which was only fastened with a latch. The eldest Princess opened it, and they found themselves immediately in a lovely little wood, where the leaves were spangled with drops of silver which shone in the brilliant light of the moon.

They next crossed another wood where the leaves were sprinkled with gold, and after that another still, where the leaves glittered with diamonds.

At last the Star Gazer perceived a large lake, and on the shores of the lake twelve little boats with awnings, in which were seated twelve princes, who, grasping their oars, awaited the princesses.

Each princess entered one of the boats, and Michael slipped into that which held the youngest. The boats glided along rapidly, but Lina's, from being heavier, was always behind the rest. 'We never went so slowly before,' said the Princess; 'what can be the reason?'

'I don't know,' answered the Prince. 'I assure you I am rowing as hard as I can.'

On the other side of the lake the garden boy saw a beautiful castle splendidly illuminated, whence came the lively music of fiddles, kettle-drums, and trumpets.

In a moment they touched land, and the company jumped out of the boats; and the princes, after having securely fastened their barques, gave their arms to the princesses and conducted them to the castle.

VIII

Michael followed, and entered the ball-room in their train. Everywhere were mirrors, lights, flowers, and damask hangings.

The Star Gazer was quite bewildered at the magnificence of the sight.

He placed himself out of the way in a corner, admiring the grace and beauty of the princesses. Their loveliness was of every kind. Some were fair and some were dark; some had chestnut hair, or curls darker still, and some had golden locks. Never were so many beautiful princesses seen together at one time, but the one whom the cow-boy thought the most beautiful and the most fascinating was the little Princess with the velvet eyes.

With what eagerness she danced! leaning on her partner's shoulder she swept by like a whirlwind. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, and it was plain that she loved dancing better than anything else.

The poor boy envied those handsome young men with whom she danced so gracefully, but he did not know how little reason he had to be jealous of them.

The young men were really the princes who, to the number of fifty at least, had tried to steal the princesses' secret. The princesses had made them drink something of a philtre, which froze the heart and left nothing but the love of dancing.

IX

They danced on till the shoes of the princesses were worn into holes. When the cock crowed the third time the fiddles stopped, and a delicious supper was served by negro boys, consisting of sugared orange flowers, crystallised rose leaves, powdered violets, cracknels, wafers, and other dishes, which are, as everyone knows, the favourite food of princesses.

After supper, the dancers all went back to their boats, and this time the Star Gazer entered that of the eldest Princess. They crossed again the wood with the diamond-spangled leaves, the wood with gold-sprinkled leaves, and the wood whose leaves glittered with drops of silver, and as a proof of what he had seen, the boy broke a small branch from a tree in the last wood. Lina turned as she heard the noise made by the breaking of the branch.

'What was that noise?' she said.

'It was nothing,' replied her eldest sister; 'it was only the screech of the barn-owl that roosts in one of the turrets of the castle.'

While she was speaking Michael managed to slip in front, and running up the staircase, he reached the princesses' room first. He flung open the window, and sliding down the vine which climbed up the wall, found himself in the garden just as the sun was beginning to rise, and it was time for him to set to his work.

X

That day, when he made up the bouquets, Michael hid the branch with the silver drops in the nosegay intended for the youngest Princess.

When Lina discovered it she was much surprised. However, she said nothing to her sisters, but as she met the boy by accident while she was walking under the shade of the elms, she suddenly stopped as if to speak to him; then, altering her mind, went on her way.

The same evening the twelve sisters went again to the ball, and the Star Gazer again followed them and crossed the lake in Lina's boat. This time it was the Prince who complained that the boat seemed very heavy.

'It is the heat,' replied the Princess. 'I, too, have been feeling very warm.'

During the ball she looked everywhere for the gardener's boy, but she never saw him.

As they came back, Michael gathered a branch from the wood with the gold-spangled leaves, and now it was the eldest Princess who heard the noise that it made in breaking.

'It is nothing,' said Lina; 'only the cry of the owl which roosts in the turrets of the castle.'

XI

As soon as she got up she found the branch in her bouquet. When the sisters went down she stayed a little behind and said to the cow-boy: 'Where does this branch come from?'

'Your Royal Highness knows well enough,' answered Michael.

'So you have followed us?'

'Yes, Princess.'

'How did you manage it? we never saw you.'

'I hid myself,' replied the Star Gazer quietly.

The Princess was silent a moment, and then said:

'You know our secret!—keep it. Here is the reward of your discretion.' And she flung the boy a purse of gold.

'I do not sell my silence,' answered Michael, and he went away without picking up the purse.

For three nights Lina neither saw nor heard anything extraordinary; on the fourth she heard a rustling among the diamond-spangled leaves of the wood. That day there was a branch of the trees in her bouquet.

She took the Star Gazer aside, and said to him in a harsh voice:
'You know what price my father has promised to pay for our secret?'
'I know, Princess,' answered Michael.
'Don't you mean to tell him?'
'That is not my intention.'
'Are you afraid?'
'No, Princess.'
'What makes you so discreet, then?'
But Michael was silent.

XII

Lina's sisters had seen her talking to the little garden boy, and jeered at her for it.

'What prevents your marrying him?' asked the eldest, 'you would become a gardener too; it is a charming profession. You could live in a cottage at the end of the park, and help your husband to draw up water from the well, and when we get up you could bring us our bouquets.'

The Princess Lina was very angry, and when the Star Gazer presented her bouquet, she received it in a disdainful manner.

Michael behaved most respectfully. He never raised his eyes to her, but nearly all day she felt him at her side without ever seeing him.

One day she made up her mind to tell everything to her eldest sister.

'What!' said she, 'this rogue knows our secret, and you never told me! I must lose no time in getting rid of him.'

'But how?'

'Why, by having him taken to the tower with the dungeons, of course.'

For this was the way that in old times beautiful princesses got rid of people who knew too much.

But the astonishing part of it was that the youngest sister did not seem at all to relish this method of stopping the mouth of the gardener's boy, who, after all, had said nothing to their father.

XIII

It was agreed that the question should be submitted to the other ten sisters. All were on the side of the eldest. Then the youngest sister declared that if they laid a finger on the little garden boy, she would herself go and tell their father the secret of the holes in their shoes.

At last it was decided that Michael should be put to the test; that they would take him to the ball, and at the end of supper would give him the philtre which was to enchant him like the rest.

They sent for the Star Gazer, and asked him how he had contrived to learn their secret; but still he remained silent.

Then, in commanding tones, the eldest sister gave him the order they had agreed upon.

He only answered:

‘I will obey.’

He had really been present, invisible, at the council of princesses, and had heard all; but he had made up his mind to drink of the philtre, and sacrifice himself to the happiness of her he loved.

Not wishing, however, to cut a poor figure at the ball by the side of the other dancers, he went at once to the laurels, and said:

‘My lovely rose laurel, with the golden rake I have raked thee, with the golden bucket I have watered thee, with a silken towel I have dried thee. Dress me like a prince.’

A beautiful pink flower appeared. Michael gathered it, and found himself in a moment clothed in velvet, which was as black as the eyes of the little Princess, with a cap to match, a diamond aigrette, and a blossom of the rose laurel in his button-hole.

Thus dressed, he presented himself that evening before the Duke of Beloeil, and obtained leave to try and discover his daughters’ secret. He looked so distinguished that hardly anyone would have known who he was.

XIV

The twelve princesses went upstairs to bed. Michael followed them, and waited behind the open door till they gave the signal for departure.

This time he did not cross in Lina’s boat. He gave his arm to the eldest sister, danced with each in turn, and was so graceful that everyone was delighted with him. At last the time came for him to dance with the little Princess. She found him the best partner in the world, but he did not dare to speak a single word to her.

When he was taking her back to her place she said to him in a mocking voice:

‘Here you are at the summit of your wishes: you are being treated like a prince.’

‘Don’t be afraid,’ replied the Star Gazer gently. ‘You shall never be a gardener’s wife.’

The little Princess stared at him with a frightened face, and he left her without waiting for an answer.

When the satin slippers were worn through the fiddles stopped, and the negro boys set the table. Michael was placed next to the eldest sister, and opposite to the youngest.

They gave him the most exquisite dishes to eat, and the most delicate wines to drink; and in order to turn his head more completely, compliments and flattery were heaped on him from every side.

But he took care not to be intoxicated, either by the wine or the compliments.

XV

At last the eldest sister made a sign, and one of the black pages brought in a large golden cup.

‘The enchanted castle has no more secrets for you,’ she said to the Star Gazer. ‘Let us drink to your triumph.’

He cast a lingering glance at the little Princess, and without hesitation lifted the cup.

‘Don’t drink!’ suddenly cried out the little Princess; ‘I would rather marry a gardener.’

And she burst into tears.

Michael flung the contents of the cup behind him, sprang over the table, and fell at Lina’s feet. The rest of the princes fell likewise at the knees of the princesses, each of whom chose a husband and raised him to her side. The charm was broken.

The twelve couples embarked in the boats, which crossed back many times in order to carry over the other princes. Then they all went through the three woods, and when they had passed the door of the underground passage a great noise was heard, as if the enchanted castle was crumbling to the earth.

They went straight to the room of the Duke of Beloeil, who had just awoke. Michael held in his hand the golden cup, and he revealed the secret of the holes in the shoes.

‘Choose, then,’ said the Duke, ‘whichever you prefer.’

‘My choice is already made,’ replied the garden boy, and he offered his hand to the youngest Princess, who blushed and lowered her eyes.

XVI

The Princess Lina did not become a gardener’s wife; on the contrary, it was the Star Gazer who became a Prince: but before the marriage ceremony the Princess insisted that her lover should tell her how he came to discover the secret.

So he showed her the two laurels which had helped him, and she, like a prudent girl, thinking they gave him too much advantage over his wife, cut them off at the root and threw them in the fire. And this is why the country girls go about singing:

Nous n’irons plus au bois,

Les lauriers sont coupés,

and dancing in summer by the light of the moon.

THE PRINCESS MAYBLOSSOM

Once upon a time there lived a King and Queen whose children had all died, first one and then another, until at last only one little daughter remained, and the Queen was at her wits' end to know where to find a really good nurse who would take care of her, and bring her up. A herald was sent who blew a trumpet at every street corner, and commanded all the best nurses to appear before the Queen, that she might choose one for the little Princess. So on the appointed day the whole palace was crowded with nurses, who came from the four corners of the world to offer themselves, until the Queen declared that if she was ever to see the half of them, they must be brought out to her, one by one, as she sat in a shady wood near the palace.

This was accordingly done, and the nurses, after they had made their curtsey to the King and Queen, ranged themselves in a line before her that she might choose. Most of them were fair and fat and charming, but there was one who was dark-skinned and ugly, and spoke a strange language which nobody could understand. The Queen wondered how she dared offer herself, and she was told to go away, as she certainly would not do. Upon which she muttered something and passed on, but hid herself in a hollow tree, from which she could see all that happened. The Queen, without giving her another thought, chose a pretty rosy-faced nurse, but no sooner was her choice made than a snake, which was hidden in the grass, bit that very nurse on her foot, so that she fell down as if dead. The Queen was very much vexed by this accident, but she soon selected another, who was just stepping forward when an eagle flew by and dropped a large tortoise upon her head, which was cracked in pieces like an egg-shell. At this the Queen was much horrified; nevertheless, she chose a third time, but with no better fortune, for the nurse, moving quickly, ran into the branch of a tree and blinded herself with a thorn. Then the Queen in dismay cried that there must be some malignant influence at work, and that she would choose no more that day; and she had just risen to return to the palace when she heard peals of malicious laughter behind her, and turning round saw the ugly stranger whom she had dismissed, who was making very merry over the disasters and mocking everyone, but especially the Queen. This annoyed Her Majesty very much, and she was about to order that she should be arrested, when the witch—for she was a witch—with two blows from a wand summoned a chariot of fire drawn by winged dragons, and was whirled off through the air uttering threats and cries. When the King saw this he cried:

‘Alas! now we are ruined indeed, for that was no other than the Fairy Carabosse, who has had a grudge against me ever since I was a boy and put sulphur into her porridge one day for fun.’

Then the Queen began to cry.

‘If I had only known who it was,’ she said, ‘I would have done my best to make friends with her; now I suppose all is lost.’

The King was sorry to have frightened her so much, and proposed that they should go and hold a council as to what was best to be done to avert the misfortunes which Carabosse certainly meant to bring upon the little Princess.

So all the counsellors were summoned to the palace, and when they had shut every door and window, and stuffed up every keyhole that they might not be overheard, they talked the affair over, and decided that every fairy for a thousand leagues round should be invited to the christening of the Princess, and that the time of the ceremony should be kept a profound secret, in case the Fairy Carabosse should take it into her head to attend it.

The Queen and her ladies set to work to prepare presents for the fairies who were invited: for each one a blue velvet cloak, a petticoat of apricot satin, a pair of high-heeled shoes, some sharp needles, and a pair of golden scissors. Of all the fairies the Queen knew, only five were able to come on the day appointed, but they began immediately to bestow gifts upon the Princess. One promised that she should be perfectly beautiful, the second that she should understand anything—no matter what—the first time it was explained to her, the third that she should sing like a nightingale, the fourth that she should succeed in everything she undertook, and the fifth was opening her mouth to speak when a tremendous rumbling was heard in the chimney, and Carabosse, all covered with soot, came rolling down, crying:

‘I say that she shall be the unluckiest of the unlucky until she is twenty years old.’

Then the Queen and all the fairies began to beg and beseech her to think better of it, and not be so unkind to the poor little Princess, who had never done her any harm. But the ugly old Fairy only grunted and made no answer. So the last Fairy, who had not yet given her gift, tried to mend matters by promising the Princess a long and happy life after the fatal time was over. At this Carabosse laughed maliciously, and climbed away up the chimney, leaving them all in great consternation, and especially the Queen. However, she entertained the fairies splendidly, and gave them beautiful ribbons, of which they are very fond, in addition to the other presents.

When they were going away the oldest Fairy said that they were of opinion that it would be best to shut the Princess up in some place, with her waiting-women, so that she might not see anyone else until she was twenty years old. So the King had a tower built on purpose. It had no

windows, so it was lighted with wax candles, and the only way into it was by an underground passage, which had iron doors only twenty feet apart, and guards were posted everywhere.

The Princess had been named Mayblossom, because she was as fresh and blooming as Spring itself, and she grew up tall and beautiful, and everything she did and said was charming. Every time the King and Queen came to see her they were more delighted with her than before, but though she was weary of the tower, and often begged them to take her away from it, they always refused. The Princess's nurse, who had never left her, sometimes told her about the world outside the tower, and though the Princess had never seen anything for herself, yet she always understood exactly, thanks to the second Fairy's gift. Often the King said to the Queen:

'We were cleverer than Carabosse after all. Our Mayblossom will be happy in spite of her predictions.'

And the Queen laughed until she was tired at the idea of having outwitted the old Fairy. They had caused the Princess's portrait to be painted and sent to all the neighbouring Courts, for in four days she would have completed her twentieth year, and it was time to decide whom she should marry. All the town was rejoicing at the thought of the Princess's approaching freedom, and when the news came that King Merlin was sending his ambassador to ask her in marriage for his son, they were still more delighted. The nurse, who kept the Princess informed of everything that went forward in the town, did not fail to repeat the news that so nearly concerned her, and gave such a description of the splendour in which the ambassador Fanfaronade would enter the town, that the Princess was wild to see the procession for herself.

'What an unhappy creature I am,' she cried, 'to be shut up in this dismal tower as if I had committed some crime! I have never seen the sun, or the stars, or a horse, or a monkey, or a lion, except in pictures, and though the King and Queen tell me I am to be set free when I am twenty, I believe they only say it to keep me amused, when they never mean to let me out at all.'

And then she began to cry, and her nurse, and the nurse's daughter, and the cradle-rocker, and the nursery-maid, who all loved her dearly, cried too for company, so that nothing could be heard but sobs and sighs. It was a scene of woe. When the Princess saw that they all pitied her she made up her mind to have her own way. So she declared that she would starve herself to death if they did not find some means of letting her see Fanfaronade's grand entry into the town.

'If you really love me,' she said, 'you will manage it, somehow or other, and the King and Queen need never know anything about it.'

Then the nurse and all the others cried harder than ever, and said everything they could think of to turn the Princess from her idea. But

the more they said the more determined she was, and at last they consented to make a tiny hole in the tower on the side that looked towards the city gates.

After scratching and scraping all day and all night, they presently made a hole through which they could, with great difficulty, push a very slender needle, and out of this the Princess looked at the daylight for the first time. She was so dazzled and delighted by what she saw, that there she stayed, never taking her eyes away from the peep-hole for a single minute, until presently the ambassador's procession appeared in sight.

At the head of it rode Fanfaronade himself upon a white horse, which pranced and caracoled to the sound of the trumpets. Nothing could have been more splendid than the ambassador's attire. His coat was nearly hidden under an embroidery of pearls and diamonds, his boots were solid gold, and from his helmet floated scarlet plumes. At the sight of him the Princess lost her wits entirely, and determined that Fanfaronade and nobody else would she marry.

'It is quite impossible,' she said, 'that his master should be half as handsome and delightful. I am not ambitious, and having spent all my life in this tedious tower, anything—even a house in the country—will seem a delightful change. I am sure that bread and water shared with Fanfaronade will please me far better than roast chicken and sweetmeats with anybody else.'

And so she went on talk, talk, talking, until her waiting-women wondered where she got it all from. But when they tried to stop her, and represented that her high rank made it perfectly impossible that she should do any such thing, she would not listen, and ordered them to be silent.

As soon as the ambassador arrived at the palace, the Queen started to fetch her daughter.

All the streets were spread with carpets, and the windows were full of ladies who were waiting to see the Princess, and carried baskets of flowers and sweetmeats to shower upon her as she passed.

They had hardly begun to get the Princess ready when a dwarf arrived, mounted upon an elephant. He came from the five fairies, and brought for the Princess a crown, a sceptre, and a robe of golden brocade, with a petticoat marvellously embroidered with butterflies' wings. They also sent a casket of jewels, so splendid that no one had ever seen anything like it before, and the Queen was perfectly dazzled when she opened it. But the Princess scarcely gave a glance to any of these treasures, for she thought of nothing but Fanfaronade. The Dwarf was rewarded with a gold piece, and decorated with so many ribbons that it was hardly possible to see him at all. The Princess sent to each of the fairies a new spinning-wheel with a distaff of cedar wood, and the Queen

said she must look through her treasures and find something very charming to send them also.

When the Princess was arrayed in all the gorgeous things the Dwarf had brought, she was more beautiful than ever, and as she walked along the streets the people cried: 'How pretty she is! How pretty she is!'

The procession consisted of the Queen, the Princess, five dozen other princesses her cousins, and ten dozen who came from the neighbouring kingdoms; and as they proceeded at a stately pace the sky began to grow dark, then suddenly the thunder growled, and rain and hail fell in torrents. The Queen put her royal mantle over her head, and all the princesses did the same with their trains. Mayblossom was just about to follow their example when a terrific croaking, as of an immense army of crows, rooks, ravens, screech-owls, and all birds of ill-omen was heard, and at the same instant a huge owl skimmed up to the Princess, and threw over her a scarf woven of spiders' webs and embroidered with bats' wings. And then peals of mocking laughter rang through the air, and they guessed that this was another of the Fairy Carabosse's unpleasant jokes.

The Queen was terrified at such an evil omen, and tried to pull the black scarf from the Princess's shoulders, but it really seemed as if it must be nailed on, it clung so closely.

'Ah!' cried the Queen, 'can nothing appease this enemy of ours? What good was it that I sent her more than fifty pounds of sweetmeats, and as much again of the best sugar, not to mention two Westphalia hams? She is as angry as ever.'

While she lamented in this way, and everybody was as wet as if they had been dragged through a river, the Princess still thought of nothing but the ambassador, and just at this moment he appeared before her, with the King, and there was a great blowing of trumpets, and all the people shouted louder than ever. Fanfaronade was not generally at a loss for something to say, but when he saw the Princess, she was so much more beautiful and majestic than he had expected that he could only stammer out a few words, and entirely forgot the harangue which he had been learning for months, and knew well enough to have repeated it in his sleep. To gain time to remember at least part of it, he made several low bows to the Princess, who on her side dropped half-a-dozen curtseys without stopping to think, and then said, to relieve his evident embarrassment:

'Sir Ambassador, I am sure that everything you intend to say is charming, since it is you who mean to say it; but let us make haste into the palace, as it is pouring cats and dogs, and the wicked Fairy Carabosse will be amused to see us all stand dripping here. When we are once under shelter we can laugh at her.'

Upon this the Ambassador found his tongue, and replied gallantly that the Fairy had evidently foreseen the flames that would be kindled by the

bright eyes of the Princess, and had sent this deluge to extinguish them. Then he offered his hand to conduct the Princess, and she said softly:

‘As you could not possibly guess how much I like you, Sir Fanfaronade, I am obliged to tell you plainly that, since I saw you enter the town on your beautiful prancing horse, I have been sorry that you came to speak for another instead of for yourself. So, if you think about it as I do, I will marry you instead of your master. Of course I know you are not a prince, but I shall be just as fond of you as if you were, and we can go and live in some cosy little corner of the world, and be as happy as the days are long.’

The Ambassador thought he must be dreaming, and could hardly believe what the lovely Princess said. He dared not answer, but only squeezed the Princess’s hand until he really hurt her little finger, but she did not cry out. When they reached the palace the King kissed his daughter on both cheeks, and said:

‘My little lambkin, are you willing to marry the great King Merlin’s son, for this Ambassador has come on his behalf to fetch you?’

‘If you please, sire,’ said the Princess, dropping a curtsey.

‘I consent also,’ said the Queen; ‘so let the banquet be prepared.’

This was done with all speed, and everybody feasted except Mayblossom and Fanfaronade, who looked at one another and forgot everything else.

After the banquet came a ball, and after that again a ballet, and at last they were all so tired that everyone fell asleep just where he sat. Only the lovers were as wide-awake as mice, and the Princess, seeing that there was nothing to fear, said to Fanfaronade:

‘Let us be quick and run away, for we shall never have a better chance than this.’

Then she took the King’s dagger, which was in a diamond sheath, and the Queen’s neck-handkerchief, and gave her hand to Fanfaronade, who carried a lantern, and they ran out together into the muddy street and down to the sea-shore. Here they got into a little boat in which the poor old boatman was sleeping, and when he woke up and saw the lovely Princess, with all her diamonds and her spiders’—web scarf, he did not know what to think, and obeyed her instantly when she commanded him to set out. They could see neither moon nor stars, but in the Queen’s neck-handkerchief there was a carbuncle which glowed like fifty torches. Fanfaronade asked the Princess where she would like to go, but she only answered that she did not care where she went as long as he was with her.

‘But, Princess,’ said he, ‘I dare not take you back to King Merlin’s court. He would think hanging too good for me.’

‘Oh, in that case,’ she answered, ‘we had better go to Squirrel Island; it is lonely enough, and too far off for anyone to follow us there.’

So she ordered the old boatman to steer for Squirrel Island.

Meanwhile the day was breaking, and the King and Queen and all the courtiers began to wake up and rub their eyes, and think it was time to finish the preparations for the wedding. And the Queen asked for her neck-handkerchief, that she might look smart. Then there was a scurrying hither and thither, and a hunting everywhere: they looked into every place, from the wardrobes to the stoves, and the Queen herself ran about from the garret to the cellar, but the handkerchief was nowhere to be found.

By this time the King had missed his dagger, and the search began all over again. They opened boxes and chests of which the keys had been lost for a hundred years, and found numbers of curious things, but not the dagger, and the King tore his beard, and the Queen tore her hair, for the handkerchief and the dagger were the most valuable things in the kingdom.

When the King saw that the search was hopeless he said:

‘Never mind, let us make haste and get the wedding over before anything else is lost.’ And then he asked where the Princess was. Upon this her nurse came forward and said:

‘Sire, I have been seeking her these two hours, but she is nowhere to be found.’ This was more than the Queen could bear. She gave a shriek of alarm and fainted away, and they had to pour two barrels of eau-de-cologne over her before she recovered. When she came to herself everybody was looking for the Princess in the greatest terror and confusion, but as she did not appear, the King said to his page:

‘Go and find the Ambassador Fanfaronade, who is doubtless asleep in some corner, and tell him the sad news.’

So the page hunted hither and thither, but Fanfaronade was no more to be found than the Princess, the dagger, or the neck-handkerchief!

Then the King summoned his counsellors and his guards, and, accompanied by the Queen, went into his great hall. As he had not had time to prepare his speech beforehand, the King ordered that silence should be kept for three hours, and at the end of that time he spoke as follows:

‘Listen, great and small! My dear daughter Mayblossom is lost: whether she has been stolen away or has simply disappeared I cannot tell. The Queen’s neck-handkerchief and my sword, which are worth their weight in gold, are also missing, and, what is worst of all, the Ambassador Fanfaronade is nowhere to be found. I greatly fear that the King, his master, when he receives no tidings from him, will come to seek him among us, and will accuse us of having made mince-meat of him. Perhaps I could bear even that if I had any money, but I assure you that the expenses of the wedding have completely ruined me. Advise me, then, my dear subjects, what had I better do to recover my daughter, Fanfaronade, and the other things.’

This was the most eloquent speech the King had been known to make, and when everybody had done admiring it the Prime Minister made answer:

‘Sire, we are all very sorry to see you so sorry. We would give everything we value in the world to take away the cause of your sorrow, but this seems to be another of the tricks of the Fairy Carabosse. The Princess’s twenty unlucky years were not quite over, and really, if the truth must be told, I noticed that Fanfaronade and the Princess appeared to admire one another greatly. Perhaps this may give some clue to the mystery of their disappearance.’

Here the Queen interrupted him, saying, ‘Take care what you say, sir. Believe me, the Princess Mayblossom was far too well brought up to think of falling in love with an Ambassador.’

At this the nurse came forward, and, falling on her knees, confessed how they had made the little needle-hole in the tower, and how the Princess had declared when she saw the Ambassador that she would marry him and nobody else. Then the Queen was very angry, and gave the nurse, and the cradle-rocker, and the nursery-maid such a scolding that they shook in their shoes. But the Admiral Cocked-Hat interrupted her, crying:

‘Let us be off after this good-for-nothing Fanfaronade, for with out a doubt he has run away with our Princess.’

Then there was a great clapping of hands, and everybody shouted, ‘By all means let us be after him.’

So while some embarked upon the sea, the others ran from kingdom to kingdom beating drums and blowing trumpets, and wherever a crowd collected they cried:

‘Whoever wants a beautiful doll, sweetmeats of all kinds, a little pair of scissors, a golden robe, and a satin cap has only to say where Fanfaronade has hidden the Princess Mayblossom.’

But the answer everywhere was, ‘You must go farther, we have not seen them.’

However, those who went by sea were more fortunate, for after sailing about for some time they noticed a light before them which burned at night like a great fire. At first they dared not go near it, not knowing what it might be, but by-and-by it remained stationary over Squirrel Island, for, as you have guessed already, the light was the glowing of the carbuncle. The Princess and Fanfaronade on landing upon the island had given the boatman a hundred gold pieces, and made him promise solemnly to tell no one where he had taken them; but the first thing that happened was that, as he rowed away, he got into the midst of the fleet, and before he could escape the Admiral had seen him and sent a boat after him.

When he was searched they found the gold pieces in his pocket, and as they were quite new coins, struck in honour of the Princess’s wedding,

the Admiral felt certain that the boatman must have been paid by the Princess to aid her in her flight. But he would not answer any questions, and pretended to be deaf and dumb.

Then the Admiral said: 'Oh! deaf and dumb is he? Lash him to the mast and give him a taste of the cat-o'-nine-tails. I don't know anything better than that for curing the deaf and dumb!'

And when the old boatman saw that he was in earnest, he told all he knew about the cavalier and the lady whom he had landed upon Squirrel Island, and the Admiral knew it must be the Princess and Fanfaronade; so he gave the order for the fleet to surround the island.

Meanwhile the Princess Mayblossom, who was by this time terribly sleepy, had found a grassy bank in the shade, and throwing herself down had already fallen into a profound slumber, when Fanfaronade, who happened to be hungry and not sleepy, came and woke her up, saying, very crossly:

'Pray, madam, how long do you mean to stay here? I see nothing to eat, and though you may be very charming, the sight of you does not prevent me from famishing.'

'What! Fanfaronade,' said the Princess, sitting up and rubbing her eyes, 'is it possible that when I am here with you you can want anything else? You ought to be thinking all the time how happy you are.'

'Happy!' cried he; 'say rather unhappy. I wish with all my heart that you were back in your dark tower again.'

'Darling, don't be cross,' said the Princess. 'I will go and see if I can find some wild fruit for you.'

'I wish you might find a wolf to eat you up,' growled Fanfaronade.

The Princess, in great dismay, ran hither and thither all about the wood, tearing her dress, and hurting her pretty white hands with the thorns and brambles, but she could find nothing good to eat, and at last she had to go back sorrowfully to Fanfaronade. When he saw that she came empty-handed he got up and left her, grumbling to himself.

The next day they searched again, but with no better success.

'Alas!' said the Princess, 'if only I could find something for you to eat, I should not mind being hungry myself.'

'No, I should not mind that either,' answered Fanfaronade.

'Is it possible,' said she, 'that you would not care if I died of hunger? Oh, Fanfaronade, you said you loved me!'

'That was when we were in quite another place and I was not hungry,' said he. 'It makes a great difference in one's ideas to be dying of hunger and thirst on a desert island.'

At this the Princess was dreadfully vexed, and she sat down under a white rose bush and began to cry bitterly.

'Happy roses,' she thought to herself, 'they have only to blossom in the sunshine and be admired, and there is nobody to be unkind to them.' And the tears ran down her cheeks and splashed on to the rose-tree

roots. Presently she was surprised to see the whole bush rustling and shaking, and a soft little voice from the prettiest rosebud said:

‘Poor Princess! look in the trunk of that tree, and you will find a honeycomb, but don’t be foolish enough to share it with Fanfaronade.’

Mayblossom ran to the tree, and sure enough there was the honey. Without losing a moment she ran with it to Fanfaronade, crying gaily:

‘See, here is a honeycomb that I have found. I might have eaten it up all by myself, but I had rather share it with you.’

But without looking at her or thanking her he snatched the honey comb out of her hands and ate it all up—every bit, without offering her a morsel. Indeed, when she humbly asked for some he said mockingly that it was too sweet for her, and would spoil her teeth.

Mayblossom, more downcast than ever, went sadly away and sat down under an oak tree, and her tears and sighs were so piteous that the oak fanned her with his rustling leaves, and said:

‘Take courage, pretty Princess, all is not lost yet. Take this pitcher of milk and drink it up, and whatever you do, don’t leave a drop for Fanfaronade.’

The Princess, quite astonished, looked round, and saw a big pitcher full of milk, but before she could raise it to her lips the thought of how thirsty Fanfaronade must be, after eating at least fifteen pounds of honey, made her run back to him and say:

‘Here is a pitcher of milk; drink some, for you must be thirsty I am sure; but pray save a little for me, as I am dying of hunger and thirst.’

But he seized the pitcher and drank all it contained at a single draught, and then broke it to atoms on the nearest stone, saying with a malicious smile: ‘As you have not eaten anything you cannot be thirsty.’

‘Ah!’ cried the Princess, ‘I am well punished for disappointing the King and Queen, and running away with this Ambassador about whom I knew nothing.’

And so saying she wandered away into the thickest part of the wood, and sat down under a thorn tree, where a nightingale was singing. Presently she heard him say: ‘Search under the bush Princess; you will find some sugar, almonds, and some tarts there But don’t be silly enough to offer Fanfaronade any.’ And this time the Princess, who was fainting with hunger, took the nightingale’s advice, and ate what she found all by herself. But Fanfaronade, seeing that she had found something good, and was not going to share it with him, ran after her in such a fury that she hastily drew out the Queen’s carbuncle, which had the property of rendering people invisible if they were in danger, and when she was safely hidden from him she reproached him gently for his unkindness.

Meanwhile Admiral Cocked-Hat had despatched Jack-the-Chatterer-of-the-Straw-Boots, Courier in Ordinary to the Prime Minister, to tell the King that the Princess and the Ambassador had landed on Squirrel

Island, but that not knowing the country he had not pursued them, for fear of being captured by concealed enemies. Their Majesties were overjoyed at the news, and the King sent for a great book, each leaf of which was eight ells long. It was the work of a very clever Fairy, and contained a description of the whole earth. He very soon found that Squirrel Island was uninhabited.

'Go,' said he, to Jack-the-Chatterer, 'tell the Admiral from me to land at once. I am surprised at his not having done so sooner.' As soon as this message reached the fleet, every preparation was made for war, and the noise was so great that it reached the ears of the Princess, who at once flew to protect her lover. As he was not very brave he accepted her aid gladly.

'You stand behind me,' said she, 'and I will hold the carbuncle which will make us invisible, and with the King's dagger I can protect you from the enemy.' So when the soldiers landed they could see nothing, but the Princess touched them one after another with the dagger, and they fell insensible upon the sand, so that at last the Admiral, seeing that there was some enchantment, hastily gave orders for a retreat to be sounded, and got his men back into their boats in great confusion.

Fanfaronade, being once more left with the Princess, began to think that if he could get rid of her, and possess himself of the carbuncle and the dagger, he would be able to make his escape. So as they walked back over the cliffs he gave the Princess a great push, hoping she would fall into the sea; but she stepped aside so quickly that he only succeeded in overbalancing himself, and over he went, and sank to the bottom of the sea like a lump of lead, and was never heard of any more. While the Princess was still looking after him in horror, her attention was attracted by a rushing noise over her head, and looking up she saw two chariots approaching rapidly from opposite directions. One was bright and glittering, and drawn by swans and peacocks, while the Fairy who sat in it was beautiful as a sunbeam; but the other was drawn by bats and ravens, and contained a frightful little Dwarf, who was dressed in a snake's skin, and wore a great toad upon her head for a hood. The chariots met with a frightful crash in mid-air, and the Princess looked on in breathless anxiety while a furious battle took place between the lovely Fairy with her golden lance, and the hideous little Dwarf and her rusty pike. But very soon it was evident that the Beauty had the best of it, and the Dwarf turned her bats' heads and flickered away in great confusion, while the Fairy came down to where the Princess stood, and said, smiling, 'You see Princess, I have completely routed that malicious old Carabosse. Will you believe it! she actually wanted to claim authority over you for ever, because you came out of the tower four days before the twenty years were ended. However, I think I have settled her pretensions, and I hope you will be very happy and enjoy the freedom I have won for you.'

The Princess thanked her heartily, and then the Fairy despatched one of her peacocks to her palace to bring a gorgeous robe for Mayblossom, who certainly needed it, for her own was torn to shreds by the thorns and briars. Another peacock was sent to the Admiral to tell him that he could now land in perfect safety, which he at once did, bringing all his men with him, even to Jack-the-Chatterer, who, happening to pass the spit upon which the Admiral's dinner was roasting, snatched it up and brought it with him.

Admiral Cocked-Hat was immensely surprised when he came upon the golden chariot, and still more so to see two lovely ladies walking under the trees a little farther away. When he reached them, of course he recognised the Princess, and he went down on his knees and kissed her hand quite joyfully. Then she presented him to the Fairy, and told him how Carabosse had been finally routed, and he thanked and congratulated the Fairy, who was most gracious to him. While they were talking she cried suddenly:

'I declare I smell a savoury dinner.'

'Why yes, Madam, here it is,' said Jack-the-Chatterer, holding up the spit, where all the pheasants and partridges were frizzling. 'Will your Highness please to taste any of them?'

'By all means,' said the Fairy, 'especially as the Princess will certainly be glad of a good meal.'

So the Admiral sent back to his ship for everything that was needful, and they feasted merrily under the trees. By the time they had finished the peacock had come back with a robe for the Princess, in which the Fairy arrayed her. It was of green and gold brocade, embroidered with pearls and rubies, and her long golden hair was tied back with strings of diamonds and emeralds, and crowned with flowers. The Fairy made her mount beside her in the golden chariot, and took her on board the Admiral's ship, where she bade her farewell, sending many messages of friendship to the Queen, and bidding the Princess tell her that she was the fifth Fairy who had attended the christening. Then salutes were fired, the fleet weighed anchor, and very soon they reached the port. Here the King and Queen were waiting, and they received the Princess with such joy and kindness that she could not get a word in edgewise, to say how sorry she was for having run away with such a very poor spirited Ambassador. But, after all, it must have been all Carabosse's

fault. Just at this lucky moment who should arrive but King Merlin's son, who had become uneasy at not receiving any news from his Ambassador, and so had started himself with a magnificent escort of a thousand horsemen, and thirty body-guards in gold and scarlet uniforms, to see what could have happened. As he was a hundred times handsomer and braver than the Ambassador, the Princess found she could like him very much. So the wedding was held at once, with so much splendour and rejoicing that all the previous misfortunes were quite forgotten.^[1]

^[1] *La Princesse Printanière*. Par Mme. d'Aulnoy.

SORIA MORIA CASTLE

There was once upon a time a couple of folks who had a son called Halvor. Ever since he had been a little boy he had been unwilling to do any work, and had just sat raking about among the ashes. His parents sent him away to learn several things, but Halvor stayed nowhere, for when he had been gone two or three days he always ran away from his master, hurried off home, and sat down in the chimney corner to grub among the ashes again.

One day, however, a sea captain came and asked Halvor if he hadn't a fancy to come with him and go to sea, and behold foreign lands. And Halvor had a fancy for that, so he was not long in getting ready.

How long they sailed I have no idea, but after a long, long time there was a terrible storm, and when it was over and all had become calm again, they knew not where they were, for they had been driven away to a strange coast of which none of them had any knowledge.

As there was no wind at all they lay there becalmed, and Halvor asked the skipper to give him leave to go on shore to look about him, for he would much rather do that than lie there and sleep.

'Dost thou think that thou art fit to go where people can see thee?' said the skipper; 'thou hast no clothes but those rags thou art going about in!'

Halvor still begged for leave, and at last got it, but he was to come back at once if the wind began to rise.

So he went on shore, and it was a delightful country; whithersoever he went there were wide plains with fields and meadows, but as for people, there were none to be seen. The wind began to rise, but Halvor thought that he had not seen enough yet, and that he would like to walk about a little longer, to try if he could not meet somebody. So after a while he came to a great highway, which was so smooth that an egg might have been rolled along it without breaking. Halvor followed this, and when evening drew near he saw a big castle far away in the distance, and there were lights in it. So as he had now been walking the whole day and had not brought anything to eat away with him, he was frightfully hungry. Nevertheless, the nearer he came to the castle the more afraid he was.

A fire was burning in the castle, and Halvor went into the kitchen, which was more magnificent than any kitchen he had ever yet beheld. There were vessels of gold and silver, but not one human being was to be seen. When Halvor had stood there for some time, and no one had