



THE SHY PRINCESS.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY FLORA SCHMALS.



ONCE upon a time, a King and Queen had a daughter, who was the shyest Princess that ever lived. She could not look at anyone without blushing, and if anyone spoke to her, she began to cry.

Her father and mother tried every remedy to cure her, but instead of improving, she seemed to grow gradually worse. The people called her shyness the Princess's unfortunate infirmity, and said she must have been bewitched at her birth.

The unhappy maiden took no pleasure in her life; indeed, every day it became a greater punishment to her. If such a thing had been permitted, she would have shut herself up in a dark room, so that no one could behold her blushes. Truly, the most ardent wish that she had on earth was to hide herself away from her fellow-creatures.

Yet it must not be imagined, from what has been said, that the Princess Bashful was not pleasant to look upon. So far was this from being the case, that even the critical Court ladies were sometimes heard to admit that their Princess was not without beauty, of a certain kind.

Bashful's face was like a flower of apple-blossom, that has newly opened, and which still retains its dewy paleness, with the

faintest tinge of pink. Her eyes, when they were not lowered, shone like violet-blue stars from out a cloud of glistening golden hair. And with this wonderful hair, which rippled down until it reached the ground, she had been known, on more than one occasion, to veil her blushes.

It was a face that all men must have admired, had they been lucky enough to obtain a glimpse of it. But the Princess could never be persuaded to show herself at any of the high Court functions, and if a courtier happened to be anywhere about, she would invariably run away at his approach. This was one reason why the ladies thought so highly of her good sense; for, if the Princess had chosen, she might have thrown them all completely into the shade.

When her twenty-first birthday drew near, the King and the Queen, and the whole Court, decided that it was quite time for the Princess to marry. Therefore a Cabinet Council was held, in order to discuss the important question, from which every one came away with a severe headache. But as a result, the King issued a proclamation, on the following day, that the Prince who succeeded in curing his daughter of her shyness should, without fail, become her husband.

So soon as Bashful heard of what had taken place, she withdrew into still stricter retirement, and spent her days and nights in continual weeping.

"By crying, I shall grow as ugly as possible," she said to herself; "and then, no one will care to marry me."

Meanwhile the King's edict travelled far and wide, and a rumour soon spread that no fewer than five Princes had at once set out for the palace. Each of these Princes ruled over a large kingdom, and was considered altogether suitable to mate with the Princess. So there were great preparations made on every side, in order to receive the illustrious visitors with due honour. But the courtiers, each of whom secretly adored the miserable Princess, were already consumed with jealousy; while the ladies, who hoped that the rejected Princes might console themselves by choosing one of them instead, whispered to each other that they were dying of curiosity.

On the day following the arrival of the Princes the Princess Bashful would come of age, when each Prince would be required, successively, to come forward and put his method to the test. Whichever of them could then prevail on the Princess to speak to him should be granted another trial.

Every sort of argument was used to induce the Princess to be present at her birthday reception. But it was not until the actual morning had dawned that she agreed to survey the Princes, upon the condition that she herself might remain in concealment.

Alas! how swollen were poor Bashful's eyes! And as for her throat, it had become parched and burning, owing to the salt brine from her tears.

The only creature the lonely maiden ever confided in was a handsome Brazilian parrot, whose cage hung in her room. This bird was over a hundred years old, but still enjoyed perfect health; for he had never

been allowed to touch a morsel of parsley, and his food was always cold, not hot.

"Oh, dear me! I feel worse than ever I did before," sighed the Princess, as she stood in her turret chamber, with the parrot perched upon her finger.

"Cheer up!" shrieked the parrot. "Don't fret!"

But though he did his best to console his beloved mistress, she knew perfectly well that however bitterly she might repent of her promise, yet a born Princess is bound to keep her word.

At mid-day the King and Queen were seated on their thrones in the Hall of Audience, and the Court had mustered in full force. The Princess was also on the dais, though hidden from view by a large screen of the finest Japanese workmanship.

Then a trumpet was blown, loud and long, and the first Prince advanced with a bold and confident air.

"The following is my suggestion," he stated, arrogantly. "Let the Princess be informed that the handsomest man in the world has come to woo her. This will immediately inspire her with the

wish to look upon me. She will then admire me, to such an extent, that she will certainly speak to me. So shall I win my suit."

"The Princess Bashful has already seen you," replied the King, somewhat haughtily; "if she feels tempted to speak to the handsomest man in the world, she will doubtless come forth."

A dead silence reigned throughout the hall, so that you might have heard a pin drop. But the Princess gave no sign.

"It is enough," was the King's verdict. "If that is your plan, sire, it has failed. Let the next competitor be summoned."

The Prince who now appeared was of a



"'CHEER UP!' SHRIEKED THE PARROT. 'DON'T FRET!'"

cheerful and merry cast of countenance. The idea of possible failure had evidently never entered his head.

"We must have music," he said, gaily, "so that I may dance before the Princess. My dancing is considered a most admirable performance. When the Princess watches me, she will soon be seized with a longing to join me. While we are dancing together, I shall speak to her, and you can make your minds easy that she will answer me."

"The Princess is observing you at present," was the King's ready rejoinder. "Therefore, let the musicians strike up."

So the music began, and the Prince danced. He went on, and on, until his legs seemed to be flying off, in all directions, and his head grew dizzy with spinning round. Everyone was thoroughly worn out with watching the extraordinary capers that he cut. But the Princess took no notice of him whatsoever.

"Stop!" cried the King, at length. "Stop at once, or we shall all go mad. The Princess will not bestow her favour upon a mountebank."

Thus the second Prince was forced to confess himself beaten. But he quitted the hall, whistling audibly, as if to prove to the company that he did not care a jot.

Now, the third aspirant was a man of maturer aspect, with a shrewd expression and a dignified carriage.

"My scheme," he informed them, "cannot possibly admit of failure. Only, before I

reveal it, the Princess must permit me to take a look at her. If she is behind that screen, as I suppose, will you kindly remove it? Or better still, allow me for a moment to peep behind the screen."

But here there came a distinct rustle of silken draperies. It was evident that the Princess Bashful had fled by the door near which she had stationed herself, in case of any sudden alarm.



"EXTRAORDINARY CAPERS."

"No such stipulation was in the contract," returned the King, and his tones expressed considerable annoyance. "If you cannot make up your mind to take the Princess on trust, you are not worthy of her. Consequently, sir, I must request you to withdraw."

So the third Prince stalked off, with a

majestic and injured manner. Upon which one of the Court ladies was dispatched at once to bring back the truant Princess.

It was the fourth Prince's turn to draw leisurely to the front, for this one had the pensive, abstracted bearing of a student.

"My proposal is," he began, in measured tones, "that the Princess should wear a mask. If no one can look at her, she will gain courage and independence. Slowly, but surely, she will become accustomed to mix with her fellow-creatures. Here is a mask which I have brought with me, for the purpose. If the Princess can be persuaded to put it on, I feel sure that she will answer me when I address her."

"Not so bad," remarked the King, more hopefully. "However, it is for the Princess to decide. If she will test the experiment let her give a cough, and the mask will be handed to her without delay."

But Bashful remained still silent, and no wonder! Had it been a beautiful mask, she might perhaps have complied with such a request. But how could she submit to transform her loveliness into ugliness?

Things were going very badly, thought the Queen. Her glance was full of sadness, and the King frowned ominously. For only one Prince was left to try his luck, and what likelihood did there seem that he would fare any better than the others had done?

He advanced very quietly to the front, and without any display of any kind. He appeared so brave, and yet so modest, it

inspired one with confidence merely to look at him.

"Your Majesty," he began, with diffidence, "I should like to tell you a story, but in order not to weary you I will make it as short as possible. A Prince was once dreadfully in love with a Princess—only, for certain reasons, he was not able to declare his love. First of all, he had never seen her, nor was it at all probable that he would ever have the chance. It is true that he might have sent her a message, but then he loved her too dearly to run the risk of causing her tears to flow when she received it.

"So, for a long time, the Prince had to content himself with thinking and dreaming of the maiden, who, for him, was the only one in existence. He gave up the hunting, which was his favourite pastime. All night he lay awake, so that he might have more leisure to cherish her in his heart. Day after day he waited patiently, until at last the opportunity offered itself when he could travel to the palace where she lived.

"And now comes the strangest part of my story. The Princess was very beautiful—but that was not the reason why he loved her. This is a riddle, and you must all try to guess it. Why do I love the Princess?"

Here the King and Queen conversed together in low tones. The courtiers shook their heads to give vent to their displeasure; but the ladies giggled and cast admiring glances at the last competitor.

The Prince's eyes, however, were fixed



"THE LADIES GIGGLED."

upon the ground. His countenance had grown very pale and anxious.

Now, the Princess was watching him all the time through a small, round hole which had been pierced in the screen beforehand. She had been feeling very weary of the whole affair; but, upon perceiving the Prince's troubled mien, Bashful smiled to herself, while her cheeks were mantled with blushes.

"Do you give it up?" he asked, at length, after quite ten minutes had elapsed.

Then they were all obliged to own that the riddle was too deep for them.

"Why do I love the Princess?" repeated the Prince. "Because of her shyness."

No one spoke. Fear and trembling were written on every face, because it was forbidden at the palace that anyone should refer to the Princess's unfortunate infirmity. But, suddenly, they were startled beyond measure by a delicious peal of low, rippling, girlish laughter. It came from behind the screen, and it was curious, the expression of relief that immediately spread over the countenances of all present. For, strange as it may sound, this was absolutely the first occasion on which the Princess Bashful had ever been known to laugh.

But still greater was the sense of relief that stole over the maiden herself. All at once it seemed as if her shyness had ceased to become a bugbear to her. Nay, it was even something to be loved for. What a new and delightful idea!

"That is good to hear," said the Prince, in his most cheery voice. "Can't you do it again?"

At this request, Bashful was so indescribably tickled, that she actually gave another laugh, louder and longer than the first. And, oh! what an inestimable amount of good it did her! The cobwebs seemed to be clearing away from her brain, in the same way as the mists are dispelled by the rising of the sun. She had never felt so light-hearted in her life.

Carried away by his excitement, the King started up from his throne.

"She has laughed," he pronounced, with gladness, "and laughter is surely a part of speech. Let the Prince return hither to-morrow at the same hour; and may his efforts be crowned with success!"

So the Court was adjourned until the following day, the courtiers dispersing in a most unenviable frame of mind. "Why could we not have thought of this remedy ourselves?" they asked one another, sourly.

The Princess hied to her chamber as fast

as her legs would carry her, for she felt utterly bewildered at the change that was rapidly taking place in her constitution.

As the hour of trial approached, the Prince grew terribly nervous. When the Court had assembled in the Hall of Audience, and the trumpet sounded as usual, he walked boldly enough to the front. But his face was deadly pale, and it was quite easy to perceive that the matter now at stake had become for him a question of life or death.

The Princess had already taken up her position behind the screen, and everyone was on the alert.

"We are now ready," the King declared, "to hear what Prince Valiant has to say for himself."

"Your Majesty," stammered the Prince, "it consists of another riddle." And notwithstanding all his efforts to the contrary, the poor youth presented a picture of most pitiable dejection.

"Proceed!" commanded the King, though in more kindly accents.

"How can I succeed in winning the Princess?"

The Prince now spoke clearly, and held himself very erect, having indeed resolved to meet failure itself in the way that a brave knight should do.

Of course, no one made any attempt to solve the riddle. It touched, just as the first had done, upon much too delicate ground.

"We give it up," said the King, at length, acting as spokesman for the rest.

"The Princess will tell you the answer herself," murmured the Prince, doffing his hat, and falling on one knee.

This was a turn in the tide of events which caused universal disappointment. The King's brow swiftly clouded over again. Tears rushed into the Queen's eyes, and a sob rose in her throat. Yesterday all had promised to go so well, but now there seemed to have come an end to everything.

So spoke the Prince, and continued kneeling, until the King was on the point of bidding him rise and go forth. But just as he began to despair a wonderful thing happened. There was a movement behind the screen which caused it to shake slightly. Another moment, and out stepped the Princess Bashful, who looked enchantingly fair and sweetly gracious.

She was clad in a robe of wondrous blue-green that shimmered like the waves of the sea. Her bright eyes sparkled like dew-drops through their tears, and her hair fell round her in a golden shower.

The Prince bent still lower before her, shading his eyes with his hand, as if the vision of so much beauty had dazzled them.

But a white hand was outstretched to raise him from the ground. Then, as everybody remained speechless with surprise, it was the Princess Bashful who addressed him first.

"Prince Valiant," she said, and her voice resembled the sound of the evening breeze when it plays over the surface of the running water, "I have been told of all the great and generous deeds you have performed. I have been assured that you love me truly. But

how can that be, when you had never seen me?"

"It was because in my own land," said the Prince, "I had been told how shy you were."

Whereupon the Princess laughed right merrily. And though her blushes rose fast and furious, they no longer distressed her as of old, and the Prince came forward and kissed both her hands.

Then the King gave out that as the Princess Bashful was cured of her shyness, the marriage should take place on the morrow.

