

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

FROM THE FRENCH OF JULES LE MAITRE.

“**S**O Cinderella married the King’s son.” And a few months later the King died, and Cinderella’s husband himself was King.

Shortly after this the Queen had a little daughter, who was called Mimi. Princess Mimi was as beautiful as the day; her hair was pale gold dotted with sunbeams, her skin the delicate pink of a moss rose.

Now, the law of that country was that she should be married when she was fifteen, and, being a Princess, she could marry only a Prince. But in all the neighbouring countries only two Princes could be found: Polyphemus, who was seven times taller than the Princess; and Hop o’ my Thumb, who was seven times smaller. Both these Princes adored her, but she cared for neither of them: one was too big, the other too little, to please her.

But, nevertheless, the King, her father, commanded her to choose between them, and gave her only a month to make up her mind. He told the Princes, too, that they were permitted to court her, and it was settled beforehand that the rejected suitor was to bear no malice to the successful one, and not to do him any harm.

Polyphemus arrived with plenty of presents—sheep, oxen, cheeses, great baskets of fruit, and, behind him, a train of giant warriors, clothed in pieced skins. Hop o’ my Thumb brought presents, too—birds in a gilt cage, flowers, jewels; and his followers were clowns in cap and bells and dancers dressed in silk.

Polyphemus at once began to tell his history.

“You must not believe all a fellow called Homer has written about me,” he said. “First of all, he says I have only one eye, and you see for yourself I have two. Next,

although it is true that I lived once on an island, and ate mariners who landed there, I only did it because they were little mites. Just, dear Princess, as you might pick the bones of a plover or young rabbit at your father's table, and see nothing cruel in it. And besides that, I haven't done it once since another fellow called Ulysses explained to me that the poor little mites were men like myself, and that some of them had families that grieved dreadfully when they were eaten. Ever since then I have lived altogether on the flesh and milk of my flocks and herds. For really and truly I'm not at all a bad fellow. You can see it for yourself, dear Princess, for though I am so big and strong, I'm as gentle as a lamb with you."

But he was too vain to tell Mimi that, strong as he was, Ulysses had overcome him and put out one of his eyes; and that he only recovered his sight through the art of a magician.

Meantime Mimi was thinking.

"It's all very well, but if he were very hungry he might just eat *me*. Now, Hop o' my Thumb is so little, that it is I who could crunch him, if I were in the mood for it."

Next it was the little Prince's turn to tell his story:—

"A wicked spell was cast over me and my six brothers, to make us lose our way in a forest. But I scattered white pebbles along the road to show us the way back. Unfortunately, however, we met the Ogre, who carried us off to his castle and put us all into one big bed together, intending to eat us up next day. But, instead of that, he killed his own seven daughters, for I had put them into the bed where he expected to find us. I took away his seven-leagued boots, too, and very useful they were afterwards, when I went to war with a neighbouring King. For by means of the boots I followed every move of the enemy, and that is how I became a powerful Prince. But I never wear the boots now. They are in the museum of my palace. To begin with, they were very hard on my feet, and then it wasn't convenient to take such very long steps when I went out only for a little walk. But you shall see them some day, dear Princess."

But he was too vain to tell her that his father was nothing but a poor wood-cutter, and, like Polyphemus, he mixed up the true with the false, a thing that love, selfishness, and imagination make many people do. But the Princess admired him for his great cleverness.

One day Polyphemus was stretched on a couch in the boudoir of the Princess, and he was so big the room seemed full of him; and when he spoke his huge voice shook the light furniture and made the windows rattle as if it were thundering.

"I am a simple fellow," he began, "but my heart is in the right place, and I am very strong. I can pluck up rocks and throw them into the sea; or fell an ox with a tap of my fist. Even lions are afraid of me. Come, dear Princess, with me to my country. I will show you beautiful things there: mountains that are blue when the sun rises, and rose pink when he sets; lakes that shine like polished mirrors; forests that are as old as the world itself. And, no matter where you want to go, I will take you, even to the highest mountains to gather strange flowers that no woman has ever worn before. I will be your slave, too, and so shall all my people be. Don't you think it would be rather fine, dear Princess, to be a sort of goddess served by a giant host? To be the Queen, and you so tiny and delicate, you know, of forests and mountains, of torrents and lakes, of eagles and lions?"

All this stirred the Princess a good deal; and though she was rather tremulous, it was only as a timid little bird quivers when it finds itself in the warm, kind hand it knows and looks to for protection. But Hop o' my Thumb, hidden all this time in a fold of her dress, began now to speak in his tiny voice like a clear crystal bell:—

"Dear Princess, choose me. I take so little room. I am so tiny that you can do just what you please with me, too. And then I have wits to love you according to your mood. I can suit my words and caresses to the inmost secret of your heart, whether you are merry or sad; and to all seasons and all kinds of weather. I shall have endless ways of entertaining you, too, and will surround you with every invention of mankind to make life pleasant. You shall see only beautiful things: the loveliest flowers, jewels, stuffs, statues; smell only the most delicious perfumes. I will tell you charming stories; have plays acted for you by the best performers. I can sing, too, and play the mandoline, and compose verses. It is a finer thing to describe beautiful things one has seen and felt, in harmonious language, than to stride over torrents. To master words is more difficult than to master wild beasts. Fine muscles are commoner than fine wits."

And the Princess, dreamy, silent, listened to all he said as to a melody.

One day she said to both her lovers :  
"Please make me some verses."

Prince Hop o' my Thumb reflected just a moment and then recited some lines, little ones like himself :—

A Prince I am of Royal blood,  
As all the world may see ;  
And sweetest Princess Mimi  
Is all the world to me.  
I am no Hercules, not I !  
Nor do not wish to be.  
My heart is large and loving,  
And that's enough for me.  
A field of gathered roses  
In tiniest vial lies ;  
The least of little dewdrops  
Reflecteth azure skies.  
My body small indeed is,  
But that you will not mind ;  
You know how great my love is,  
And surely will be kind.

"Charming ! exquisite !" said the Princess,

and she felt proud to be loved by a little man who could so easily string rhymes together.

"Bah," said Polyphemus, "such little verses as that cannot be hard to make."

"Try," said Hop o' my Thumb.

And try he did, all day long. But nothing came, not even when he hammered his forehead with his fist at last, in a rage at not being able to express what he felt so intensely ; somehow, it didn't seem fair. But there he stuck from morn till eve, his mouth open, his eyes wandering. It was almost nightfall, when at last he discovered that *love* and *dove* rhymed, and rushing to Mimi, he cried :—

"I've got it, got it !"

"That's right," said the Princess, "let us hear it, then."

"Here it is," said the giant :—

Oh, my dove  
I assure you I you love.

This, of course, made the Princess laugh heartily.

"What," said poor Polyphemus, abashed, "aren't they good verses ?"

Hop o' my Thumb enjoyed this very much, as it showed his superiority.

"It was not so hard all the same," he said.

"You might just have said this, you know :—

My Princess you are  
fair ;  
For love of you I'm all  
despair.

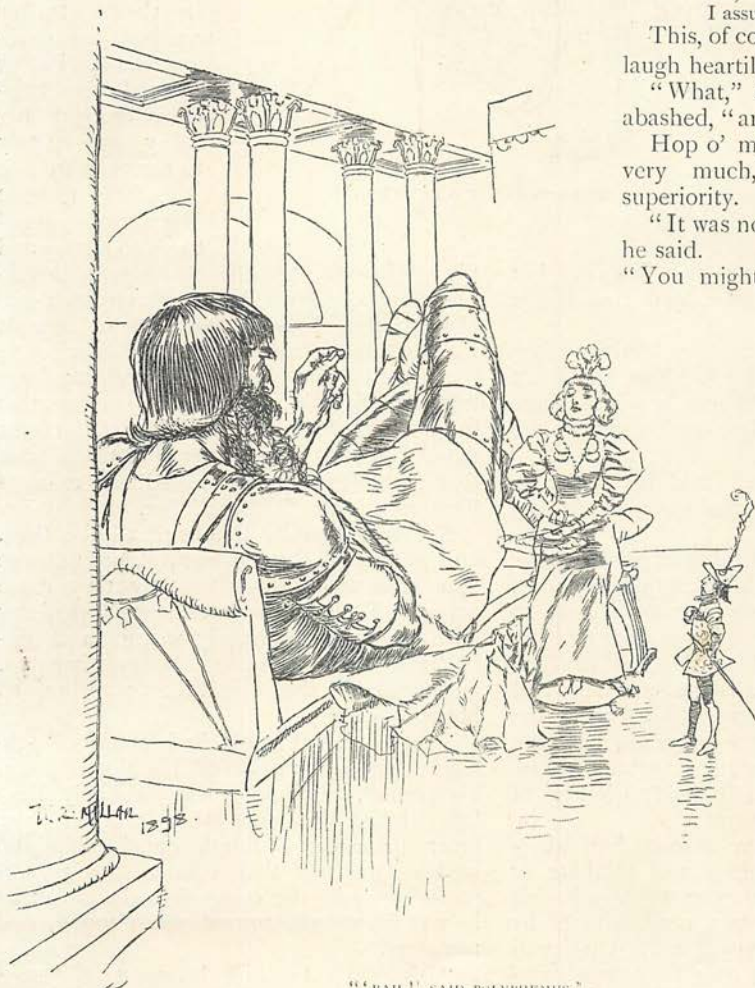
Or,  
I'm a giant good and  
true,  
Who breaks his heart,  
for love of you.

Or,  
A little, little maiden  
Who wields a con-  
quering dart,  
She scarce can reach  
my instep,  
How hath she pierced  
my heart ?

Or else, if you like  
it better :—

Among the trees,  
The oak, the grandest  
giant grows,  
And loves, among  
The blossoms, that fair-  
est flower, the Rose."

"Lovely, charm-  
ing, delightful !" said  
Mimi. But at that  
moment she saw in



"BAH !" SAID POLYPHEMUS.

one of Polyphemus's eyes a tear the size of a hen's egg, and he looked so wretched she felt sorry for him. Besides, there was something in Hop o' my Thumb's self-satisfaction that didn't quite please her. Polyphemus, in comparison, looked so subdued and simple that she was touched.

"After all," she thought, "with one fillip of his finger he could send the other flying, or he could pop him into his pocket. Indeed, though, of course, I'm bigger than Hop o' my Thumb, he could easily enough tuck me under his arm and do anything he liked with me. He must be very good-hearted to bear all this so patiently."

Then, speaking to Polyphemus, she said:—

"Don't be too much grieved, my friend. Your verses are not first-rate, but they have heart in them, and that is the essential thing."

"But," objected Hop o' my Thumb, "they are not proper verses at all. You could not possibly scan them. There are only three syllables in the first line and seven in the other."

"Hold your tongue," said the Princess, sharply; "thank goodness everyone is not born a critic like you."

The palace where Mimi lived was in a large park, across which ran a beautiful blue river, in the midst of which was an island, so covered with flowers that it was like a nosegay floating between the blue sky and the blue river. Mimi loved this island, and spent all the time she could there, either among the flowers, or resting in the porcelain pavilion, which in shape and colour was built to resemble an immense tulip, with windows of precious stones set in silver.

One day she was there as usual, half asleep in her pavilion, dreaming and thinking, or singing touching little songs to herself, her eyes half shut, so that not until aroused by the sound of waves lapping against the wall did she perceive that the river was over-

flowing. Opening one of the windows, she saw to her horror that already she was cut off from the mainland, the bridge being under water, and in a few more moments the whole island would be flooded. Terrified, she shrieked for help to her father and mother,

who, with Hop o' my Thumb, had rushed to the river bank, but stood there in despair, unable to save her. Just then, however, Polyphemus joined them, and, learning that Mimi was on the island, he calmly stepped into the rushing river (which hardly reached his belt), in three strides reached the pavilion, and, having rescued the Princess, brought her safely and gently to her parents.

"Oh," thought Mimi, "how grand to be so strong and

big! How sweet to lie under such protection always! With Polyphemus to take care of me, I should never have a fear or anxiety. I really think I had better choose him."

And with that she smiled, and his huge frame shook with pleasure just because that little mouth had smiled at him. But next day she found Hop o' my Thumb so sad, that, to comfort him, she asked him to come for a walk in the fields with her.

She held him by the hand all the time, and pretended she was so tired, not to make him walk too fast. Presently they came across a flock of sheep, and as Hop o' my Thumb was unfortunately wearing a cherry-coloured doublet, the ram became irritated, and made for the little Prince with lowered horns.

Hop o' my Thumb had plenty of self-respect, and, in spite of his alarm, stood his ground. But he would probably have been killed had not the Princess, with great presence of mind, caught him up in her arms and then opened her parasol so suddenly in the angry animal's face, that he was frightened, turned sharp round, and ran away.

"It's lucky for him he went off," said



"A TEAR THE SIZE OF A HEN'S EGG."



"HE CALMLY STEPPED INTO THE RUSHING RIVER."

Hop o' my Thumb. "Of course I wasn't at all afraid. You saw for yourself, dear Princess, that I was ready for him."

"Yes, yes," she answered, "I know you are very brave." And to herself she thought: "How sweet to protect someone feebler than oneself. I'm sure one would grow very fond of anyone to whom one was really useful, particularly of one so pretty and refined as this little Prince."

The next day Hop o' my Thumb brought her a little rose scarcely more than a bud, but more exquisite in tint and scent than any rose that ever was seen before.

She took it from him, saying:—

"Thank you, thank you, dear kind little Prince."

Her gown that day was made of a sort of fine gossamer, shaded with changing lights, like a dragon-fly's wings.

"Ah," said Hop o' my Thumb, "how beautiful your dress is!"

"Yes," said Mimi, "isn't it pretty? And just see how well your rose looks fastened in it."

"A rose," thought Polyphemus; "what's *one* rose? I'll just show her what the bouquets I give are like."

And with that, he went off to the Indies, to a large tree covered with enormous bright flowers as big as cathedral bells, and, plucking up the tree, he bore it in triumph to the Princess.

"It is very beautiful," said Mimi, laughing, "but what shall I do with it, dear Prince? I cannot wear that in my dress or hair, can I?"

Poor Polyphemus, abashed at these words, could think of no answer, and only hung his head. But while doing this, he saw that Hop o' my Thumb was dressed in stuff

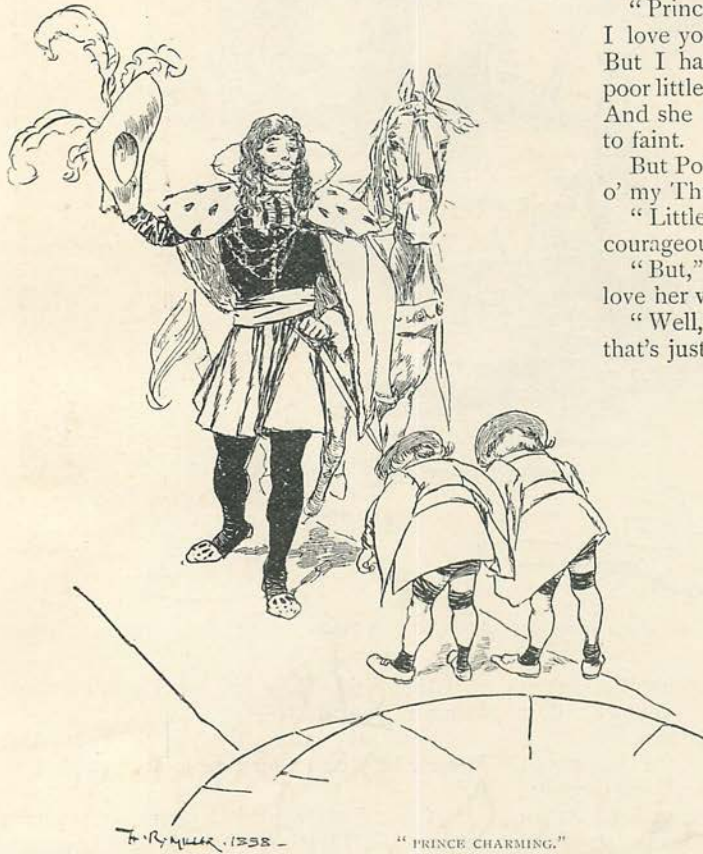
like the Princess's gossamer gown, and he cried:—

"Oh!"

"Yes," said Mimi, "I had it made for him, out of one of the snips left. There was not enough to make even a neck-tie for you; so I didn't offer you any."

And with that she turned to the King, her father, and said:—

"The time for me to decide has come, father, and I choose Prince Hop o' my Thumb to be my husband. Prince Poly-



"PRINCE CHARMING."

phemus will forgive me, I hope. I am sorry to make him unhappy, and I have a great regard for him."

Polyphemus was true to the compact, and gently grasping his successful rival's tiny hand, he said:—

"Only make her happy."

The marriage day arrived, and the bride seemed neither glad nor sorry. She liked Hop o' my Thumb, but did not really love him.

Now, just as the wedding procession was leaving the palace for the church, a servant announced Prince Charming: he had been travelling in foreign lands for several years, and had only arrived in time to be present at the ceremony.

He was a very handsome young man, rather taller than Princess Mimi, very distinguished looking, and as clever as clever can be. Mimi had never seen or even heard of him before, but, directly he was introduced to her, she grew first pale, then red, and, as if she couldn't help herself, said:—

"Prince, I was waiting for you. I love you, and I know you love me. But I have pledged my word to this poor little fellow, and I can't break it." And she looked as if she were going to faint.

But Polyphemus bent down to Hop o' my Thumb, and said:—

"Little Prince, if I did it, aren't you courageous enough to do it too?"

"But," said Hop o' my Thumb, "I love her very much indeed."

"Well," said the good giant, "and that's just the reason why——"

"Madam," said Hop o' my Thumb, "this good fellow is right. I love you too much to want to make you unhappy. None of us knew that Prince Charming would come. But if you wish it, let him be your husband."

He said all this very gravely and with much dignity, but when the Princess in her joy and relief caught him up in her arms and kissed him on both cheeks, saying:—

"Ah, this is kind of you," he burst into tears and said:—

"That's the hardest cut of all."

"Come, dear little Prince," said the giant; "come away with me. No one can understand your grief as I can. You will talk of it to me; all day long we will talk of her to each other; and watch over her, too, if at a distance."

And with these words he raised his little friend to his shoulder and strode away with him, and both disappeared where earth and sky meet.