

A FAIRY STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY R. E. VERNÈDE.

"Oh, dear," sighed Carolla, as she ran into the forest, "I wish that Gorgianna were less beautiful or that Kings were not so foolish."

"Why do you say that?"

Carolla looked up, to find that she had almost run into a man mounted on a great white horse. He was young and very handsome, and his armour was made of gold. In his right hand he carried a small sack, and he seemed to have been riding at full speed, for his horse was flecked

with foam. He pulled the beast up almost on its haunches, and repeated, rather angrily: "Why do you say that?"

"Because so many have lost their lives for her," said Carolla.

"Pooh!" said the young man. "What does that matter? For one so beautiful as Gorgianna, Kings should gladly die."

"Most Kings do die," said Carolla, but he went on, without paying any attention.

"I have ridden all the way from Landamor, through many countries of giants and magicians, because I heard that she was so beautiful."

"You are the King they expect, then?" asked Carolla.

"Does Gorgianna expect me?" he inquired, eagerly.

"She expects more diamonds," said Carolla.

"Child," said the King, impatiently, "you must be envious. What do poor maids know about Princesses?"

CAROLLA drew her ragged cloak about her and slipped out of the palace down the long avenue pink with almond-blossoms. No one in the Court cared where she went, for they were all busy preparing for the arrival of a new King, who was reported to be on his way to woo Princess Gorgianna, the Caliph's daughter. He would make the hundred and fiftieth King that had come for that purpose, and the heads of the rest were drying in the sun on the spikes of the palace gates. For Gorgianna was cruel as she was beautiful. She did not wish to marry, only to get the bag of diamonds which each wooer was bound to bring her as a gift before setting out on two adventures dictated by the Caliph, to be successfully accomplished before he could hope to win the hand of Gorgianna. These adventures were so dangerous that no one yet had succeeded in them, and the penalty of failure was to lose one's head.

Carolla blushed to be called a child and to be thought envious. But she did not tell the King that she was Gorgianna's sister, neglected and put in the background because of Gorgianna's pride and fascinations, for she thought that would give him further reason for thinking her jealous, which she was not. But because this King was so young and gallant, though not indeed very polite to her, she warned him earnestly of what would surely happen.

"There is nothing I wish more than that



"HE SUDDENLY CAUGHT SIGHT OF SOMETHING OVAL-SHAPED THAT CAME BOUNDING TOWARDS HIM."

the Princess should be married," she said, "and to show it I will gladly help you, if I can, on your adventures."

"You!" he said, staring; "how could you help me?"

"I know the forests," she said, "and some of the fairies that live there are my friends. Nothing can be done without fairies."

He laughed good-naturedly, as at a child, and shook his reins.

"Maybe," he cried, "but I help myself. Now I must be off to see this beautiful Princess."

"You will not go back?"

"Never," he said, and he put his horse to the gallop.

Carolla watched him sadly until he was out of sight, and then went and ran with the deer among the glades and sang to the birds. The forests always showed her something new, some wonderful little brook that gurgled its dreams among the stones, or some slim

green tree full of spring thoughts. All the creatures that dwelt there loved Carolla, and the flowers gave out a sweeter scent when she walked near.

Meanwhile the young King rode on, thinking only of the beautiful Princess he was so soon to see. As he came to a place of little downs that lay not far from the palace he suddenly caught sight of something oval-shaped that came bounding towards him, rolling up one hillock and down another. He would not have stopped to see what it was had it not been that it rolled directly in his path, and,

while it seemed to be a barrel, gave forth deep groans and murmurs.

"Is anything the matter?" asked the King, thinking it a most strange barrel. A voice immediately answered from inside:—

"Stop me rolling, and I'll tell ye!"

The King at once got down from his horse and steadied the cask.

"I never heard a barrel speak before," he said.

"Maybe not," said the voice. "The fact is, I'm the Vizier, and the Caliph had me placed inside this barrel and sent me rolling off in order that I might not warn the King that is coming to-day that he will only perish if he persists in wooing the Princess Gorgianna."

"Indeed," said the King. "Why is that?"

"Because she only loves diamonds," said the Vizier, "and every new suitor that comes brings her more."

"I don't believe it," said the King, angrily. "She is so beautiful that everyone tries to disparage her."

He was in such a fury that he let the barrel roll on down the hillock into the forest, though the Vizier groaned pitifully and asked to be let out. For all his kind heart the King could not believe but that anyone who spoke against Princess Gorgianna deserved whatever punishment he got. And again he rode on and came to the palace, and having handed over his bag of diamonds was introduced to the presence of the Princess.

Now it was Gorgianna's custom to receive her wooers very graciously at first, for she loved admiration, and knew that the more they admired her the readier they would be to go out on the adventures in which none of them had ever yet succeeded, so that she could be quit of them when she pleased. When the young King arrived, therefore, she was sitting among her maidens in her rose-bower, robed in a dress that was made altogether of diamonds, at the sight of which the King, because he was a little dazzled, thought her more beautiful even than he had heard. Her eyes were blue and wide, her lips pouted, and her hair was a shimmer of gold.

She gave the King a seat beside her and let him babble compliments, to which she only smiled sweetly, while she thought out a new corset that might be strung from the diamonds he had brought. She knew that the Caliph, who had been in a bad temper for some time, was devising some most impossible adventure for this new wooer of hers to embark on. Presently the Caliph came in; a fierce, small man, with the bushiest of eyebrows.

"Who is this?" he asked, abruptly.

"I am the King of Landamor," said the young man, "and I have come to ask for the hand of your daughter."

"Do you agree to my conditions?" asked the Caliph, grimly.

"To any conditions," said the King.

"Sign, then," said the Caliph, and the King, not being in a very thoughtful frame of mind, which was what the Caliph always counted on, signed the document that was handed to him. He read nothing in fact except the words "on condition that" and "I give you the hand of my daughter."

"Now you must go on your adventures," said the Caliph. "By to-morrow morning you must bring me as a token something New Done under the sun."

The King realized at once the nature of his folly, and began, in despair:—

"But——"

"There are no buts about it," said the Caliph, frowning, so that for all his small size he looked like a thundercloud.

"I only wanted to say——" went on the poor King.

"Surely you will do this little thing for me?" said the crafty Gorgianna, interrupting. She looked so dazzling that the King forgot that he had meant to say it was impossible, and could only stammer:—

"Of course."

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"Thank you so much," said Gorgianna, smiling to herself.

"Not at all," said the King.

"By to-morrow morning, mind," repeated the Caliph.

"Certainly."

"Or else you lose your head."

The King bowed himself out of the rose-bower and into the park, where he found his white horse waiting for him. When he had mounted, and the cool wind fanned his heated brow, he remembered again what lay before him, and cried out, as he rode:—

"But it is impossible!"

"What is impossible?"

This time it was the King who nearly rode into Carolla; but he was now so desperate that he was less polite than before.

"You are always in the way, it seems," he muttered.

"The road is clear enough," she said, smiling. "It is your fault if we have met again, for I saw you a mile away, and you have been riding up and down and round and round till you came right into me."

"I beg your pardon," said the King, being too proud quite to admit his error. "I'm afraid it was my fault or, rather, my horse's. He is a little dazed."

"I see," said Carolla, doubtfully. "You aren't, are you?"

"I—dazed?" exclaimed the King. "Why should you suppose so?"

Carolla hesitated.

"You have been to see Gorgianna," she said, at last. "And you have met the Caliph, and I heard you say something was impossible."

"So it is," said the King.

"What is?"

"To bring something done new under the sun to the Caliph by to-morrow morning."

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Carolla. "That does sound very difficult. You must go into the forests at once."

"What for?"

"To fetch it."

"But there is nothing done new," objected the King. "It's impossible."

"Not if you go to the forests," she said, eagerly. "At every turn there are strange things that the fairies have made, only they are hard to find. I do not know if you understand the way to search for them."

"I don't," said the King. "Do you?"

"Sometimes."

"Then you must come and show me," he cried, and before she knew he had stooped and lifted her up on the saddle before him.



"HE LIFTED HER UP ON THE SADDLE BEFORE HIM."

The white horse galloped like the wind under his double burden. The truth is that the green grasses grew springy for his hoofs, knowing well that it was Carolla whom they were speeding on. The King grew cheerful again, he knew not why, and began to talk of Gorgianna and her beauty as if no troubles or adventures were ahead. And Carolla, leaning against his right arm, listened and said nothing. So they advanced till they were among the great black trees, and a mist began to rise out of the ground. Quite suddenly the white horse neighed and stood still.

"I think we are in one of the Magic Glades," said Carolla. "Hark!"

Out of the mist there came a little piping voice, that sang thus:—

There once was a Dun-coloured Gnu
Which laughed at the popular view
That under the sun
There was nothing new done—
For it said—"I am always——"

"Dun gnu!" cried the King, "of course."

He spurred the white horse into the mist,

but the mist only closed about them and they could discover nothing.

"Where are you?" shouted the King.

There was no answer at first, and then Carolla tried.

"Please come out!" she said.

"Oh, very well," said the squeaky voice, and the mist seemed to fall away. The King and Carolla saw that they were in one of the forest-glades, in which a small house stood, and in front of it—on a stool—busily polishing a kind of harness, sat a very diminutive man, the owner of the squeaky voice. He looked up now and then from his polishing, but said nothing.

"Who are you?" asked the King.

The little man rubbed his hands together, put down the harness, pulled some spectacles out of his pocket, and adjusted them on his nose. Then:—

"Podgkin," he said.

"Then, Mr. Podgkin——" began the King.

"Plain Podgkin," said the little man, snappily.

"Dear Podgkin," exclaimed Carolla, knowing that most probably he was a magician, who, like other people, are very particular in many ways, but usually to be won over by friendliness. "Dear Podgkin, will you please tell me about the Dun Gnu?"

"Certainly," said the little man, chuckling at her address. "He's got a hump unlike other gnüs, and he lives on the Spiky Star." He looked from one to the other and added:—

"Is that all you wanted to know?"

"Not all," said the King, disconsolately. "I wanted to capture it."

"And you will help us, won't you?" said Carolla, persuasively.

The small magician looked at her and was melted.

"Then you'll have to go to the Spiky Star," he said. "How will you get there, you ask? Rocs, my dear sir, rocs!"

"Rocs?" echoed the King.

"Hav'n't you heard of 'em?" asked the magician. "Big birds that can pick up an elephant and carry him off to a valley of rubies. Well, I don't wonder. They've nearly died out; but I found a trace—an egg!"

"A roc's egg?"

"Yes," said the magician. "Now, you'd have blown that egg or poached it. I didn't. I put it in an oven. What's the consequence, eh?"

"It got cooked," the King suggested.

"No, sir," said the magician, his little eyes flashing. "The shell splintered, out popped—what do you think?"

"A roc?"

"Two rocs, my dear sir, two rocs—twins—Gobble and Wobble. Come with me. I'll show 'em to you."

He sprang off his stool and danced his way excitedly into a back-yard, completely wired round and roofed, so as to form a huge kind of hen-run. Up and down this two immense birds, as big as mammoths and of a skewbald colour, were stalking. As they heard Podgkin approach they ran to the side of the wire and put their beaks through and flapped their wings, manifesting every sign of delight.

"There, sir!" said the magician, proudly.

"A splendid pair of fowls!" exclaimed the King.

"Dears!" said Carolla.

"Aren't they?" said the magician, delighted. "They're in fine feather, hey? They're little beauties—they're ducks."

"But can they fetch the Dun Gnu?" asked the King, anxiously.

"No," said Podgkin. "But they can carry us to the Spiky Star, if need be, and there you can catch the Dun Gnu by putting pepper on his hump."

The King felt much relieved.

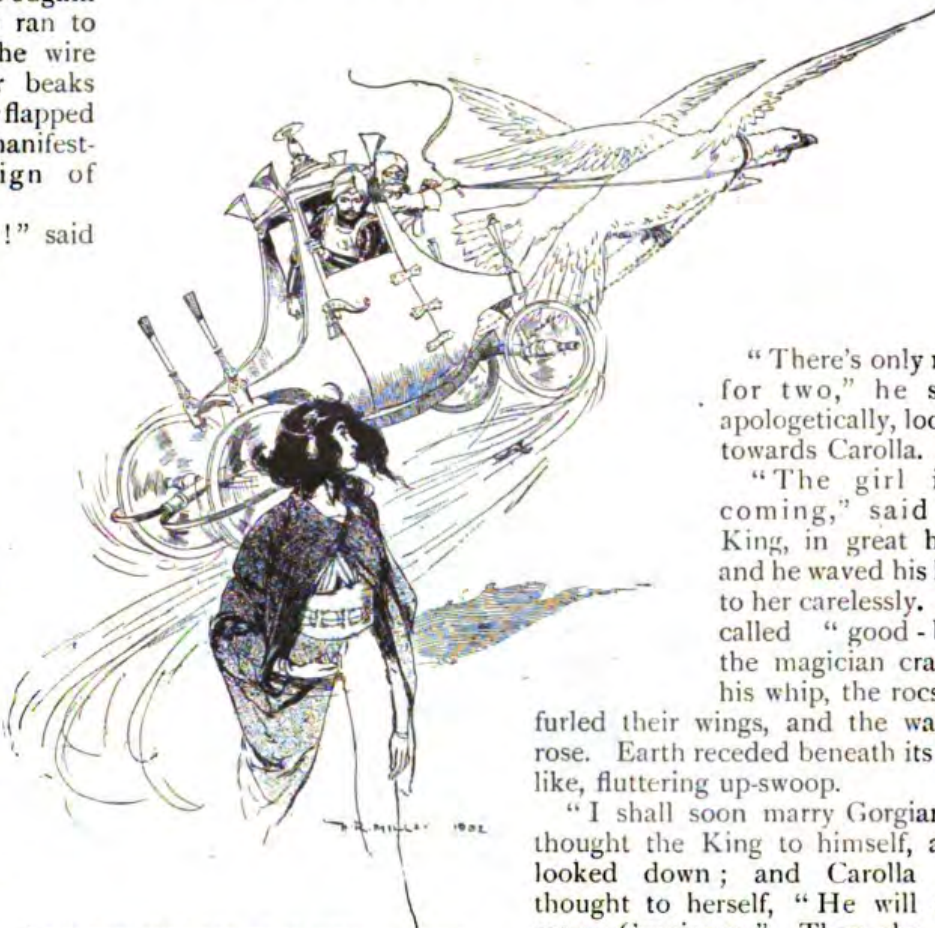
"Let us start at once," he said. "I must be back with the Dun Gnu before to-morrow morning, or I shall lose the loveliest Princess in the world and my head."

"She is pretty," said the magician. "But I don't know—"

"Oh, do take the King!" said Carolla.

The fact was that the magician supposed the King to be in love with Carolla, whom he also loved as a daughter. So that, although the King had really forgotten all about Carolla, and was already feasting his mind with thoughts of his success and the smiles and thanks he would win from Gorgianna, Podgkin agreed to take him.

It was already nearly dusk and time to start. The magician, with the King's assistance, got out a light waggon from his stables, a whip, and a tin of pepper, harnessed Gobble and Wobble, and invited the King to get in.



"THE ROCS UNFURLED THEIR WINGS, AND THE WAGGON ROSE."

"There's only room for two," he said, apologetically, looking towards Carolla.

"The girl isn't coming," said the King, in great haste, and he waved his hand to her carelessly. She called "good-bye," the magician cracked his whip, the rocs unfurled their wings, and the waggon rose.

Earth receded beneath its lark-like, fluttering up-swoop.

"I shall soon marry Gorgianna," thought the King to himself, as he looked down; and Carolla also thought to herself, "He will soon marry Gorgianna." Then she went back to the palace, feeling a little sad, and crept up to her attic noiselessly and slept until the morning.

Quite early the Caliph was up and about. He had sent for his headsman and bidden him sharpen an axe, and he had personally inspected, before breakfast, the gate upon which he intended to spike the head of his latest victim.

Gorgianna, too, had risen and sat lazily on her throne, looking at herself in a mirror which one of the handmaidens held before her. She wore the corset which she

had had made out of the King's diamonds, and felt more resplendent than ever, and the more anxious for a new suitor to make her such another splendid gift. Her annoyance, therefore, and the Caliph's may easily be imagined when through the windows they saw riding up the almond avenue on his white horse the King, and led by a rope—contrary to all expectation—the dun gnu.

The King was well pleased with himself and naturally astonished to see the sour looks of the company when he rode up. The Caliph, indeed, could not conceal his displeasure, and though Gorgianna smiled hypocritically anyone who knew her would have noted the way she drew in her underlip and pressed her teeth against it.

The King bowed in front of them.

"I count myself happy," he said, "to have succeeded in this adventure, and to be able to place at your feet the Dun Gnu."

"Oh," said the Caliph, "indeed!"

"It's an ugly creature," said Gorgianna.

"Everything cannot be so beautiful," said the King to her, a little disappointed at the same time.

Gorgianna feigned a smile, but the Caliph only frowned. "You seem to have succeeded in your first attempt," he said, grudgingly, "but a second awaits you before you can claim my daughter's hand."

"Is it true?" said the King, aghast.

"You would not expect to win me too easily," said Gorgianna, aloud, as the Caliph came across to her and began

whispering. The truth is, he had been so taken by surprise that he had not schemed any second adventure that would insure the King's success.

"We must make certain this time," he hissed in his daughter's ear. "I long for his head."

"I also am tired of him," she said.

"Think of something then."

So, while the King waited in impatience, this wicked pair put their heads together to bring about his downfall. The Caliph would not hear of any of the ordinary impossibilities, such as making him drain a pond with a sieve, or construct ropes out of sand, or walk up a pole of ice.

"It must be harder than that," he vowed.

"What should you say to making him find for us some Wood that Sings?" asked Gorgianna, at length.

"Does wood sing?" said the Caliph.

"No."

"Then that will do."

He turned to the King.

"By to-morrow morning," he said, "you must bring me some Wood that Sings."

"But no wood sings," objected the King.

"Oh, yes, it does," said the Caliph.

"Don't dare to contradict me. Unless you bring it by the time I have named you will lose your head. You are dismissed."

With a wave of his hand he beckoned to the King to be gone, and as the young man obeyed he heard behind him the mocking laughter of the Princess Gorgianna.

"And I thought her so beautiful," he said to himself in a rage, as he rode off. "But I doubt if she is as fair or half



"THE CALIPH CAME ACROSS TO HER AND BEGAN WHISPERING."

so kind as the ragged girl that helped me yesterday."

Being struck by the contrast between the Princess and one whom he took for a beggar-girl he began to call her name: "Carolla."

But no one came.

"She has forgotten me," thought the King, bitterly, but he did not remember that he had forgotten her until this moment. He had come in the course of his riding to the little place of downs outside the forests where he had met the rolling barrel on the first day. The track it had left in the grass reminded him of the Vizier's saying, and it struck him with remorse how that in that hour of what he believed to be his own approaching happiness he had left the poor man to roll on for ever, just because he had told the truth about the Caliph and Gorgianna. At least he could remedy this unkindness, even if he could not find the Wood that Sings or save his own head. As he came to this conclusion, and spurred his white horse on, it seemed to him that all the trees about him became musical with birds, and the words they sang were "Carolla, Carolla, Carolla." But he could not very well take the forest to the Caliph, so that he banished all thought of himself and his danger from his mind, and followed the traces of the barrel. They led him farther and farther into the forest. Rabbits came out and peeped at him, unscared, and squirrels dropped nuts into his lap from their store-rooms in the trees. Even a hind, most timid of creatures, ran beside him for some way and made soft eyes at him.

The King wondered how it was they knew that he was not come a-hunting that day.

Presently he had quite a retinue of followers in his train: skylarks and doves, hares and foxes, stags, two honey-bears, a lynx, and, toiling in the rear, perseveringly, a tortoise. It was a little ridiculous, perhaps, and the King was not quite pleased to hear a sudden ring of silvery laughter as he galloped through a glade. But when he saw who laughed he could not be angry.

"Carolla!" he cried, looking at her, eagerly. Before, he had scarcely noticed her; but now, though she was still dressed raggedly, he saw her great beauty. Brown cheeks, and small brown hands, and a maze of brown hair, lips more cherry-red than Gorgianna's—he thought—and great grey eyes, like clear deep pools seen through a fringe of dark lashes—that was Carolla. And with the sun shining upon her, and the trill

of her laughter still in the air, he quite forgot Gorgianna. So changeable is a King.

"What a train!" she laughed. "But I am glad the creatures like you."

"Then, I am glad," the King agreed.

"But why do you ride this way?" she asked.

"To find the Vizier."

The King confessed his heartlessness of the previous day, and Carolla rebuked him.

"I too am looking for him," she said. "It was only this morning that I heard of his mishap. It seems that he insulted the Caliph in trying to protect you."

"It's all my fault," said the King, regretfully.

"But I think," went on Carolla, "that we shall find him soon. I only stopped because I fancied that I heard him singing."

"Singing?"

"Hark!"

She held up her hand and, listening hard, they caught the following words:—

Hoots! monie a wearie hour's to seek
Since wi' Kirsteen I walkit:
A red, red rose was on her cheek
An' saxpence in ma pocket.

"That's the Vizier," said Carolla, nodding. "Come."

The King and she advanced, and saw—not far off—the barrel, which had stuck in a bush. Again the song rose:—

I've trampit over Arctic snows
Where walruses bereft me:
But, losh, I've no forgot the rose,
The saxpence hasna left me.

"Why," said the King, "that is the Wood that Sings!"

He explained to Carolla what sort of second adventure the Caliph had set him, and she listened gravely.

"You must roll the barrel back," she said, "to the palace."

"But I don't want to marry the Princess," said the King, obstinately.

"Then you'll lose your head," answered Carolla.

"It's not worth much," said the King, gloomily, but she would not listen to him, and went over to the barrel to comfort the Vizier.

"Eh, is it you, Princess?" he cried.

"Yes," she said; "and I've brought the King with me to take you back to the palace in safety, unless you would rather get out here."

"Is yon the King that I happened on yesterday?" asked the Vizier, indignantly.

"Yes," said Carolla.

"But I had no idea then," added the

King, apologetically, "that you were speaking the truth about the Princess Gorgianna."

"Aweel," said the Vizier, mollified. "Whiles I don't, whiles I do. But I'll forgie ye your doots if ye'll propel me to the palace as quick as ye're able. I'll be glad of a dish o' parritch."



"SO THEY STARTED BACK FOR THE PALACE."

So they started back for the palace, the Vizier humming to himself contentedly, the King pushing him. Carolla rode the King's white horse. She kept behind a little, thinking to herself that now the King would get his desire and marry the Princess Gorgianna, which thought made her somehow a little melancholy. The King, too, was not feeling in the best of spirits.

"Why was it," he said, tapping on the barrel to attract the Vizier's attention—"why was it that you called Carolla 'Princess' when she is no more than a beggar-girl?"

"A beggar-girl!" said the Vizier. "She's the Caliph's dochter! 'Tis only her sister's jealousy that keeps Carolla in an attic."

"The Caliph's daughter!" repeated the King, amazed.

"Dinna stop pushing, young man," said the Vizier, "or I'll stop singing, and ye'll get nothing of what ye want."

For the cunning old man knew very well what sort of reflections were passing through the King's mind, and, being very fond of Carolla and not averse to paying out the Caliph for having put him in the barrel, meant to bring off a plan that he had in his head.

"If I take to the Caliph's palace the Wood that Sings," said the King, "I can demand to marry the Caliph's daughter."

"There'll be two maids," said the Vizier. "Ye'll have to choose."

"Of course," said the King, and he began to roll the barrel with renewed energy.

It was not until the afternoon that they came to the palace. The Caliph had put up a great stand in the park outside, and in the middle of it he sat on his throne, with Gorgianna beside him in all her diamonds and the headsman just behind leaning on his axe. All the courtiers were crowded round, for the Caliph had determined to make a great carnival that day, at which the decapitation of the King would be a leading feature. Fury and indignation nearly consumed him, therefore, when he suddenly became aware of the strange procession of the Vizier in the barrel, singing loudly, the King pushing with all his might, and Carolla riding behind on the white horse.

"What is this?" he demanded, fiercely.

"This is the Wood that Sings," said the King, and at that the Vizier strained his lungs in a roundelay that made the barrel resound like an organ. The Caliph exchanged glances of disgust with Gorgianna.

"I suppose I shall have to marry him now," she whispered.

"I demand your daughter's hand in marriage," continued the King.

"Very well," said the Caliph, sulkily.

The King turned to where Carolla sat on the white horse and lifted her down.

"She is the loveliest Princess in the world," he said.

"Corolla!" hissed Gorgianna.

"Her!" said the Caliph, ungrammatically.

"That's the wrong Princess. She's hardly one at all."

"I can't agree with you," said the King. "She seems to me the right Princess, and very shortly she will be my Queen."

"Never," yelled the Caliph, "never," and Gorgianna, crimson with envy and shame at being passed over for her younger sister, leaned over and whispered something in his ear. The Caliph nodded, and called to his headsman.

"Go and cut off all their heads!" he said, fiercely.

Carolla clung to the King, the King drew his sword and prepared to resist all the Caliph's army, if need be, and the Vizier ended his song in a quavering note. It seemed not unlikely that in another moment they would cease to live, when suddenly there was a great whir of wings in the air overhead, and all present saw Podgkin arrive in his car, drawn by the great rocs, Gobble and Wobble. They swooped down and perched beside the King.

"Get in!" said Podgkin. "It'll be a tight fit, but I can take you all for once in a way."

The King lifted Carolla into the car and the white horse stepped in after her, arching his mane. Podgkin himself rolled the Vizier still in the barrel in after them.

Before the Caliph could understand what was happening they were all in the car. Gobble and Wobble rose slowly and hovered in mid-air just over the Caliph's head. Podgkin put his arm out of the window and

began to drop a curious white powder on to the heads of all below.

"Stop!" shrieked the Caliph. "Restore me my prisoners."

The magician went on strewing his powder. Carolla and the King were so much taken up with each other that they did not see what was happening.

"Stop!" shrilled Gorgianna.

Then Podgkin spoke in a stern voice.

"There probably never was a worse Caliph," he said, "nor an uglier Princess than you, Gorgianna, beneath your diamonds, for you are both greedy and cruel and heartless. So I have determined to punish you. In a little while you and all your courtiers will be

no better than plaster, for the dust I am throwing is magic, and turns everyone it touches into statues for a thousand years."

"Mercy!" they cried, but Podgkin went on strewing.

"The King will marry Carolla," he said, "and go off to rule his own country wisely. Some day, perhaps, their great-grandchildren will come and wake you to life. Mind you are better than!"

He emptied the rest of his powder on them.

Then very slowly the rocs rose into the air and flew to Landamor.



"MERCY!" THEY CRIED.