



PRINCESS FORTUNIA.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

FROM THE SPANISH.

It happened that war broke out with the neighbouring country. The King went forth at the head of his troops, after taking an affectionate leave of the Queen.

One night, as he was sleeping in his tent, he had a dream. He dreamt that he was engaged in a battle, when in the midst of the combat the Queen appeared before him and, with a radiant smile, presented to him a beautiful baby Princess. The King adopted this vision as an omen. He was transported with joy, and his valour increased tenfold in consequence, so that in the real battle which shortly after followed he triumphed over his enemies, subdued the rebel cities, and returned to his capital laden with glory and booty.

All this had only occupied a few months. When the King returned, in the midst of the acclamations of his people, the bells rang joyously, for the general gladness had still another motive than the warlike triumphs of the King. What was the delight of His Majesty, on returning to his palace, to find that his dream had been realized, and that an heiress to the throne had been born! But, alas! the Queen, the Royal consort to whom he was so deeply attached, was dead, and could no longer return the tender caresses he was eager to lavish upon her.

Imagine the despair of the unhappy King,



ONCE upon a time, long, long ago, there was a very powerful King, ardently loved by his vassals, and master of a vast empire far away in the East. This King possessed immense treasures and gave splendid *fêtes*. His army was numerous and brave. His ships sailed in triumph upon every ocean. But how shall I describe his palaces and the wondrous magnificence which they inclosed? That would be impossible, because their splendour was beyond the power of language to describe.

The vassals of this great King called him "King Fortunio." His life had been one long career of happiness, whose brilliancy was never obscured by a single cloud or a painful shadow. The King had been married for seven years to an accomplished Princess, whom he adored, but he had no heir, which was deeply regretted by him and his people.

who threw himself on his knees at her bedside and gave way to uncontrollable grief. But his tears and lamentations could not resuscitate the Queen, whose face, even in death, wore an angelic smile, and who seemed to have died with a prayer for the King upon her lips. It was thus, no doubt, that her soul had taken its flight, borne away to the unknown land on the wings of a sigh of love, and proud to have inspired an affection so deep and lasting as that felt by the King.

The King made a vow never again to marry, and kept his word. He confided to his chief poet the duty of composing a funeral ode, which is still regarded in that country as a masterpiece of the national literature. The Court mourning lasted for three years, and a superb mausoleum was erected in honour of the Queen.

But, as the song says, "there is no sorrow which lasts a century." At the end of a couple of years the King shook off his melancholy and turned his attention to the little Princess, who grew apace, and to whom had been given the name of Princess Fortunia.

When the Princess had reached her fifteenth year her beauty, intelligence, and gentle manners elicited the admiration of all who saw her and the astonishment of those who enjoyed the privilege of hearing her speak. The King caused her to be proclaimed heiress to the Throne, and then began to look about for a husband worthy of so bright a jewel.

More than five hundred Cabinet couriers and lords, mounted upon zebras of the purest race, left the capital of the kingdom at the same time, bearers of five hundred despatches for as many foreign Courts. All the Princes of the world were invited to compete for the hand of the Princess, who would choose

amongst them the one who pleased her the most.

The renown of her marvellous beauty had already reached every corner of the globe, so that hardly had the couriers arrived at the different capitals to which they were accredited when every Prince of high and low degree, powerful or feeble, decided to go to the capital of King Fortunio to take part in the jousts, tournaments, and competitions of wit, instituted as preliminaries to obtaining the hand of the Princess.

But it happened that the young lady, who, notwithstanding her modesty and her discretion, by no means possessed a gentle temper, overwhelmed all the Princes with her disdain, and gave them to understand, one and all, that she cared nothing whatever about any of



"SHE CARED NOTHING WHATEVER ABOUT ANY OF THEM."

them. And this was the state of affairs during all the *fêtes* of the Court, which day after day increased in splendour and brilliancy.

The Princes, seeing that they made no progress, despaired of any of their number being accepted by the wayward Princess. King Fortunio was enraged at the hesitation of his daughter, whilst she continued obstinately to refuse compliance with her father's wishes and to make a choice amongst her numerous suitors.

It happened that the Princess one lovely spring morning found herself in her boudoir. Her favourite Lady of Honour was combing her long and silky golden hair. The window leading to a balcony which looked upon the garden had been opened to give access to the gentle breeze and the aroma of the flowers.

The attendant already held in her hand the ribbon with which she was about to bind the golden tresses of her mistress, when suddenly there fluttered into the apartment a precious bird whose plumage seemed to be composed of emeralds, and whose graceful evolutions filled with ecstasy the Princess and her Lady of Honour. The bird flew quickly to the latter, seized in its beak the ribbon in her hand, and making its exit from the balcony window flew away rapidly. All this occurred so quickly that the Princess had only just time to see the bird, but its beauty and its audacity gave her the most strange impression and regret at its sudden departure.

A few days afterwards the Princess Fortunio, to relieve her melancholy, was dancing with her Ladies of Honour in presence of the Princes. Whilst her tiny feet nimbly executed the most graceful steps she raised above her head, with a charming movement, a scarf of light gauze, and her youthful face, full of animation, was lovely to behold.

All the Princes gazed at her with unrestrained admiration, when suddenly the whirr of wings was heard, and with the rapidity of an arrow the emerald bird entered the room. Seizing in its ivory beak the scarf floating in the air, the bird snatched it from the hands of the affrighted Princess and instantly disappeared, carrying off its precious booty to the clouds.

The Princess uttered a cry and fell fainting into the arms of her attendants. Her father and all the candidates for her hand hastened to her side. When she regained her senses the first words she uttered were: "Let search be made for the green bird, and bring it to me alive. Above all, let no harm

be done to it. I must possess the green bird living."

But the five hundred Princes searched for it in vain. The green bird was nowhere to be found, living or dead. Her unfulfilled desire to possess it tormented the Princess greatly and increased her ill-humour. That night she was totally unable to close her eyelids; so completely filled was her mind with the recollection of the beautiful bird that sleep was out of the question.

As soon as daylight appeared Princess Fortunio rose, and, dressed in a light morning gown, she directed her steps, accompanied by her favourite attendant, towards the thickest part of the wood in the neighbourhood of the palace, and in which stood the mausoleum of her mother. There she wept bitterly and bewailed her destiny. "Of what use to me are all my riches, my costly trinkets, and my jewels, if I am never to see again the beautiful green bird?"

As she spoke these words, and as if in search of a little consolation, she loosened the cord of her cloak and drew from her bosom a magnificent locket studded with diamonds and containing a lock of her mother's hair, which she kissed reverently. Wonderful to relate, at the very same instant the green bird flew towards her as swift as thought. He lightly touched with his ivory beak the lips of the Princess, and quickly seized the locket which she had during so many years jealously guarded. Then the robber instantly flew away with the rapidity of an arrow, and, rising to a great height, was soon lost in the clouds.

This time the Princess did not faint; on the contrary, her face became scarlet, and she said to her attendant, "Look! Look at my lips! That insolent bird has wounded them, for I feel a burning sensation in them."

The attendant looked carefully several times, but could not perceive the smallest wound. Thereupon she came to the conclusion that the bird had inoculated the Princess with some subtle poison, for she grew weaker and weaker from that moment, until at last she became dangerously ill. She was seized with a strange fever, which none of the physicians of the Court could understand or cure. In her exaltation the only words the Princess uttered were, "Do not kill him! Bring him to me alive. The bird must be mine."

After long consultation the doctors came to the conclusion that the sole means of restoring the Princess to health was to find

and bring to her the green bird. But where was its hiding-place? The most expert hunters sought for it fruitlessly, and the enormous sums offered to anyone who would bring it to the palace were alike without avail.



"LOOK! LOOK AT MY LIPS!"

At last King Fortunio gathered together a great congress of learned men, who, during forty days and forty nights, remained constantly in session. During their debates innumerable grave speeches were pronounced, and after the proceedings had terminated the wise assembly sent a unanimous message to the King, occupying several sheets of parchment, but the gist of which was as follows: "We are unable to inform your Majesty what has become of the green bird."

During all this time Princess Fortunia grew worse and worse, and shed so many tears that every day she required more than fifty handkerchiefs. The laundresses of the palace were therefore overwhelmed with work, and spent their days and nights at the

wash-tubs, which had to be constantly refilled from the neighbouring river. One of these laundry women, who had been at work from daylight till sunset, washing the tear-stained handkerchiefs of the Princess, feeling a little fatigued, strolled into the forest and sat down at the foot of a tree. She drew from her pocket an orange, and was about to eat it, when it escaped from her hands and rolled down the hill-side with extraordinary rapidity.

The girl ran after her orange, but the more she ran the faster the orange rolled away from her. Out of breath, she stopped, and was stupefied to perceive that she was in a leafy wood and that night had fallen around her in pitchy darkness. The affrighted girl sobbed as if her heart would break. The darkness increased rapidly, and of course she was no longer able to see the fugitive orange or to retrace her footsteps. So she roamed about at haphazard, more alarmed than ever and nearly dead with hunger and fatigue, when all at once she perceived at a short distance a brilliant light. Supposing that it was the illumination of the city, she thanked Heaven and turned in the direction of the light. But what was her surprise to find herself at the gates of a sumptuous palace, which seemed to be of molten gold. There

were neither soldiers nor porters nor valets to prevent her from entering; so the young girl walked in boldly and, mounting a monumental staircase of polished jasper, passed through a suite of rooms the most magnificent that can be imagined, but still without meeting any living being. Nevertheless, every apartment was profusely illuminated by a thousand golden lamps, whose perfumed oil filled the air with the softest and most delightful odours.

Whilst admiring the marvellous objects of art which these extraordinary saloons contained, the laundress, attracted by the smell of the most delicate and succulent of dishes, reached the kitchen; but she found there neither cooks nor under-cooks nor scullery-maids. The place was completely deserted, like

the rest of the palace. The great range was, nevertheless, lighted, as also were the ovens; and on the fire there was an enormous number of frying-pans, saucepans, and other cooking utensils. The venturesome girl raised the lid of a saucepan and saw it was filled with the most delicate soup. Encouraged by this first essay, she examined the contents of another and found them to consist of a boar's head stuffed with pheasant livers and truffles. In a word, she saw before her the most exquisite viands, that are only served on the tables of Kings and Emperors.

Enticed by what she saw and smelled, the young girl armed herself with a knife and fork and, without further ado, commenced cutting off a slice from the stuffed boar's head. But hardly had she touched it when she felt a smart blow upon her hand—doubtless inflicted by some powerful and invisible means—and she heard a voice exclaim, "No, you don't! That's for His Highness the Prince."

The poor little disappointed laundress determined to try again, and made an attempt on four or five other choice dishes. But each time she received a rap upon the knuckles from an invisible hand, and the mysterious voice repeated the same warning words. At last, with much regret, she made up her mind to remain fasting, and left the kitchen, deeply chagrined.

She endeavoured to forget her hunger by going through the sumptuous apartments again and again, but found them still silent and deserted. At last she came to a very elegant bedchamber, where two or three lights were burning in alabaster vases, with a soft light conducive to repose. There was in this room a bed so convenient, soft, and inviting, that the laundress, who was very tired, could not resist the temptation to rest herself upon it for a few moments. She was on the point of putting her project into practice, had already seated herself on the side of the bed, and was about to lie down, when she felt a painful pricking on her body, as if someone had thrust thousands of needles into her flesh, and again she heard the mysterious voice exclaim:—

"No, you don't! That's for His Highness the Prince!"

Words are powerless to describe the mingled fright and disappointment of the poor laundress; but she resigned herself to go without sleep, just as she had given up the idea of assuaging her hunger. In order to direct her thoughts into another channel she commenced a minute examination of the

various objects in the room, her curiosity even going to the extent of lifting up the hangings and curtains. Behind one of these latter our heroine discovered a beautiful little secret door of sandal-wood incrustated with mother-of-pearl. She pushed it gently, and, entering, found herself upon a stately white marble staircase.

Boldly mounting, she at last reached a splendid conservatory, in the centre of which was a magnificent basin of immense dimensions, which seemed made of a single clear and limpid topaz. From the middle of the basin sprang a gigantic jet of water, which rose to a great height and fell in many-coloured spray, with an exquisite musical sound, and filling the air with the most delightful perfume.

The astonished girl was absorbed in the contemplation of these wonderful things when she heard a loud noise and saw a window suddenly open. Hastily she concealed herself behind a mass of verdure, in order, if possible, to see without being seen by anyone who might come.

No human being entered, but through the open window flew three rare and beautiful birds, one of which was covered with a plumage of green as brilliant as an emerald. In this dazzling bird the laundress thought she recognised the cause of the prolonged melancholy of the Princess Fortunia.

The two other birds were not nearly so marvellous, but still they were not wanting in beauty. All three entered swiftly and gracefully. They alighted upon the topaz fountain and plunged into the water. An instant afterwards, from the clear water of the fountain came forth three young men dressed in elegant costumes. The enchanted bath had caused this prodigy. One of them, the handsomest of the three, wore upon his head a diadem of emeralds, and was treated by the others with the respect due to a Sovereign.

The laundress managed to follow the three young men without being seen, and she was even able to hear some part of their conversation, from which she gathered that the handsomest of the trio was the Heir-Apparent to the Throne of the kingdom, and that the two others were his secretary and favourite equerry. Also that the three were victims of a sorcerer's enchantment during the day, and that they were able to resume their natural forms at night, thanks to the plunge in the magic waters of the fountain.

The inquisitive laundress also noticed that the Emerald Prince ate but little, notwith-

standing the entreaties of his companions, and that he appeared absorbed in melancholy thought during their repast. At last the Emerald Prince, with an evident effort to break away from his reverie, turned to his secretary and said :—

“Bring me the casket of my dreams.”

Accordingly his secretary brought the most precious casket ever seen by mortal eyes. The Prince opened it, and remained several moments in silent contemplation of its contents. He then plunged in his hand and brought forth a ribbon, which he kissed passionately, shedding tears of tenderness.

“Ah!” he cried, “little ribbon of my lost love, when shall I see thy mistress again?”

Then replacing the ribbon in the casket, he drew forth an elegant gauze scarf, which he also kissed and caressed and kissed again.

“Ah!” he murmured, “charming scarf of my lost love, when shall I see thy mistress again?”

Finally he drew forth a locket studded with diamonds and, covering it with kisses, exclaimed :—

“Ah! locket of my lost love, when shall I see thy mistress again?”

Soon afterwards the Prince and his companions withdrew to their rooms. The laundress, left alone in the dining-room, felt herself drawn by an irresistible force towards the table on which were still the remains of their repast. Notwithstanding the pangs of hunger, she would not have dared to touch any of the viands had not an invisible hand compelled her to sit down in the chair of the Prince himself. At the same time she heard the mysterious voice say :—

“Now thou canst satisfy thy hunger.”

Thus encouraged, she commenced to eat with extraordinary appetite. And while tasting the marvellous viands spread before her she was suddenly plunged into a profound slumber. When she awoke it was broad daylight. She opened her eyes and found herself in the midst of the country, lying under the same tree where she had attempted to eat the orange. Near her was the linen she had brought with her, and, strange to relate, there also was the truant orange.

“I cannot bear to think it is all a dream,” said the laundress to herself. “What if I return to the place where I entered the fairy palace, just to assure myself that all the wonderful things I have seen were not the creations of my own fancy?”

As she spoke she threw the orange on the ground in order to see if it would again roll beyond her reach, so that she might follow it. But the orange did nothing of the sort, and presently stopped in the most natural way in the world.



“WHEN SHALL I SEE THY MISTRESS AGAIN?”

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Hereupon the young girl, much disappointed, picked it up, tore off the peel, and found that inside it was exactly like other fruit of its kind. She ate it, and detected no difference in its taste from the flavour of other oranges.

No longer doubting that she had been dreaming, the young girl nevertheless made up her mind to go to the Princess and tell her of her adventure, leaving Her Royal Highness to form her own opinion of the matter.

When the Princess Fortunia heard the story of the laundress she did not for a moment doubt that the beautiful green bird was in reality a handsome and amiable young man, transformed by a mysterious enchantment, and when the girl described the esteem, admiration, and affection he had shown towards her she nearly fainted with delight.

"Now, indeed," said she, "I may justly be called the Princess Fortunia, for I am sure I have found the consort who is worthy to possess my heart. Nor can it be doubted that he is brave, generous, and loyal."

"Your Royal Highness," said the laundress, "I am convinced you have guessed the truth; but if you will permit me to offer an opinion, I should choose the equerry."

"Indeed," said the Princess; "in that case you shall marry him yourself, and my Lady-in-Waiting, if she likes, shall marry the secretary. But the first thing to be considered is to break the enchantment of the three young men turned into birds."

From this moment the Princess was transfigured, ceased to be sad and ill, and thought only of the means of breaking the fatal spell.

Now, it happened that far away in Asia there lived a King to whom popular belief attributed the privileges usually accorded only to genii. He was known as the Khan of Tartary. To this potentate Princess Fortunia sent seven wise men laden with rich presents, their mission being to ascertain, if possible, if any means existed of dissolving the charm which weighed upon the Emerald Prince. They returned from their Embassy bearers of a sealed letter.

Trembling with emotion, the Princess broke the seal, but as soon as she had glanced at the parchment within she uttered an exclamation of disappointment; the letter was written in a language to which she was a total stranger. The linguists employed by the Government to translate foreign tongues were immediately sent for, but none of them could make head or tail of the contents of

the mysterious letter. The members of the twelve Royal Academies were then charged with the difficult task, but were no more successful than their predecessors.

In despair the Princess adopted a desperate resolution, and the next day the King, her father, found her boudoir deserted, and on the table a letter in the following terms:—

"MY DEAR FATHER,—Do not seek for me, and do not attempt to find out whither I have gone, if you do not wish to see me die. Let it suffice you to know that I am alive and well, but that no one shall see me again until I have deciphered the mysterious letter of the Khan, and delivered from enchantment my beloved Prince. Adieu.

"Your loving child,

"FORTUNIA."

At a very short distance from the capital high mountains reared their snowy peaks. No one had ever dared to risk attempting to climb these forbidding crags. It was said that one single human being was there spending his miserable days, imposing upon himself the most severe penance, and living in an odour of sanctity. Some even pretended that he was immortal, for nobody in the country remembered at what period he had retreated to the mountains, where he was only seen at rare intervals.

It was this holy hermit that Princess Fortunia had resolved to go and consult. Accompanied only by two faithful attendants she went away on foot. During seven days and seven nights they wandered among the inaccessible rocks and brushwood. By day they painfully forced their way through innumerable obstacles, and at night sheltered themselves in the caves formed by the rocks. They had no one to guide them, because none had ever before attempted to penetrate these solitudes, and also because everyone feared the curse of the hermit, certain to be launched at any rash invader of his retreat or who should interrupt his prayers. As may be guessed, the hermit so ready with his curses was a Pagan. Notwithstanding the natural kindness of his heart, his sombre and terrible religion imposed upon him the duty of uttering execrations and anathemas.

At last, on the evening of the seventh day, the exhausted travellers were about to rest in an enormous cavern, when, at its farther end, they perceived the hermit himself, engaged in prayer. A lamp illumined with an uncertain light this melancholy and mysterious retreat.

The hermit, whose beard was as white as the driven snow, whose skin was wrinkled

like a raisin, and whose body resembled a skeleton, cast upon them a penetrating look from eyes which shone like coals of fire, and said, in a joyous and gentle voice :—

“Thanks to the gods, you have come at last! I have been waiting for you for a hundred years. Often I have prayed for death, but I could not die before having fulfilled a duty imposed upon me by the King of the Genii. Behold in me the only *savant* who is able to speak the language of Babel before the confusion of tongues. Every noun in this incomparable language contains in its letters the essence of the thing named. All things when they hear themselves called by their true name obey those who call them. So great was the power of the human race when it possessed this language that it undertook

to climb to Heaven, and these impious men might have succeeded in their ambitious purpose if the gods had not deprived them of their original language. There is in the world one person only who can decipher the letter of the Khan of Tartary—I am he! And it was expressly to render you this service that the King of the Genii has preserved my life during many centuries.”

Hearing this, Princess Fortunia presented to the hermit the mysterious letter, and he drew near the lamp in order to read it. During two hours he continued to read it aloud. At each word that he pronounced the globe trembled, the stars were covered

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with darkness, the moon quivered in the heavens as her reflection quivers in the waves of the ocean. The Princess and her two faithful attendants were obliged to close their eyes and to stop their ears to avoid seeing the spectres which were evoked, and in order to prevent hearing the terrible and pro-

digious sounds which came from the centre of Nature, as if agitated by an earthquake.

When the reading of the letter was finished the hermit said, in a tranquil voice :—

“The Emerald Prince is, by his virtues, talent, and beauty, the favourite of the King of the Genii, who has saved him a thousand times from the devices of the Khan of Tartary. This wicked sorcerer, finding it impossible to kill his victim, changed him into a bird, in order to render it impossible

that he should ever reign over his subjects, and that the Khan himself might be able to usurp his throne. The King of the Genii ordained, however, that the enchantment should cease when a Princess of high rank should fall desperately in love with the green bird without having seen him more than three times.

“I have only two minutes more to live, and I shall employ them in imparting to you the secret means of liberating the Emerald Prince.

“I am about to transport all three of you to the Palace of the Prince himself, near the topaz fountain. You will see the birds



“THE HERMIT.”

bathing. You will witness the transformation which takes place daily ; but you must not show yourselves until the Prince asks for the casket of his dreams, draws forth and kisses the ribbon, and exclaims :—

“‘Ah, little ribbon of my lost love, when shall I see thy mistress again?’

“At the same instant you are to come forth from your hiding-place and kiss each of the three Princes on the left cheek.”

the Princess Fortunia, with maidenly modesty, kissed the cheek of the Emerald Prince, and her Lady of Honour had followed her mistress's example and embraced the secretary, whilst the laundress gave the equerry a similar token of her regard, the Khan of Tartary expired suddenly, and the Emerald Prince was at once placed in possession of his throne.

Never again did the three young men



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“THE PRINCESS FORTUNIA, WITH MAIDENLY MODESTY, KISSED THE CHEEK OF THE EMERALD PRINCE.”

Scarcely had the hermit pronounced these words than he made an extraordinary grimace, opened his mouth as if gasping for breath, stretched out his legs, and fell dead !

At the same instant the Princess and her companions found themselves in the shade of the foliage which overhung the topaz fountain, and thus so far had been accomplished the miraculous journey promised by the hermit.

The rest followed in due course, and when

assume their green plumage. The three weddings were celebrated at the same time with great pomp and magnificence. The three couples were superlatively happy, the Emerald Prince and Princess Fortunia as Emperor and Empress ; the secretary and the Lady of Honour as Grand Master and Grand Mistress of the Household ; and the equerry and the laundress respectively as Lord Chamberlain and Lady of the Bed-chamber.