



MUSCADEL

A STORY FOR
CHILDREN.

BY E. NESBIT.

been to a school for the daughters of monarchs only, where, every Wednesday evening, she and her schoolfellows were taught "deportment, manners, and how to behave at Court."

All the guests went away very pleased with her and with themselves, which is how people ought always to feel after a party.

When they had all gone she went and curled up at the feet of her father, who had sunk back on his throne exhausted by his hospitable exertions. The two were quite alone, except for a particularly fine house-fly who had settled on the back of the throne, just above the carved Royal arms. Of course, neither the King nor the Princess noticed such a little thing as a fly.

"Well, daddy, dear," said the Princess, "did it go off all right? Did I behave prettily?"

"Ah!" said the King, "you're a born Princess, my pet. Pretty face, pretty manners, good heart, good head. You're your dear mother over again. And that reminds me——"

"Yes?" said the Princess.

"When your mother died," said the King—and he sighed, though it was twenty-one years to a day since he had lost his Queen-love—"I promised her to lock up her apartments, and only to give the keys of them to you when you should be twenty-one. And now you *are*; so here are the keys, my precious. You've always wanted to explore the rooms in the south wing. Well, now you can."

"How lovely!" cried the Princess, jumping up; "won't you come too, daddy?"

"I'd rather not, dear," said the King, so sadly that Pandora at once said:—

"Well, then, *I* won't either. I'll stay with you."

But the King said "No," and she had



Of course, there was a grand party when Princess Pandora came of age. The palace was hung with garlands of white roses, all the carpets were taken up, and the floor of every room was covered close with green turf with daisies in it, for in that country the cruel practice of rooting daisies out of lawns with a spud was a crime.

The Queen-mother had died when Pandora was a little baby, so now the Princess had to be hostess, and to receive all the guests, and talk to each one a little, and see that everyone had enough to eat and the right sort of person to talk to.

She did it all very nicely indeed, for she was a properly brought up Princess and had

better take a housemaid or two with brooms and dusters. "The dust grows thick in twenty-one years," said he.

But the Princess didn't want any of the palace housemaids to help her to explore her mother's rooms. She went alone, holding up her cloth-of-silver train because of the dust.

And the rooms that she unlocked with the six gold keys with pearls in their handles were very dusty indeed. The windows were yellow with dust, so the Princess threw them all open. And then, even through the dust, she could see how beautiful the rooms were—far more beautiful even than her own—and everyone had always said that hers were the most beautiful rooms in the seven kingdoms. She dusted the tops of a few of the tables and cabinets with her lace handkerchief, so that she could just see how everything was inlaid with ivory and jade and ebony and precious stones.

Six of the keys—the pearly ones—opened six beautiful rooms, but the seventh had rubies in its handle, and it was a little, little key, not at all like a door-key; so Pandora looked about for a little keyhole that the key would fit, and at last she found a cabinet of ebony inlaid with gold and red tortoiseshell, and the little seventh key just fitted through the opening of the gold lock-plate and into the keyhole. Pandora turned the key and opened the cabinet. Inside the cabinet were seven little drawers with gold handles set with rubies, like the key.

Pandora pulled the drawers out one after the other. She was alone, except for the house-fly who had followed her and now sat on the top of the cabinet door, watching her with all his hundreds of eyes. But no one notices a fly.

Five of the drawers contained jewels. The first was full of necklaces, the second held rings and brooches, the third had tiaras and

chaplets, the fourth girdles, and the fifth bracelets, and they were all of the most beautiful jewels in the world—rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls and diamonds, and opals and many other stones that the Princess did not even know the names of.

In the sixth drawer was a dry brown wreath that fell to pieces as Pandora lifted it. It had been jasmine once, and the Queen had worn it at her wedding.

And in the seventh drawer was just one jewelled ring. It lay on a written page.

The Princess read the writing:—

"This ring is for my son's wife, or for my daughter, if I have no son. It is the magic ring given thousands of years ago to a Queen of this country. It has the power of changing the wearer into whatever shape he chooses. But it has never been used, because the

Kings of this country have always been so good and kind, and clever and beloved, that their wives could never think of any change that would not be a change for the worse. There is only one thing in the world that this jewel cannot touch or change. And this is of all things in the world the most important thing."

Pandora kissed the written words and slipped the ring on to her finger. It was a wonderful stone, like a sapphire that had tried to change into an opal, and stopped half-way.

There was not a happier Princess living than Pandora. Yet she was not afraid of change. Girls are like this sometimes, and she was very young for her age.

She stood looking at the ring and turning it on her finger, and the fly watched her with all its hundreds of eyes.

Now, you will, perhaps, have guessed that this fly was not an ordinary fly, and you are right. But if you think he was an enchanted Prince or anything of that sort you are



"THE PRINCESS READ THE WRITING."

wrong. The fly was simply the cleverest fly of all flies—someone must be the cleverest in any society, you know—and he was just clever enough to like to be where the Princess was, and to look at her beauty with all his hundreds of eyes. He was clever enough to like this and to know that he liked it, but he was not clever enough to know why.

So now, as the Princess stood fingering her ring and trying to make her mind up, he gave an interested buzz, and the Princess jumped.

"Oh," she said, "it's only a horrid fly. But it has wings. It must be lovely to have wings. I wish I were a fairy no bigger than that fly."

And instantly she and her silver-trained gown, and her silver shoes, and the magic ring, and everything about her grew suddenly small, till she was just as big as the fly and no bigger, and that is flower-fairy size. Silver-gauze wings grew out of her shoulders; she felt them unfolding slowly, like a dragon-fly's wings when he first comes out of that dull brown coat of his that hasn't any wing parts.

She gave a tiny shriek of joyous surprise and fluttered out through the open window and down across the marble terraces to the palace flower-garden. The fly buzzed heavily after her.

Pandora fluttered among roses and lilies on her bright, light, white wings, but presently she was tired, because flying is much harder work than you would think, especially when you have not been brought up to it from a child. So she looked about for a place to rest in, and saw near her the cool, pink cave of a foxglove flower. She alighted on its lip, folded her wings, and walked in on her little fairy feet. It was very pleasant inside the foxglove. The Princess sat down by a drop of dew, which was quite a pool to the tiny lady, and presently she took off her rings and laid them on the smooth floor of the pink

cave and began to dabble her hands in the dew-pool. The fly had settled on the outer edge of the flower and watched her with all its hundreds of eyes.

And now the dreadful thing happened. Pandora, her hands and face wet with dew, suddenly saw the daylight darken at the entrance of her foxglove cave. Then a black-winged monster, with hundreds and hundreds of eyes, came quickly towards her on its six legs. Pandora was very frightened, and squeezed herself close to the back of her cave. The fly moved on, and quickly picked up the magic ring, now so tiny that it fitted nicely on to one of its front feet.

Next moment it had backed out of the foxglove, taking the ring with it, and had flown off, and the Princess was left alone.

If she cried a little you can hardly blame her. You wait till you find yourself one

million three hundred thousand two hundred and seventy-four times as small as you usually are, with no means whatever of getting back to your proper

size. Then you'll understand how the Princess felt.

But she was a brave Princess; so she soon stopped crying, spread her gauzy wings, and flew across the garden and up over the marble terraces and in at the library window of the palace.

The King was reading the account of the birthday-party in the evening paper, and he did not notice the Princess at all till she settled on his ear. Then he put up his hand to brush her away, for he thought she was a fly. She dodged his hand and settled again, and shouted "Papa" into his ear as loud as ever she could. And the shout was no louder than a fly's buzzing. But as it was close to his ear the King heard it very distinctly.

"Bless my soul!" said the King, sitting very bolt upright.

"Don't move, daddy," said the tiny Princess, "even if I tickle your ear with my wings. I found a magic jewel in one of dear



"PANDORA WAS VERY FRIGHTENED."

mother's cabinets, and I made it turn me into a fairy, and now a horrid fly has buzzed off with the jewel, and I can't get back to my right size."

"I must be dreaming," said the King.

"I wish you were—I mean I wish I was—but it's true. I'll settle on your hand now, and you'll see."

The King looked at the tiny winged thing—flower-fairy size—that settled on his hand. And he put on his spectacles and looked again. And then he got a magnifying glass and looked through that.

"Yes," he said, "it certainly is you! What a thing to happen, and on your birthday, too! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"It is rather hard, daddy," said the poor Princess; "but you are so wise and clever, you'll be able to get me back to my right size again."

"My dear," said the King, "I received a thorough commercial education, but I never learned magic. In fact, I doubt whether it is still taught even at Oxford."

"Daddy, dear," said the Princess, shyly, "I've read a good many books about magic—fairy-tales they're called, you know—and—"

"Yes," said the King, who saw at once what she meant. "Of course, I shall do that first thing."

And next morning all the newspapers contained an advertisement: "Wanted, competent Prince to undo magic and restore Princesses to their right size. None but eldest sons need apply. The usual reward offered. Apply at the palace."

"I think *that's* a mistake, daddy," said the Princess; "in the fairy stories it's always the youngest son who makes everything come right. And people don't know their fairy history nowadays; they mayn't know what the reward is."

So the next day the advertisement was changed to: "Any sons of respectable monarchs may apply. The successful candidate will receive the Princess's hand in marriage."

"It's all very well to put that in," said the Princess to herself, "but if I don't like him I sha'n't marry him. I'll give him all my jewels instead."

But all the Kings' sons in the world had forgotten their magic, if they ever knew any, and not one single Prince applied at the palace.

So the Princess had to do the only possible thing—make the best of it. And she did it bravely.

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Now, when the fly, whose name, by the way, was Muscadel, flew off from the foxglove bell, with the magic jewel on his feathery foot, he flew straight to the Princess's boudoir and settled down on his favourite spot, the corner of the frame of her mirror. And there he sat and wondered how he could best use the magic jewel. And he thought so hard that he never noticed a large spider who spun a web right across the corner where he sat, and when he spread his wings to assist his meditations by a little exercise he was caught in the web.

"Aha!" said the spider, smiling greedily.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said the fly.

"How nice you look!" said the spider. Then very slowly and carefully she began to move towards him.

"What a terrible thing it is to be a fly!" said he. "I wish I was a spider."

And, of course, instantly he was. He broke the web and scrambled down the mirror, for he was still horribly frightened of the other spider. He got out of the window and down into the garden, and hid himself under a leaf of a burdock, which was there because the gardener was a lazy fellow and neglected his business.

But it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Before Muscadel had got his breath after the shock of that dreadful web he saw a slow, wrinkled-skinned creature, with bright yellow eyes, quite close to him. It was a toad, and he knew that toads eat spiders.

"Oh, a spider's life isn't worth living," he cried; "I wish I was a toad."

And, of course, he was, for the magic jewel was still on his front foot.

Now that Muscadel was a toad he felt he should like to find a nice damp place to live in, so he crawled to the edge of the basin of the palace fountain.

And when he had found a nice damp crack in the marble he squeezed in and stayed there for some days. But one day, when he went out for a breath of air and a wood-louse or two, a great beak clattered quite near him and startled him so that he nearly jumped out of his toad's skin.

The person with a beak was a stork, and Muscadel knew what the stork wanted.

"Oh, a toad's life is a dog's life," said Muscadel; "I wish I was a stork."

So he was a stork, and the magic jewel, grown bigger, was round his right leg.

It was fine to be a stork, and he did not envy even the golden eagle that flew down to drink at the fountain. And when the

eagle came within a yard or two of him he felt so large and brave that he said :—

“Keep to your own side, will you? Where are you shoving to?”

The golden eagle, whose temper is very short, looked at him with evil golden eyes, and said :—

“You’ll soon see where I am shoving to,” and flew at him.

Muscadel saw that he had made a mistake that might cost him his life.

“Oh, what’s the good of being a stork?” he said. “I wish I was an eagle.”

And as soon as he was one he flew away, leaving the other eagle with its beak open in amazement, too much “struck of a heap,” as he told his wife afterwards, to follow the new bird and finish off their quarrel in the air.

“Oh, how grand it is to be an eagle!” said Muscadel, sailing on wide-spread wings; and just as he said it an arrow caught him under the left wing. It hurt horribly.

“What a powerful thing an arrow is!” he said. “Dear me, how it hurts! I wish I was an arrow.”

So he was one, but he was an arrow in the quiver of a very stupid bowman, who shot next day at a buzzard and missed it. So the arrow, which was Muscadel, lodged high in an oak tree, and the stupid bowman could not get it down again.

“I don’t like being a slave to a mere bow,” said Muscadel; “I’ll be a bow myself!”

But when he was a bow the archer who owned him hurt his bow-back so in fitting him with a new string that he got very cross, and said :—

“This is worse slavery than the other. I want to be an archer.”

So he was an archer. And as it happened he was one of the King’s archers. The magic jewel was round his arm like a bracelet, and no one saw it, for he kept it hidden up his arm under the sleeve of his buff coat.

Now that Muscadel was a man, of course he read the newspapers, and in them he saw the King’s advertisement, which was still appearing every day.

“Dear me!” said Muscadel; “of course the Princess couldn’t get back to her right size when I had taken the magic jewel away. I never thought of that. Flies are thoughtless little things. And, by the way, taking that jewel was stealing. Very wrong indeed. But I didn’t know that when I was a fly. So *I’m* not a thief, and no more was the fly, because he didn’t know any better.”

That evening he had a little talk with the captain of the King’s archers, and in the morning the captain called on the King very early and said :—

“Sire, there’s a crack-brained chap among my archers who says he can make the Princess her right size again. Of course, it’s all tommyrot, your Majesty, if I may be pardoned the expression, but I thought your Majesty would like to know.”

“Oh, let him try,” said the King, wearily; “it’s something to find someone who even thinks he can do it.”

So next day Muscadel, the archer, put on his Sunday clothes and went up to the palace, and a great, red-faced, burly fellow he was.

The King and all the Court were assembled to see the archer make the Princess her own size again, though nobody believed he could do it.

The King was on his throne, and Pandora, still flower-fairy size, was sitting on one of the carved gold flowers that adorned the throne’s right arm.

The archer bowed to the King and the Court, and to the Princess, though he could not see her.

Then he looked round the crowded throne-room, and said :—

“Look here, your Majesty, this will never do.”

“Eh?” said the King.

“Magic can’t be done in this sort of public way. I must be left alone with the Princess. No; I can’t have anyone bothering round. Not even you, your Majesty.”

The King was rather offended, but the Princess got to his ear and whispered, and then he gave the order for the throne-room to be cleared, and when that was done he set the tiny Princess on the table and went away himself and shut the door honourably behind him.

Then the archer said :—

“Little Princess, you can be made your right size again if you will do just what I tell you. Do you promise?”

The Princess’s little voice said “Yes.”

“Well, then,” said the archer, “I have got the jewel here that the fly stole from you, and I will lend it to you, and you can wish yourself Princess size again, and then you must give me back the jewel.”

“Why, the jewel was stolen! You’ve no right to it. I shall call the guard,” said Pandora, angrily.

“They wouldn’t hear you, little Princess,

if you did call," said the archer, "but I'll call them for you if you like. Only you promised."

"So I did," said the Princess. "Well, lend me the jewel."

He took it off his arm and laid it upon the table, and as soon as the Princess touched it it grew small, small, small, so that she could put it on her finger. Then she said:—

"I wish I were my right size again!"

And the archer rubbed his eyes, for there on the table stood the dazzling figure of a real, full-sized Princess in a cloth-of-silver gown, and a face more beautiful than the morning.

"Oh, how lovely you are!" he said, and

gave her his hand to help her down. She jumped lightly from the table and stood before him, laughing with joy at being her own real right size once more.

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she cried; "I must run and show my father this very minute."

"The jewel?" said the archer.

"Oh!" said Pandora. "Well, yes, I did promise, but—well, I'm a Princess of my word. Here it is."

She held it out, but he did not take it.

"You may keep it for ever and ever, Princess dear," he said, "if you will only marry me."

"Oh, I can't," she cried. "I'm never going to marry anyone unless I love him more than all the world."

"I feel as if I'd loved you all my lives," said Muscadel—"all my life, I mean. Couldn't you wish to love me?"

"I don't think I want to," said the Princess, doubtfully.

"Then I must have the jewel. I'll find some way yet of making you love me, and then you shall have it for ever and ever."

"If I loved you," said she, "I suppose I shouldn't mind your having red hair and a red face and red ears and red hands, should I?"

"Not a bit," said the archer, cheerfully.

She stood there, twisting the magic jewel round and round on her Royal finger.

"I suppose it's more important than anything else to love someone?" she said.

"Much," said he.

"Well, then," said she, "but are you the sort of person I ought to love?"

"No," said he, "I'm not half good enough for you. But then nobody is."

"That's nice of you, anyhow," she said. "I'll do it. I wish I loved you."

There was a silence. Then Pandora said, "Nothing's happened. I don't love you. I feel just the same as usual.



"ON THE TABLE STOOD THE DAZZLING FIGURE OF A REAL, FULL-SIZED PRINCESS."

Your hair and hands and face and ears are redder than ever. You'll excuse my candour, won't you?"

"Then there's nothing for it but for me to wish not to love you," said Muscadel, "for I really can't bear loving you to this desperate degree when you don't care a snap of your Royal fingers for me. Lend me the jewel a moment. You shall have it back. If you don't care for me I don't want to care for anything. I'll live and die a red-faced, red-eared, red-haired, red-handed archer, so I will."

The Princess lent him the jewel; and he wished, and waited. Then—

"It's no good," he said, "I adore you as much as ever. More, if possible."

"Ah, I see," said the Princess; "there *is* one thing that the magic ring won't touch. I suppose that's love. How funny!"

"I don't think it's funny at all," said he. "I suppose really it's because you're not the sort of person that could love the sort of person I am."

"Well, then," said she, "I'll wish I was the sort of person who *could*. I won't be made a silly of by a stupid magic jewel. Only let me call my father, because goodness knows what

sort of person the person who could love you would be like. I can't imagine anyone who could!"

"You may be as cruel as you like now," said Muscadel, "if only somehow or other you'll get to love me afterwards. I will call the King."

So he went to the door and shouted:—

"Hi, your Majesty! Step this way for a moment, will you, please?"

And His Majesty stepped.

"Look here, daddy," said the Princess, "I'm real Princess size again, so give me a kiss!"

When this was done she said very quickly, and before the King could stop her, "I wish I was the kind of person that could love this archer."

And then and there, before the horrified eyes of the other two, the Princess turned into the kind of person who could love the archer.

"Bless my soul and body!" said the King, turning purple.

"Oh, my heart!" said Muscadel, turning white.

For the kind of person the Princess had changed into was a blowzy, frouzy dairy-



"THE PRINCESS HAD CHANGED INTO A BLOWZY, FROUZY DAIRYMAID."

maid, with oily black hair and shining red cheeks, and little black eyes like the currant eyes in gingerbread pigs. Her hands were fat and red, and her feet would not bear looking at for a moment.

"Good old Muscadel!" said the dairymaid that Pandora had turned into; "now we'll be married and live as happy as two mice in a cheese!"

"Never in this world," cried Muscadel, snatching the ring from her hand, which was not manners, but we must remember that he was very much upset. He snatched the ring and he rushed out of the room and out of the palace, and when he got to the archers' quarters he flung himself face down among the rushes on the floor, and lay there till his comrades began to mock him and even to kick him as he lay; and then he got up and fought them with his red fists, one down, t'other come on, till seven of them had owned that they did not want any more.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said the King in his palace; "I'd rather have had you flower-fairy size for life than like this. We must get back the jewel and make you into your old self."

"Not a bit of it," said the dairymaid Princess. "I never was so happy in my life. I love that lovely archer, and if I'm a Princess you can order him to marry me, and he'll have to."

"Lackaday!" said the King. "Dairy-maids don't seem to love like Princesses do."

"I dare say not," said she, "but we know our own minds. I tell you I'm happy, governor, and I'll stay as I am."

The dairymaid Princess called for cold pork and cheese and beer, and, having had quite enough of all three, she went to bed in the Princess's green and white bedroom.

Now, when all the archers had gone to sleep poor Muscadel stole out and wandered through the palace gardens, and looked at the white fountains rising and falling in the moonlight. He saw the white lilies sleeping standing up, just like real live sentinels. He saw the white peacocks roosting in the yew trees, and the white swans cuddled up among the reeds by the lake. He went hither and thither through the cold white beauty of the night, and he thought and thought, but he could not think any thought that was worth the trouble of thinking.

And at last he sat down on a marble bench and very nearly wished that he were dead. Not quite, of course, because people very seldom do that; and if he had there would have been an end to this story.

The silence and the moonlight soothed him, his poor brain felt clearer and brighter, and at last he had the sense to say, without at all knowing that he was saying anything sensible:—

"I wish I was clever."

And instantly he was.

The change was so great, so sudden, and so violent that it nearly choked him. He drew two or three difficult breaths, and then he said:—

"Oh, I see! How stupid of me! I wish I were the kind of person the real Princess could love."

And he felt his body change. He grew thinner and his face seemed to grow a different shape. He hastened to the lake and leaned over it, and saw by the moonlight the reflection of his own face in the water. It was not particularly handsome, but he was not ashamed of the deep-set eyes, largish nose, and firm lips and chin.

"So that's the sort of man she could love!" he said, and went home to bed like a sensible person.

Early in the morning he went out into the palace garden, and it was not all grey and white as it had been the night before, with moonlight and white lilies, but gold and red, with sunshine and roses, and hollyhocks and carnations.

He went and waited under the Princess's window, for he had grown clever enough to know that the Princess, since she was now a dairymaid, would be up awake betimes. And sure enough the green silk curtains were presently drawn back, and the drowsy, blowzy, frouzy face of the dairymaid looked out.

"Halloa!" she said to Muscadel, among the roses, "what are *you* up to?"

"I am the archer you love," said Muscadel, among the roses.

"Not you," she said.

"But indeed!" said he.

"Lawks!" said the dairymaid.

"Don't you love me like this?" said Muscadel.

"Not a bit," said she; "go along, do. You've got a face as long as a fiddle, and I never could abide black hair."

"I'm going to stay like this," said he.

"Then what's to become of me?" she asked, and waited for an answer with her mouth half open.

"I'll tell you," said Muscadel. "You can stay as you are all your life, and go on loving an archer who isn't anywhere at all, or I'll lend you the magic jewel, and then you can

change back into the Princess. And when you're the Princess, you'll love me ever so much more than you ever loved the archer."

"Humph!" said the dairymaid, fingering the Princess's pearl necklace. "Well, if my dear archer really isn't any more, anywhere— As you say, the really important thing is to love someone." Although she was a dairymaid she had the sense to see that. "Give me the jewel," she said.

He threw it up, and she caught it overhand, put it on, and said:—

"I wish I was the Princess again."

And there was the Princess leaning out of the window and covering her face with her hands.

"Look at me," said Muscadel; "am I the sort of person you could love?"

"I don't know," said Pandora, peeping at him between her rosy finger-tips. "You had better ask papa."

"I'd rather ask you," said Muscadel, as he climbed up the palace ivy and leaned in at her window-sill to ask her.

And she leaned out to answer him.

They were married the very next day, and everyone in the kingdom, rich and poor, had roast beef and plum pudding for dinner.

And as soon as the wedding was over Muscadel and his bride went down to the lake, and he threw the magic jewel far, far out. It gleamed redly as it flew through the sunlit air and with a tiny splash sank in the lake, and there it is to this day. You might try to find it one of these days when you have nothing better to do. I dare say you often feel that you would like to change from what you are into something else, and, for anything I know, it might be a very good thing for you, and for the rest of the world.

But Pandora and Muscadel were so happy at belonging to each other that they never wished to change at all, so they did not want the magic ring, and that is why they threw it away. For, as all good house-keepers know, it is very foolish to keep useless things about— just to litter the house up.



"GIVE ME THE JEWEL," SHE SAID.