

THE CRUISE OF THE LITTLE DIPPER

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00004661801



Class PZ8

Book L36

Copyright N° Cu

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



· BIRDLING · NIKKO · MINKA



PETER · ZARASHNE · THE · TSAR ·



“Why, what’s this?” said a thundering voice in his ear

THE CRUISE *of* THE
LITTLE DIPPER

and OTHER FAIRY TALES

THE WONDERFUL TALE *of* NIKKO

PETER DWARF

THE CRYSTAL BOWL

THE MERCILESS TSAR

by

SUSANNE LANGER

Illustrated by

H. SEWELL



NORCROSS

NEW YORK

PZ8
-L26
CW

JAN 24 '24

© CIA 765774

no 1

**THE CRUISE OF THE
LITTLE DIPPER**



COPYRIGHT 1923
BY NORCROSS, N.Y.

THE CRUISE OF THE LITTLE DIPPER



Once upon a time there was a very poor boy, who had no cap on his head, no shoes on his feet, and never a penny in his pocket. He was so poor that he did not even have a name. His father had gone to sea many years ago in a ship called The Big Dipper, and as he had never returned, people said surely he must be dead. So the boy had gone to live in a small, dark house beside the sea, with his great-aunt, who was very old and cross and strict. She did not let him have any sugar on his cereal or butter on his bread, and every day after school she spanked him soundly for all the mistakes he had made that day, and if he had not



made any she spanked him just the same for all those he would probably make to-morrow, or the next day, or the next. When he asked for a bit of soap to blow bright soap-bubbles, she cried:

“Soap-bubbles, indeed! Soap is made only to wash one’s face with. You may have all you want for that, but for bubbles, no, no! Bless my boots, what will you ask for next?”

When the other children played on the beach, building castles in the sand, or picking up pretty shells, this poor boy had to gather driftwood for his great-aunt’s kitchen fire.

But for all his hard luck he was always whistling blithely at his work. He would whistle all the tunes in the hymn book, and all the sailor's songs, and the nursery songs, and then some more that he made up as he ran along the beach picking up driftwood. Of course his great-aunt had forbidden his whistling about the house, but other people liked to hear him, and since he had no name, they called him "Birdling." His great-aunt called him "You!"

One day, after he had come home from school, washed his hands, eaten his dry bread and drunk his tea without sugar or cream, he went as usual to the beach to gather wood; but this day, all the boys from school were down by the sea-side making sail-boats. Their mothers and aunts and grandmas had given them odd bits of muslin from the rag-bag for sails, and their fathers and uncles and grandpas had

given them little pots of paint, and the old boat-builder who lived on the beach had supplied the nails and boards and no end of good advice. They were building a splendid fleet, and when Birdling came whistling along the sands, they all hailed him and shouted:

“Birdling, Birdling, come and build a boat! We have nails to spare, and surely you have some nice boards in your load of driftwood! Come, come and build a boat!”

So Birdling, forgetting all about his duties and his great-aunt, sat down in the warm yellow sand, and built a boat of driftwood; and while he worked he whistled.

The boys were all so glad to hear him and be able to play with him that they gave him all the paint and nails that they could spare, as well as string for his rigging and a lead sinker for his anchor. Of course he had many kinds

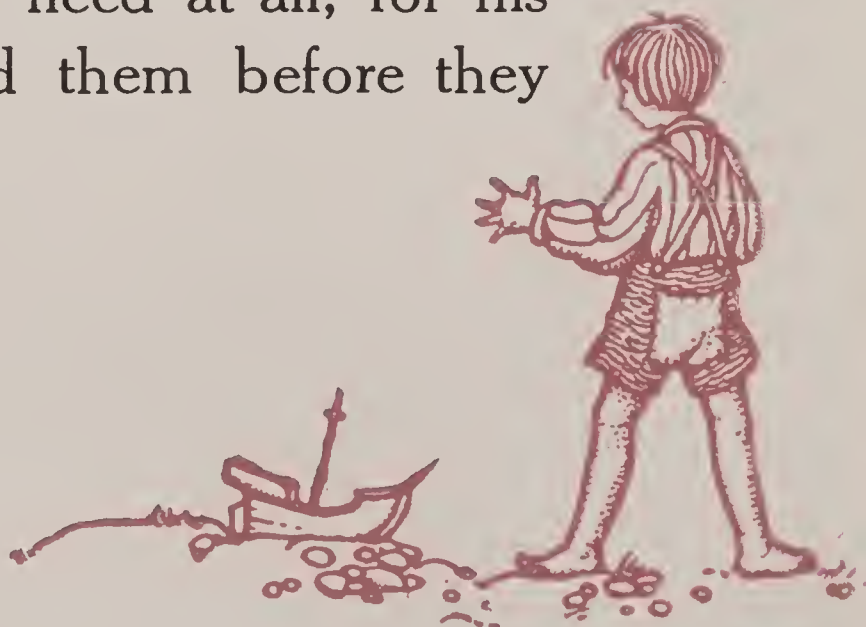
of paint, and not enough of any one color to paint his whole boat, so her hull was black, the trimming golden-yellow, the deck bright-blue and the mast was green. She was a funny boat indeed, but Birdling liked her none the less and wanted to name her after his father's ship, the Big Dipper.

“But she isn't big!” said the other boys. ‘She's the smallest boat of all!”

So he called her the Little Dipper.

“What will you do for a sail?” the others asked. “We'd love to give you some muslin, but we haven't a bit to spare.”

Here was a dilemma indeed. Then Birdling remembered that he had a patch on the seat of his trousers that he did not need at all, for his great-aunt always patched them before they



went into holes (“If I didn’t,” she would say, “why bless my boots, he’d sit them through in two minutes!”); and now he did a dreadful thing, he took off the patch and used it for a sail!

They had such a good time with the boats, loading them with cargoes of sea-shells and digging harbors and chasing away the crabs who came to watch, that they did not notice how the sun had dipped down behind the sand-dunes and the light-house brightened far out at sea. Suddenly they heard the curfew ring.

“Why, it’s past supper-time!” they cried, and all the boys snatched up their boats and ran home. In a moment the beach was as deserted as the sea, and Birdling sat alone on the sands,



his boat between his knees, while the shadows of night crept down to the water. At the furthest end of the beach gleamed a dull square of light—that was his great-aunt's window, brightened by the oil-lamp behind it:

Oh, how she was going to scold him now! For this time he had really been naughty. He had gathered no driftwood, he was late to supper, and he had ripped the patch off the seat of his trousers!

“I don't dare take you home, Little Dipper,” he said as he placed his boat in the safest harbor, as far as possible from the incoming tide. “My great-aunt would burn you in the kitchen stove. Goodby, Little Dipper!”

His great-aunt met him at the door as he



came home. She was so angry that her cap had slid over one ear, her eyes were like tiny hot coals and her very apron-strings curled with wrath. She boxed Birdling's ears, smack, smack, smack!—until they were as pink as sea-shells.

“You, you, you,” she cried, “You shall have no supper, sir, but a very good whipping! Go up on the hill behind the house and cut a switch, a strong one, a long one, for a long strong whipping, sir!”

Obediently Birdling went up to the hill where the witch-hazel bushes held out their long, strong boughs to be cut for switches. But somehow he could not find just the switch he wanted; one was not long enough and another was too long, or one would not be strong enough and the next too strong. He looked them all over very carefully.

The witch-hazel bushes were in blossom, there were fuzzy little yellow stars on their boughs; Birdling saw a bumble-bee (who should have been in bed an hour ago) darting from bush to bush and tasting the little flowers. Then the boy remembered that he was to have no supper to-night, and as he felt dreadfully hungry, he touched one of the yellow blossoms and licked his finger that was covered with fine golden pollen, just to see what it tasted like.

Behold what happened to Birdling! He



did not know that the witch-hazel flowers were full of Fairy Bread! Suddenly he grew smaller and smaller, like a candle on a birthday-cake, till he thought he must go out altogether—but just before it was time to go out he stopped shrinking and saw to his great relief that he was still a good inch taller than the bumble-bee.

He sat down with surprise, hands on the ground and feet apart, and the short grasses closed above his head. All around him the daisies, who always enjoy a joke, were tittering and looking at him through the grass. Somewhere behind a huge fuzzy mullen-plant was a great noise, like the motor of an aeroplane—it was the bumble-bee, coming to see what was going on.

“What’s happened?” he boomed in his rolling bass voice.

“That’s what I’d like to know,” replied the

boy, picking himself up. "I never felt so small in my life, not even when I tore my Sunday shirt and my great-aunt scolded me before everybody! Why, I'm no bigger than a sea-horse!"

The daisies were still laughing and now they could no longer contain themselves.

"He ate fairy-bread," they giggled, "and he grew as little as a balloon when the air goes out, ho, ho, ho, ho! Tee, tee, tee, tee!"

"Ate fairy-bread!" exclaimed Birdling, "do you mean to say I am a fairy now?"

The Bumble-bee put his head on one side and deliberated.

"No," he said slowly, "You're not a fairy. You're only fairyish. What's your name?"

"I haven't any. But people call me Birdling."

"Well, that's not so bad. What can you do?"

"Nothing. Oh, yes—I can whistle!"

“Where will you live? You are too small to live with your great-aunt. She would surely step on you.”

Birdling looked around; there was a ground-sparrow's nest under the witch-hazel bushes, very near the fairy-bread flowers.

“Here,” he said, “If nobody minds, I'll live here.”

So that is where he lived all summer. Everybody on the hill grew fond of him, and in the mornings when the robin sang to the sun, Birdling too would be up and whistling.

But one day the Bumble-bee came to call. His face was serious and his voice unusually rumbly. It was a cool day so Birdling was all wrapped in a mullen leaf.



“It’s Autumn!” said Bumble. “What will you do when Winter comes?”

“I don’t know. What do the birds do?”

“They go to the Fairy Islands.”

“Mayn’t I go?”

“You aren’t a bird or a fairy,” objected the visitor.

“But I’m fairyish, you know.”

“Then you may, I suppose.”

Birdling got up, ready to start at once.

“How do the birds get there, Bumble?”

“They fly.”

“But I can’t fly!”

“Then you can’t go.”

“But you said I could if I was fairyish!”

“No, I said you might. You may, but you can’t. See?”

Birdling shook his head.

“Where are the Fairy Islands?” he asked.

“Beyond the Deep Sea.”

“Could one go in a boat?”

“Possibly.”



Then Birdling remembered the Little Dipper, lying forlorn on the sands, beyond the reaches of the tide. Perhaps some boy had picked her up, or perhaps the waves had taken her—or perhaps she was still in her harbor!

Neatly he folded some mullen-leaves, for sailors need warm clothes and blankets, and with these over his arm he began the long journey from the hill-top to the harbor. It was ten fairy-miles of rather rough walking. The Bumble-bee went with him and when they had come as far as his great-aunt's house, which was just half-way between the hill and the beach, he flew up on her roof where you could get a splendid view of the country.

“Oh, can you see the Little Dipper?” cried



Birdling from below.

“I see a boat on the sand,” reported Bumble, “a very queer boat—her hull is black, her trimmings golden-yellow, her decks bright-blue and the mast and sails are green.”

“That’s the Little Dipper!” shouted Birdling, and began to run as fast as he could. He quite forgot that his great-aunt sat by the window, knitting wristlets and watching everything outside the house. She saw the tiny creature running along the beach, and as she was very old and could not see very clearly through her spectacles, she opened the window and leaned far out.

“It must be a mouse,” she decided, and hobbling across the room, she called her cat and opened the door for him.

“Mousie outside, Puss!” she said. “Go catch the Mousie, catch the Mousie!”

The big black cat never had much to eat so he was very glad to go and catch a mouse. Poor Birdling dropped his mullen-leaves and ran faster and faster, but could not run fast enough. The Cat came nearer and nearer.



“Oh, I can’t run any more!” panted Birdling at last. In another moment the Cat would have pounced upon him and devoured him—but just then the Bumble-bee came booming through the air, and stung the Cat on his big, black, S-shaped tail. The cat gave a terrible cry, turned around and ran home three times as fast as he had come.

Birdling had to sit down and rest for a while after the Cat had gone. Then he and

the Bumble-bee went on, hoping to reach the Little Dipper before noon. But they had not gone one-half a fairy-mile further, when a cross, scratchy voice shouted at them: "Get off the beach!"

"I can't," said Birdling timidly. "There's a board fence on one side and water on the other, and I can't go back the way I came, because there's a cat."

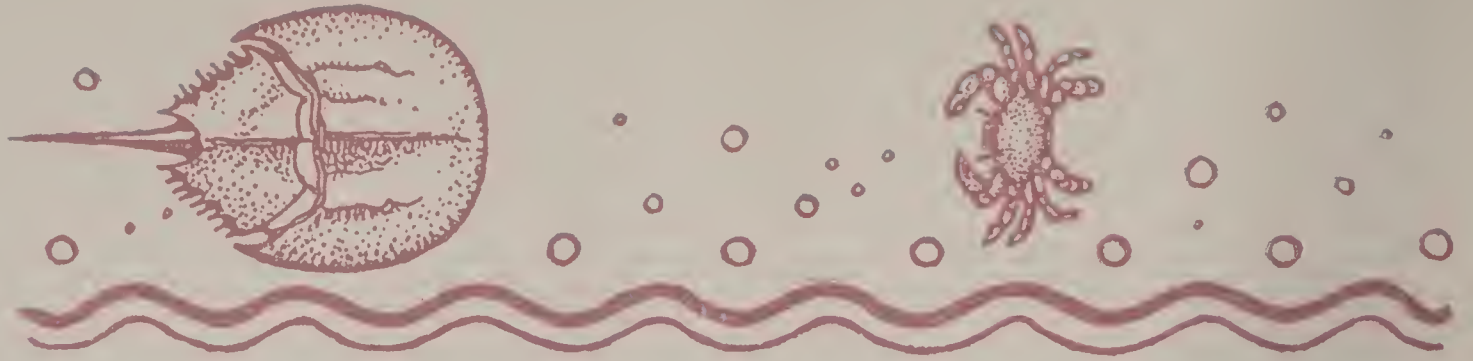
He could not even see who was speaking. There was only a big brown hill in front of him.

"I'm not on the beach," replied Bumble-bee. "I'm in the air. Who are you, anyway?"

"Who am I! Well, I like that—who am I? Why, I'm ME!"

The big brown hill lifted itself up a bit, and they saw that it was the back of a Horse-Shoe Crab.

"Get off the beach, you civilians, this is a



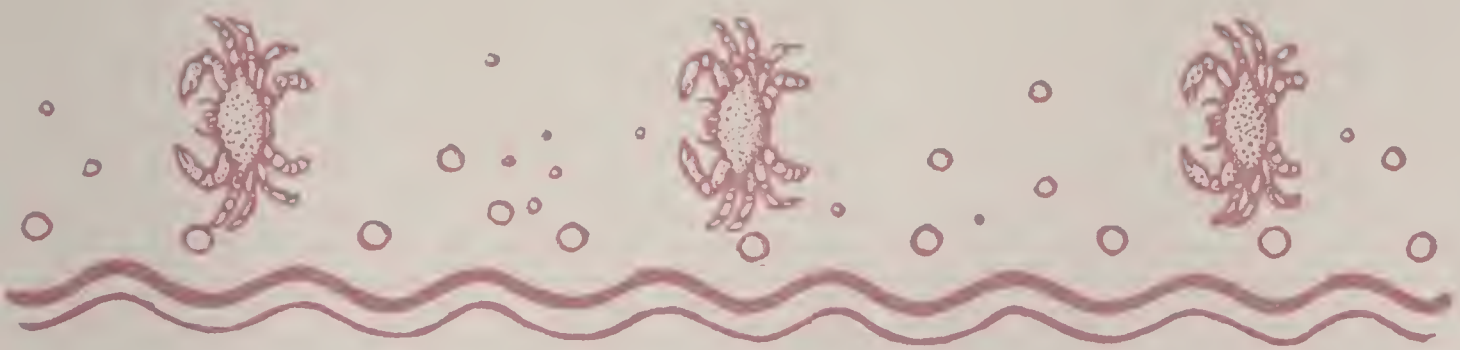
parade-ground! I'm drilling the new regiment from the Deep Sea."

Then they noticed a long line of little pink Crabs emerging from the foamy water and slowly ascending the sands.

"Backward—march!" shouted the Horse-Shoe Crab.

There was nothing for Birdling to do but sit down on an empty oyster shell and wait until the parade was over. They marched backward, and marked time with two feet, three feet, four feet, till they had learned to keep all six of them going, and they did squads right and left and exercised their jaws and joints and pincers. There was nothing they did not do.

At last the Horse-Shoe Crab shouted: "Dismiss!" and all the little Crabs tumbled back into the sea, pinching each other and betting who



would be first down the beach. Then the old commander turned his attention to Birdling and Bumble.

“Who are you?”

“Nobody.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’m not going at all,” replied Bumble.

“You want to cross the parade-ground?”

“Yes.”

“What for?”

“To get to my ship.”

“Show your passport.”

“Here!” and Bumble unsheathed his shiny long bayonet.

“That will do,” said the Horse-Shoe Crab quickly, backing away a few steps and pulling in his tail. “You may pass.”

It was night before they reached the Little

Dipper. She looked very forlorn, lying a bit sideways, sails furled and decks covered with sand. Worst of all, a whole brotherhood of Shrimps had set up housekeeping in her hold, and not even at the point of Bumble's bayonet would they move out. They wore little coats of mail that made them quite indifferent to a mere bumble-bee's sting.

"But you *must* move out," pleaded Birdling, standing on the deck and shouting down into the hold. "I want to go to the Fairy Islands, and I simply must have my ship."

"Going to the Fairy Islands?" echoed the Shrimps. "That's a long trip, without food or water aboard and without a crew!"

"Oh, we'll lay in food and water soon enough," said Bumble, who sat in the rigging. "As for a crew—"

"Let us be the crew," cried the Shrimps.

“We’re not clever, but we’re really very obedient and faithful. We don’t want to spoil your trip, Birdling, but we don’t want to move, either; there are very few houses along the beach, and none as nice as this. Let us be your crew!”

“But then I’ll have to pay you,” said Birdling, “and I have no money. Shall I pay you with music? I’ll whistle one tune for every Shrimp once a week.”



“It’s a bargain,” replied the crew.

All night long Bumble flew to and fro be-

tween the witch-hazel bushes on the hill and the boat upon the beach, carrying fairy-bread and honey-dew for the voyage. The crew packed all these provisions into big barnacles that made splendid kegs and barrels. Birdling was brave enough to go back along the beach by moonlight and pick up the mullen-leaf blankets he had dropped when he fled from the Cat, and at the crack of dawn the Little Dipper was ready to put to sea. They cleared the harbor and with the outgoing tide floated out upon the ocean. Bumble flew above the mast and accompanied them for several miles; two fiddler crabs came to the edge of the beach and fiddled until the good ship was out of sight, and Birdling stood at the bow with the great green sail blowing behind him. At last everybody shouted: "Goodby, goodby, goodluck, thank you, thank-you!" then the Little Dipper sailed out of sight.



For three days they journeyed, always pointing their course to Eastward, but they did not know just where to look for the Fairy Islands. Sometimes a flock of birds would fly above them also going Eastward, but they flew so fast that it was never possible to follow and learn their path.

On the fourth day, just as the pink dawn spread over the sky, Birdling saw a whole fleet of tiny sails. They were no bigger than his own, but they were pearly white and shimmered with lovely colors, so he knew they must be Nautilus ships.

“Heigh-ho!” he shouted, catching up to them. “Heigh-ho, heigh-ho!”

The Nautilus ships have deep, deep holds with many little cabins in them. When he shouted, a whole troop of fairy sailors came

popping out to see who had called to them.

“Heigh-ho!” they replied.

“Where are you going?” asked Birdling.

“To the Fairy Islands.”

“Take me along?”

“With pleasure,” said the fairies. “Who are you?”

“I’m Birdling, and the Shrimps are my crew.”

The Little Dipper was surrounded by the ships of pearl, and as the sea was quiet and the wind very low they could talk from deck to deck. The oldest one of the fairy captains was a Brownie named Trick. He was seven hundred years old, and knew about everything from the North Pole to the great Antarctic.

“We are going to the Fairy Islands with a



cargo of ants'-eggs," he told Birdling, "Our King likes to eat them poached, or fried, or scrambled, on his breakfast toast. We would do anything to cheer up the King."

"Why does the King need cheering up?" Birdling inquired sympathetically. "I thought Kings were always happy."

"Oh no, no, no, our Fairy King is very unhappy. His little son has been kidnapped by Shag."

"Who is Shag?"

Trick shook his head and rolled his eyes at Birdling's ignorance.

"What! You have sailed the Sea for fully half a week, and don't know who Shag is? Ask your crew!"

But the Shrimps did not know about Shag, either. They were not very clever, you know, and had not gone to school.

“Won’t you please tell us?” said Birdling, a bit ruffled at the Brownie’s airs.

“Shag is the King of the Deep Sea!” shouted all the Fairies together, so loudly that the Nautilus ships rocked with the noise.

“He has kidnapped our little Fairy Prince,” Trick explained, “and nobody knows whether he is ill, or imprisoned, or dead. Our King is so sad that he will not wear his crown, he has locked it in a closet and hidden the key. As for the queen, the poor lady has turned into a weeping willow!”

“That’s awful,” said Birdling, and the Shrimps



were moved to tears. “Where does Shag live?”

“Under the rock where the Sea Lion sleeps.”

“Can’t somebody sneak into his house and take a peep to see what has become of the little Prince?”

“You make us shiver to think of it,” replied the fairies, pulling their caps down over their ears and their sailor collars up. “The Sea-Lion wakes at the slightest noise and catches anyone who comes near. And if you did get by, Shag would be sure to see you and eat you at a gulp!”

But Birdling went on asking questions.

“Where is the Rock?”

“We are just passing it,” said a Shrimp from the top of the mast. “I see it, far to leeward.”

Birdling turned his rudder, and waved his hand as his boat swung away from the Nautilus fleet.



“Goodby,” he shouted. “Tell your King that Birdling has gone to take a peep into Shag’s palace, to see whether the young Prince be ill, or imprisoned, or dead! You shall not see me again till I bring word of your prince.”

The fairies set up a great cry of amazement, but already the Little Dipper was far to leeward, steering toward the terrible Rock. So they continued on their way to the Fairy Islands and all the way home they could talk of nothing but the adventurous captain of the many-colored sail-boat, and his crew.

Birdling sailed straight up to the Rock. It was black and high, and the waves ran up on it in great white ruffles. Then he noticed that the top of the Rock was not of stone at all—it was the outstretched form of the Sea Lion, sound asleep.

When the Shrimps saw the monster, their

courage failed them. They fell upon their knees and begged the Skipper to turn back, for they were dreadfully afraid of being eaten; and when Birdling would not turn back, they mutinied and said they would not mind the sails and would not go one inch nearer the terrible Rock! Then Birdling grew angry at their cowardice and locked them all into the hold, where their cries could not be heard, for he was afraid they would wake the Sea Lion. He then took the ropes and the rudder in his own hand, and steered his craft into a cove so near the Sea Lion that he could hear the great creature breathing.

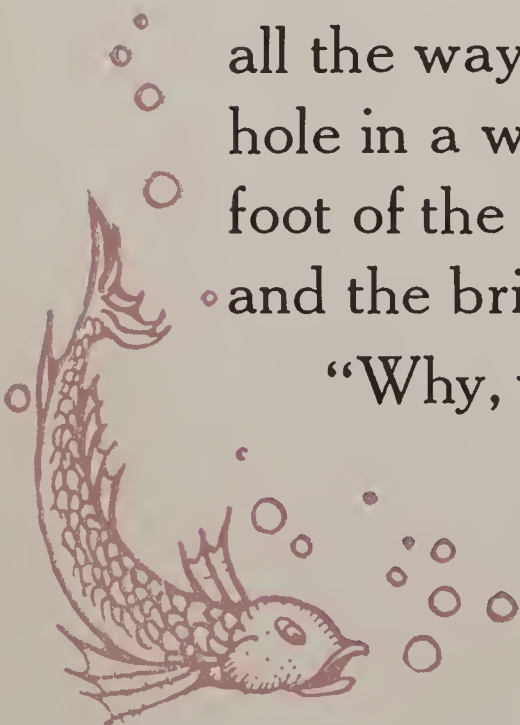
In the cove and under the rock ran a deep cave, that he guessed at once to be the entrance to Shag's palace, where you could go down into the sea without drowning, as the Mermen and Mermaids do. Very quietly he fastened his boat to the rock, then climbed on to the gun-

wale and dived like a dolphin into the deep, dark, ripply water.

Yes, this was the entrance to the Palace of King Shag! At the bottom of the cave was a winding stairway, like the inside of a huge shell. Strange, fantastic fish swam up and down and churned up the water so that it was very hard for Birdling to keep his balance. But fortunately they did not see him, so he crept on slowly down the steps.

Suddenly he saw a gleam of light, and he felt sure it must be from Shag's palace. Faster and faster he ran down the wet, mossy stairs, till a current of water caught him and took him all the way down just as a fly goes down the hole in a washbowl. When he landed at the foot of the stairs, he was sitting on golden sands and the bright lights blinded his eyes.

“Why, what's this?” said a thundering voice

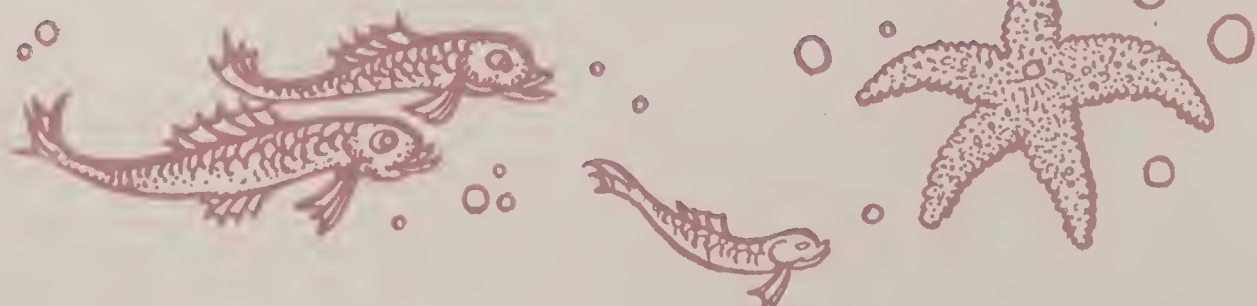


in his ear, and a huge fin picked him up. He looked up and saw Shag himself, a huge silvery fish with long whiskers and pop-eyes and a golden crown on his head. He was very hideous, and Birdling was terribly frightened, but he looked all around hoping to see the Prince.

“I don’t know who you are,” said Shag, “but you look as if you’d make a nice little morsel.”

“I will let you have one chance for your life. Before I eat you, you shall come and see the wonderful treasures I have collected, and if you are able to pick out the most precious jewel in my vault, I will let you go. You shall have the jewel for a prize, and I will give you one day’s grace before pursuing you with my soldiers.”

So Birdling was led down some more long stairs to the cellar of the palace, where shining jellyfish lights hung from the ceiling. In their



dim radiance he saw a heap of treasure such as no one had ever seen in all the world—diamonds that shone like stars, rubies and sapphires and emeralds, brooches and necklaces, pearl-set combs, wonderful pins and lockets and vessels of hammered gold!

Then Birdling noticed a queer locket lying close to his foot; it seemed to be made of two big oyster-shells closed with a band of tin. There was nothing very precious about it.

“But it must be precious, or it wouldn’t be here,” he thought quickly.

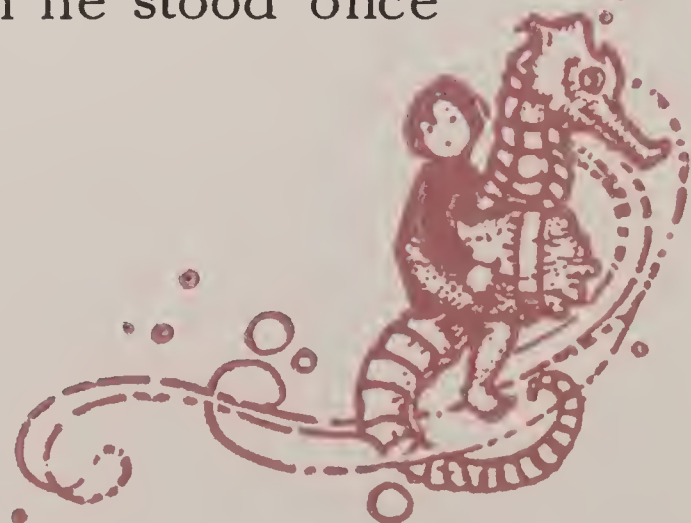
So, while Shag waved his whiskers in a bored and superior way, and his soldiers craned their necks to see Birdling, the boy suddenly stooped and picked up the locket.

“I choose this,” he said, and held it up with both hands.

Shag uttered a howl of rage.

“He has guessed, he has guessed!” The body-guard drew back in terror as their King beat the water with his fins, till a cloud of mud came up from the floor of the cave and his crown slipped over one eye. Now he would really have liked to eat up Birdling but of course the soldiers had all heard the rules of the game, so he had to abide by his word. Birdling was escorted back to the hall and allowed to go up the winding stairs, back to the Little Dipper, the heavy oyster shell under his arm. It seemed to him about as big as a suit-case, but harder to carry because it had no handle. No one knows how he could ever have carried it to the top of the stairs, had he not met a Sea-Horse who gave him a ride.

“Heigh-ho!” he cried, when he stood once



more aboard the Little Dipper, "are you asleep or awake down there in the hold?"

"Awake!" cried one voice.

"Asleep!" murmured all the others.

"Then wake up, for we must flee! We have one day of grace and then Shag will pursue us: Heave the anchors and hoist the sails!"

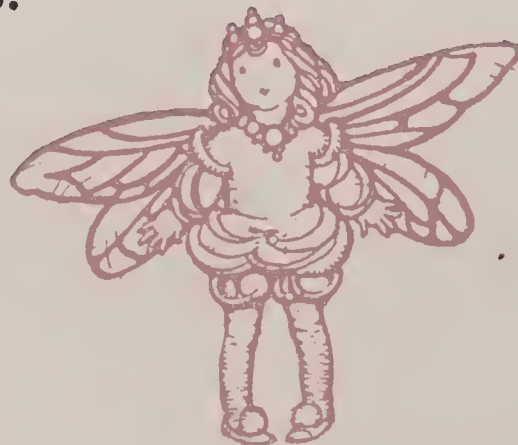
So he raised the trap-door of the hold, and the Shrimps climbed out, looking very shamefaced and small, as well they might; and in a few minutes the Little Dipper was under sail.

When the Rock was well out of sight and the Little Dipper making good speed, Birdling gave the wheel to the first mate, and decided to open the oyster-locket. It took three Shrimps and the captain himself to move the heavy band of tin that held the two half-shells together. But at last they fell apart—and what do you suppose was inside?

A perfect little bedroom, all wrought of finest gold, with a canopy-bed of rosy silk and a tiny chair and table and even a dresser—and in the bed, on pillows of down, lay the young Fairy Prince! When the locket opened and the light shone into his room, he rubbed his eyes and said: “What time is it?”

“Time to go home,” replied Birdling. “Don’t be afraid, for we are taking you there.”

They gave him some witch-hazel bread and a drink of honey-dew, and one of the Shrimps was appointed to tell him stories to pass the time. The young Prince was cheerful and well-behaved and every one who saw him loved him at once. He had yellow curls and bright, laughing eyes, and clothes made of flower-petals, that made Birdling feel very plain in his rough coat of mullen-leaves.



Everybody aboard the Little Dipper was perfectly happy, so they quite forgot that tomorrow morning Shag would pursue them with his soldiers. Imagine their terror when they woke up at sunrise in a raging storm that made the waves dash over the very mast of their boat! They could hear Shag howling at the bottom of the Deep Sea, and as he whisked his tail he made more and more bubbles and white-caps come up. The white-caps pursued the Little Dipper like ranks of horsemen.

The young prince, hidden under Birdling's



mullen-coat, began to tremble and cry, for he was dreadfully afraid of Shag.

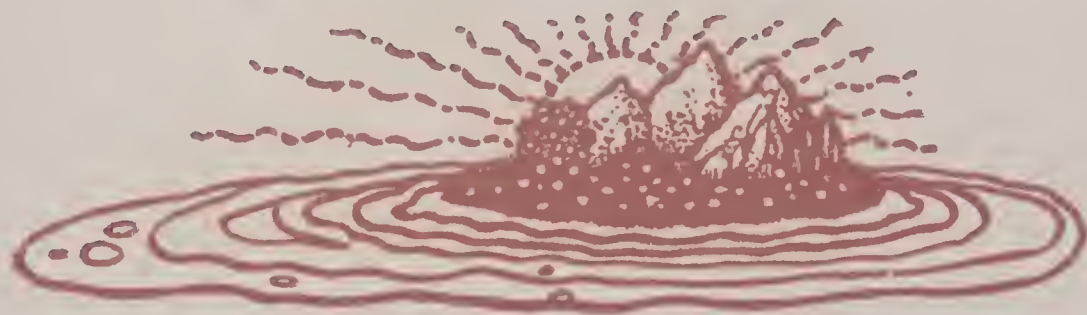
“Don’t be afraid,” said Birdling. “I’m sure we will reach the Fairy Islands very soon now, and then we will be safe.”

“But where are the Fairy Islands? Where are they?” queried the young prince, scanning the sea with his bright eyes. “I don’t see them, and I am so frightened!”

Birdling had just been hit on the head by a hailstone, but he pretended it did not hurt.

“You mustn’t be frightened,” he said cheerfully. “I’ll whistle you a tune if you’ll stop crying.” And he began to whistle as though he did not mind the storm at all.

As he whistled, the sea became calm and began to shimmer with a thousand lovely colors—and out of the rippling waters rose three snow-



capped mountains surrounded on every side by sunny green plains. He had found the Fairy Islands!

Birdling ran his boat into the harbor where he saw the Nautilus fleet lying at anchor, and he called out joyfully, "Yo, ho, yo, ho, heigh-ho! Where is Trick?"

A crowd of fairies came running to the harbor's edge, and cried, "Hush, hush! No one is allowed to shout or whistle or sing on this island. Even the birds do not sing. The King and Queen have commanded silence to prevail, until they have some news of their son."

"Here's news for you, then," replied Birdling. "Go and tell your King and Queen that the young prince has returned!" So saying, he picked up the fairy child and stood him on the gunwale of the ship for everyone to see, and the well-behaved child doffed his little diadem,



and bowed.

So great was the joy of the fairy people, that they stumbled over each other in their haste to go and tell the King that the good ship Little Dipper had brought back his son. The queen, who had turned into a weeping willow, came back to life and wept now with delight; the king hunted all over the palace for the key to his closet, for he could hardly wait to put on his crown once more and hold a great banquet in honor of Birdling, who had restored the heir to the throne. The birds burst into song and

the blue bells chimed and even the butterflies, who are usually silent, began to trill and chirp, until the whole island rang with joyous sounds. As soon as the cook could get the banquet ready they all sat down and feasted, from the fairy King, with Birdling by his side, to the meekest under-earthworm, and the shy Shrimps had a table by themselves because they did not possess very fairyish manners. There was cake for everybody, and ice-cream, and chocolate with whipped cream, and candy and favors. The best thing about the party was that all the goodies were fairy-food which couldn't make you sick however much you ate, and they all drank Birdling's health in pink lemonade.

Three days later, when the feasting was over, and the hundreds of golden dishes had been washed and dried, Birdling was playing

on the beach with the fairies and he saw a ship out at Sea.

“Look,” he said to his friend Trick, “there is a ship just like mine, only a hundred times bigger! That isn’t a fairy ship. How do you suppose she came into these waters?”

“Oh, that is a ship which came here long ago,” said Trick. “Shag caught it and tied it it to the light-house rock. It has been there for years and years. I suppose the storm which Shag made when he was angry at you, must have torn the rope and set the poor vessel free. Do you suppose the people on board are still alive?”

“I’ll go and see,” said Birdling. “Of course I’m very small, but I might be able to help them.” So he took the Little Dipper and sailed out to the schooner.

“Heigh-ho!” he cried, standing up and put-

ting his hands to his mouth. "Heigh-ho!"

Somebody certainly was alive on the ship; a tall captain dressed in oil skins, stood up in the bow and shouted back:

"We are the Big Dipper! Who are you?"

"The Little Dipper! And you must be my father," cried Birdling, dancing for joy.

At first the Captain could not believe his eyes and ears, but when Birdling stood on his right hand (he had the good ship Little Dipper in the left one) he looked at him very closely, and saw that it really was his son.



“Oh Father, now we can go home together,” exclaimed the boy, hugging his father’s thumb. “But will you wait till I go and say goodby to my fairy friends?”

“Yes, I will wait,” said the Captain, “for you should never leave your friends without saying goodby and thank you.”

The fairies were sorry to see Birdling go, they let him take along all the treasures he wanted from the King’s store room, and helped him carry them down to the harbor and put them in his hold. He took a bag of gold for his father and a little one for himself, besides the oyster-locket with the golden chamber inside, which he had won from Shag, and a little pearly crown for his friend the Bumblebee at home. He even took a gold thimble for his great-aunt and a little silver bell for the Cat, to show that he bore no malice.

“And here is some fairy wine you must drink when you are safely aboard your father’s ship,” said the King, handing Birdling a tiny vial just as he said goodby. “It will make you grow up again and be as big as other boys. We will miss you, Birdling. Farewell!”

So Birdling, a life sized boy once more, went home with his father whistling happy songs. As his whistle died away in the distance, the Fairy Islands sank down into the water, the waves closed over them, and you could not even guess where the three snowy peaks and the green plains and sunny harbors had been.

And no one has ever seen them since.



**THE WONDERFUL
TALE OF NIKKO**

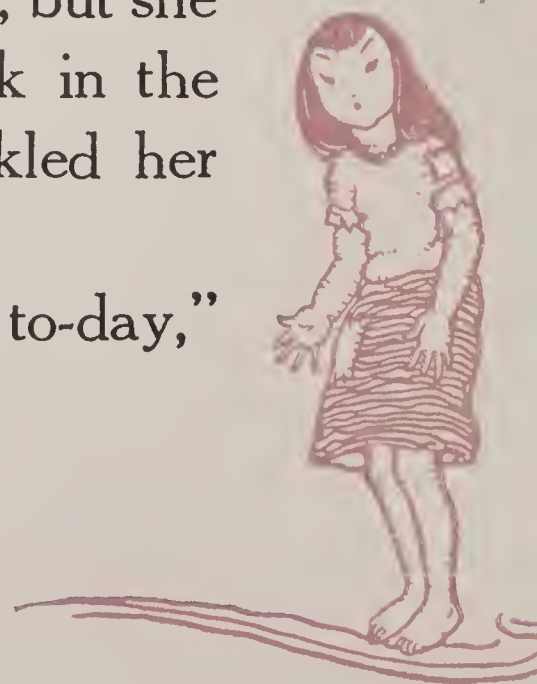


THE WONDERFUL TALE OF NIKKO

The Emperor of China was about to choose a bride. From far and near the fairest ladies of the realm came to his palace. They sat on pearly thrones which were borne on the shoulders of Hindu slaves or drawn by spotted leopards and some were floated down the great rivers on rafts woven of long-stemmed Lotos flowers.

Nikko stood sadly by the roadside watching the grand procession pass. She was more beautiful than any of the splendid ladies, but she was poor and humble and had to work in the rice-fields where the muddy water tickled her little bare toes.

“I cannot work in the rice-fields to-day,”



she said to herself, "for the procession is so interesting that I have to stand by the roadside and watch. I had better go into the woods, where I can't see it, and pick some mushrooms for dinner."

So she took her basket and went into the woods. But before she had picked the first handful, she saw a tremendous scarlet toadstool spangled all over with silver dots, swaying on a tall silvery stem. It was the most enormous toadstool she had ever seen, so big that Nikko could have hidden under its flapping top. She wanted to pull it up and carry it as a parasol, but just then she looked over the edge and noticed that a pearly Snail and a golden Spider



were sitting on top having tea together. The Snail turned around and stuck out his eyes at her like opera-glasses.

“Excuse me,” said Nikko. “I almost picked your toadstool for a parasol! I didn’t see you.”

“Why should a little girl want a parasol?” asked the Snail as solemnly as a great-aunt. “You’re very vain.”

“Oh no indeed,” replied Nikko. “But I should like to pretend I was a grand lady, going to the Emperor’s palace to-day. I should love to see the Emperor.”

“So should I,” said the Spider.

“Well, so should I,” admitted the Snail. “Why don’t you go?”

“Ah, but look at me!” cried Nikko sadly. “I have on a hempen frock and my feet are bare and I have not a single jewel, only this string of red berries round my neck! But to ride

in the procession one must sit on a pearly throne and wear a silken gown and jewelry and carry a pretty parasol. I have none of these things.”

“I will make you a dress more beautiful than silk,” said the Spider, “if you will take me along to see the Emperor!”

“And I could take the toadstool for a parasol, if you wouldn’t mind having tea somewhere else,” Nikko said. “But alas! what should I do for a pearly throne?”

“Well, now you mention it,” chimed in the Snail, “if I could eat enough tea and toast I might grow big enough to carry you, and my house would make a pretty good throne. Yes, perhaps I’ll carry you, if you will get me the tea and toast; for I must confess I should love to see the Emperor!”

As fast as her bare feet could carry her, Nikko ran home, took all the tea out of the can-

ister, baked six batches of bread, put them in a bucket and carried them back to the forest. She then laid a fire of sticks and began to make



toast so ambitiously that the scent of it could be smelled all over China from the Great Wall at one end to the Yellow Sea at the other. And above the fire hung the bucket, filled with water for the Snail's tea.

The Snail filled his acorn-cup a million times



that day and ate toast till the sun went down. Then he rested for a few minutes, but when night came he began again and you could hear him munching in the dark.

In the morning he was so big that he had to descend from the toadstool for fear of breaking its stem. By evening he was as big as a football, and by the next morning as big as the biggest snow-ball you ever made, and before the third day, he was big enough to carry Nikko on his back.

Meanwhile the Spider had been very busy. He had spun a wonderful silken gown, all decked with dew-drops and inwrought with the wings of butterflies, and when he had watched Nikko

put it on and made sure that it fitted perfectly, he fastened himself in front for a brooch. Nikko was delighted. But suddenly she exclaimed:

“Alas, I have no shoes! The grand ladies all wear tiny beaded shoes. What shall I do with my feet?”

“Oh, never mind your feet,” replied the Snail. “You’ll be riding all the time so you can keep them tucked under your gown.”

So they picked the scarlet toadstool for a parasol, set Nikko a-top the Snail with her feet well hidden, and started on their way.

The procession was almost over; only a few stragglers hurried along the highroad, and they all overtook poor Nikko, for a Snail can go just half a mile an hour and no faster. A haughty four-in-hand of peacocks passed her at a strut, tails spread and crests erect; a team of pig-tailed Chinamen running for all they were worth and

jolting their mistress till she was dizzy, almost stumbled headlong over the Snail; four turbaned slaves overtook her and then looked back open-mouthed at the beautiful lady; and a spotted leopard, loping in front of a gorgeous princess' throne, shied in terror when the Snail happened to stick out his eyes, and the leopard, the throne and the gorgeous princess were wrecked in the muddy water of the rice-field beside the road.

When they came to the palace they heard the bells ringing, the big gongs sounding and the conches blowing, and saw great kites and paper lanterns and balloons swinging in the air, for the Emperor had just chosen a bride and the procession was all over! The bride was the beautiful lady Lu Tsing, who now sat beside him on the terrace and smiled down on all the other ladies. Her maidens and attendants sat at her feet and told her how fortunate she was.

“How did you feel when you rode in the procession?” asked one of the maidens.

“Weren’t you dreadfully excited till you knew whom his Majesty would choose.?”

Lu Tsing yawned behind her fan.

“No,” she replied, “I wasn’t a bit excited, for I knew of course that he would choose me.”

Just then the big Snail came plodding along the road, and they all got a glimpse of Nikko’s face under the scarlet parasol. She was so lovely



to behold that everybody gasped. But the Emperor did more than gasp; he jumped up from his ivory chair and cried,

“Friends, Courtiers, Chinamen! I have changed my mind! I am not going to marry Lu Tsing after all, but this unknown damsel whose name has never been heard in the land!”

Then the bells were tolled and the gongs sounded and the conches blown louder than ever, as a hundred slaves hurried down the steps to pick up Nikko's throne and carry her up to the terrace. Then the Snail withdrew into his house, for he was ticklish, and the Spider whispered to Nikko under cover of all the noise:

“You must not be found with a real spider on your breast! I will leave you now, and you can say you have lost your pin.”

With these words he dropped to the ground and ran when he thought no one would notice.

But one person did notice; that was the lady Lu Tsing. She tried to kill him with her foot, but he escaped again and again, till suddenly she picked up a cup from the tea-table, turned it up-side down and trapped him under it.

The Emperor greeted Nikko with honeyed words, but the lady Lu Tsing having caught the Spider, retreated to the furthest, darkest chamber of the palace, where she tore up all the curtains and bed-spreads and bureau-scarfs in her wrath till the room looked like a rag-man's house. Then she sat down among the wreckage and plotted revenge.



Nikko would have been quite happy if she had not been so worried about her bare feet. Sooner or later they would be discovered and oh, what would the Emperor think of her then? Just now he took her hand and said to her:

“My dear, you must tell me what you would like for a wedding gift!” And Nikko almost cried out: “Shoes, your Majesty, shoes!” but she did not want to give herself away, so she replied,

“Well, I do not know which I would rather have, a bright brocaded shawl or a new pair of slippers!”

“You shall have both,” declared the Emperor, and ordered a maiden to fetch them. Nikko donned the shawl and slipped on the little shoes but they were so small that they hurt her feet dreadfully.

“Ah well,” she said to herself, biting back

tears of pain. "I shall have to get used to some discomforts now that I am to be an Empress!"

She had been Empress for about a week, when her husband the Emperor fell very ill. It really was indigestion after the wedding-feast, but of course the doctors wanted to make it something more dignified, so they said:

"He must have been bitten by a poisonous insect!"

"Yes, and I know who it was," said Lu Tsing to her attendants. "It was the golden Spider who sat on Nikko's breast when she came! Everybody thought it was a pin, but it really was a Spider, for I saw him creep away!" and the attendants went about the palace telling



everybody how Nikko had worn a live Spider for a pin.

Nikko was very anxious about her husband. He lay on a couch in the parlor because he was too ill to sit on his throne, and twenty doctors stood around and told him that a poisonous insect must have bitten him. Just then Lu Tsing came in, with a tea-cup in her hand.

“Behold what the maid found in his Majesty’s bed when she turned the mattress!” she cried, And showed them the golden Spider, who sat in the tea-cup and looked at them with great surprise.

“Why, it is the Spider that Nikko wore when she came,” said the Emperor. “We all thought it was a pin. And she said she had lost it. Nikko, you were fibbing!”

“Yes, I was fibbing,” Nikko admitted.



“Friends, Courtiers, Chinamen! I have changed my mind”

“And then she put the Spider into your Majesty’s bed!” cried all the people. “She is a wicked woman!”

In vain Nikko protested. Lu Tsing’s attendants had told the story so often that everybody was ready to believe it now that they saw the Spider.

“The Spider shall be killed, and Nikko be put into the highest, strongest, darkest tower, with a moat around it, and kept there all her life,” said the Emperor in great anger, “and Lu Tsing shall be Empress of China!”

So they set the Spider down on the floor and called a hundred slaves to come with brooms and kill him. But the hundred slaves all hit each other’s brooms and got so mixed up that they did not hit the Spider at all, so he hid under the Emperor’s couch and when nobody was looking he ran away. He ran to the back-

yard where the extra thrones and the Emperor's beasts were kept.

Here the Snail was just having an argument with a quick-tempered Dragon about which was better, tea or toast. The Dragon said tea. The Snail said toast.



“Stop arguing,” said the Spider. “The best food is rice anyway.” And while the Dragon was still switching his tail and shouting: “Tea, tea, tea!” the Snail stopped and listened to the story of Nikko's trouble.

“This is awful,” he said, looking forward

with one eye and back with the other to make sure nobody was listening. "Have they put Nikko in the tower?"

"Yes, they have," wept the Spider.

"Can't she let herself out of the window? You could creep in and spin a rope for her. She's not very heavy."

"But there is a deep moat around the tower," said the Spider. "I couldn't get to her, and besides if she let herself down she would drop into the moat."

"I'll help you below," replied the Snail. "You be ready to do your part. Meet me to-night at the edge of the moat!"

Just then one of the slaves appeared with a broom, so the little spider ducked out of sight under a throne. The Snail sat in deep thought for a while; then he went and found the Dragon again, and told him that toast was better than tea.

At night, when the temple-bells had stopped ringing and everyone in the palace was fast asleep, the Snail and the Spider met at the edge of the moat.

“Hop on my back,” whispered the Snail, and slid into the water with the Spider aboard. Softly he floated across the black moat to the tower where Nikko was imprisoned.

Poor Nikko sat weeping by the window. It was cold and dusty and untidy in the tower-room. She had pulled the brocaded shawl tight about her shoulders and had taken off her tiny shoes, for now that she was no longer an Empress she thought she might as well be



comfortable. Her parasol lay up-side-down in a corner for she never expected to use it again. The sun never shone in the tower where she was to stay all her life.

How surprised she was when a small voice called: "Nikko, Empress of China!" and looking up, she discovered the golden spider sitting on the window-sill!"

"We must hurry," he said, and began to spin a rope. He was all out of breath from running up the high steep wall of the tower. When he had finished the rope, Nikko put on her shoes and picked up the parasol, the Spider hopped on her shoulder, and together they let themselves carefully out of the window. The rope was very slippery and they slid down a little faster than they intended.

Splash! they landed on the back of the Snail and ducked him completely under water,

but he bobbed right up again. They floated across the moat in the moonlight and the spider climbed on top of the parasol and kept the watch, for the Snail kept getting his eyes full of water, and Nikko was so busy holding on that she could not look around at all.

“Take care,” said the Spider, “someone is coming! Thank goodness, here we are ashore. But I’m afraid somebody has seen us!”

The Snail crawled out of the water and shook himself, stretched his eyes and paused for breath.

“Run away, Nikko,” he said. “I should like to carry you, but my pace is too slow. You had better trust to your feet. Hurry, hurry and flee from the land of China, or the Emperor’s soldiers will catch you!”

“But I won’t leave you,” protested Nikko.

“Yes, you must leave me. I will follow by

and by and meet you in the big world beyond China, for no one will think about me or try to catch me. Take the Spider with you. Buddha preserve you!”

So Nikko and the Spider kissed him good-bye and ran away together, over muddy fields of rice and big dry fields of black poppies, past temples and villages till they came to the furthest end of the country. It was lucky they had not waited for the Snail, for no sooner were they out of sight of the palace than they heard the Emperor's soldiers coming after them. Somebody really had seen them in the moat; it was the Dragon, who had drunk so much tea the day before that he could not sleep that



night and was prowling through the yard looking for the Snail. He wanted to have another argument to pass the time. But when he discovered the Snail in the moat, carrying Nikko away from the tower, he did not stop to argue—he ran straight to the Emepror's room, and told him what he had seen.

Nikko ran as fast as she could, ducking under the tea-plants whenever she had to stop and rest. She lost one shoe in the deep mud, so she took off the other one too and carried it in her hand, glad to be barefoot again. The tea-plants tore her gown, but every time there was a fresh rent the Spider promptly mended it.

Thus they came to the great Wall of China, and there they had to stop. The gates were locked and the wall was much, much too high to climb over.

“Ha, we have you now!” shouted the



soldiers, catching up and swinging their swords most grandly.

But just then there came a mighty puff of wind that pulled hard at Nikko's parasol. She held on with all her might, and the wind picked her up and wafted her high, high into the air, and carried her clean over the wall! The soldiers dropped their swords in amazement, and stood with mouths agape, but there was nothing they could do for the gate was locked and Nikko escaped under their very noses. They could only pick up their swords and go home again,



with their pig-tails dangling foolishly behind.

In a great forest outside the land of China, the parasol came to earth. Nikko planted it in the ground to let it grow as a toadstool once more. When it rained she sat underneath it, and by and by the Spider made curtains all around, so that she had a lovely little house to live in.

About three months later, when they had given up all hope of ever seeing the Snail again and the Spider had hung a black crêpe on the door in his memory, they heard a rustle among the tea-plants, and saw his pearly shell plodding through the forest!

“Well”, said the Snail, sitting down heavily, “I’m sure I never want to go travelling again! The roads are really dreadful in China, and the baggage problem is terrible!” It had taken him two months to make the trip, and he had to

wait another month for the great gate to be opened, for it is only opened once a year, and anyone who wants to come in or go out has to wait for that day.

But they were so happy to be reunited again that they soon forgot all their troubles. The Snail lived in his house and Nikko in hers, and the Spider had Nikko's old shoe for a bungalow. Every afternoon Nikko received her friends on the little lawn between the three houses, where she spread the bright brocaded shawl and served them tea in the most imperial fashion. When it was time to go they would make a bow and say:

“Goodnight, Empress, Buddha preserve your Majesty!”

“But I am not an Empress any more!” said Nikko sadly. “Lu Tsing is Empress of China.”

“Oh well,” replied the Snail, “Lu Tsing may

be Empress of China. but I'm sure you are Empress of everywhere else!"

"Where is that?" asked the Spider.

"Lazybones," said the Snail with his great-auntliest air, "look it up on the map!"

So they continued to bow, and the Spider (who didn't look it up) embroidered a little sampler with these words on it and fastened it over Nikko's door:

"Here under curtains magnificent dwells
Nikko, the Empress of Everywhere Else!"



PETER DWARF



PETER DWARF

Once upon a time there was a man who lived in a dark hut under a willow tree. His face, and his wife's face, and the faces of their six black-haired children, were as dark and gnarled as the willow trunk. But when their seventh son was born, he was a light-haired boy, with clear blue eyes, and a smile like golden sunshine.

"This is not our child!" cried the black-eyed man and the black-eyed woman; "this yellow-haired baby is a changeling; the dwarfs have put him into the cradle!" So they called him Peter Dwarf. They were very unkind to him, and when he grew older they made him do



hard, ugly work, like picking nettles and killing lambs. Peter liked to work, but he did not at all like to kill poor little lambs.

One day it happened that the cat got into the larder and ate a big piece of meat. The black-eyed woman took her by the tail and flung her out of the window at Peter Dwarf,



telling him that he must get rid of her at once. But when he had the lovely white cat in his arms, she looked at him so pleadingly that tears

came into his eyes, and he said: "Minka, I cannot hurt you! But if I don't obey, my father and mother will be very angry." But the cat still looked at him so sorrowfully that he said: "Minka, let us both run away. You shall not be harmed."

They walked over many fields where corn and beans grew in rows and the rabbits jumped away as they came. When night fell they had reached a mountain, and there were no more fields, only roots and rocks and shadowy trees.

"Let us go into a cave to sleep," Peter Dwarf suggested. So they crept into a deep cavern, which seemed to have no end. Peter spread his coat and lay down; but Minka crept into all the dark crannies mewling and scratching, and finally she disappeared. When Peter heard her come back again, he could only see her eyes, shining like stars in the rocky passage.

“Oho!” he cried, and the cavern echoed, “does this vault go on into the mountain? I must see how far it goes.” So he took up his coat and followed Minka. Presently they were in the heart of the hill. The caves were cold and damp, and it was very dark. Then Peter, shuddering, turned around to go back, but he was entirely lost among the winding passages, and the white cat walked aimlessly from one cavern to another. At last, after much wandering, they saw a light, and at the same time they heard voices—little buzzing voices, that sounded like a copper dish when you strike it and set it ringing.

“They are coming this way!” whispered Peter Dwarf. “Look, they have lanterns they will save us. But who are they?—Minka, they are the Diggerfolk—the Dwarfs!”

Presently they came, and their lanterns made



shadowy circles on the walls. They were little men, in gay, patched clothes, and their faces were brown and wrinkled like walnuts. They stopped, raised their arms, and pointed at Peter, crying all together:

“Here is a mortal! Here is a child of mortals, in our own native caverns!”

Now Peter had gone many hours without anything to eat, and the darkness and hunger had made him shaky. His knees gave way under him and he sank down on the stone.

“Oh Diggerfolk, Diggerfolk, have mercy on

us! We are lost, and hungry, and have not a friend in the world!”

The little men all muttered and grunted; they did not look unkind.

“Who are you?” asked one of them who carried a great stone hammer.

“I am Peter Dwarf,” replied the boy, bowing his fair, bright head. “And this”—he drew the white cat into his arms—“this is Minka.”

“Peter Dwarf!” exclaimed the one with the hammer, “why do they call you Dwarf? You are as tall and well-shaped a boy as ever I have seen.”



“Because I have blue eyes and yellow hair,” Peter replied, “I was so different from my brothers, and so ugly that my mother said I was not her own son, but a fairy changeling whom the dwarfs have put into the cradle.”

“Ho, ho!” cried a big dwarf with a bunch of keys at his belt, “so they have sent you back where you came from, have they? And do we look as though we were your relatives? No, no, little boy; take up that purring friend of yours and go home to your mother and tell her that this is no place either for her child or her pussy-cat.”

Peter was still kneeling on the ground, and Minka sat between his knees. Now he stretched his arms toward the little men, and implored:

“Oh good kind Diggerfolk, let me go with you and work for you! My mother has not

sent me; I ran away, because I would not hurt Minka, and they would have been very angry with me. I will work for you from morning until night, only let me stay!”

“Work?” said the dwarf with the hammer, “how can such a slight and princely creature work? Peter, let me see your hands.” He felt Peter’s hands; they were thin and strong and callous. “Yes,” he said, “this boy knows what it is to work, I think we had better let him stay with us. And now, Peter, since you are coming with us, let us have a general introduction.



My name is Stroke,” “and he bowed as best he could over his round stomach. “I am a Swordsmith, and he with the pick-axe is a Miner, Mushroom by name; he of the pointed ears is Berry, the Blacksmith; and those three who are talking to the Lady Minka, are Hump, the Goldsmith, Crow the Coppersmith, and Wisely, he that jingles the keys—a Locksmith.”

Peter got up and bowed to the little men. They told him to follow, then they led the way through winding passages down to the very center of the earth.



“Now, if you will truly learn the trades,” they said, “you must work with each one of us for a year. You shall be given plenty to eat, and shall sleep beside the fire.”

So Peter worked for the first year with Mushroom, the Miner. They would go into the shafts together and break the good ore out of the crags, letting the pieces roll with a noise like thunder down into the cave where Thorn, the Smelter, kept his furnace glowing.

The next year Peter worked for Thorn, the Smelter, and his face became a ruddy brown from standing over the roaring furnaces; then he learned from Berry, the Blacksmith, how to make hammers and axes and other tools; and the next year he helped Stroke to fashion swords and armor. He made gold chains and brooches and rings with Hump, and keys with Wisely, the Locksmith. Before the seventh year was

over, there was not a lock in all Christendom which Peter could not open.

“Keys,” said Wisely, stroking his silken beard, “Keys are the most magic things in all the world. You have learned your trades well, Peter Dwarf; now we will let you go forth into the world and try your luck. And because you have been faithful and sweet-natured, you shall have a gift of magic. This gift shall be that whenever you stand in another person’s shoes, you will be able to see what that person sees and know what that person knows. Now use your magic as you will, and do not forget us. Good-bye, Peter Dwarf, good-bye!”

All the little dwarfs waved their caps and their big brown hands, as Peter and Minka went back to the sunny upper Earth, which they had not seen for seven years.

They wandered for a long time, when finally

they came to the hut where Peter had been born, but strange people lived in it now--his wicked black-eyed family had all died; the woman of a cat-bite, the man of a dog-bite, and the six naughty boys of over-eating. So Peter and his white Pussy walked on for many miles and came to a splendid palace where a king lived with his queen.

“O Minka!” said Peter, quite breathlessly, “if one could only look inside for one single moment! Wouldn’t you love to look inside?”

“Mew-ew,” said the cat, rubbing her head against his bare ankles. “Mew!”

Just then a fat gentleman, in blue and gold attire, came running down the hillside, as fast as he could run. He stopped to catch his breath, and then started again. He was the king’s chamberlain. Peter bowed and spoke to him. “Sir, is there anything I can do for

you? If it is an errand, I am a swift runner!”

“Indeed you should be swifter than I,” groaned the chamberlain. “Oh what a stitch I have; what a stitch! Yes, run if you will, and summon all the doctors in the land, and all the wise philosophers; for the King is very ill.”

So Peter ran, as fast as only a bare-foot boy can run; and soon he came to a house that bore a sign:



He drummed on the door until the old magician came out, pipe in hand, to ask what had happened.

“The King is very ill!” cried Peter. “Go swiftly to the palace, good doctor, and find out what ails him.”

All afternoon Peter ran on and on, hunting up physicians and wise men and sending them to the palace. At night he returned to the palace and the blue-and-gold gentleman called him into the banquet hall. Peter’s heart beat high as he entered the shining room which was lit by a thousand candles. Timidly he stood in the doorway, his red pointed cap in his hands and the white cat at his heels.

He almost lost his breath when the Queen stepped through the great portal of gold. She was arrayed in crimson silk, with red roses in her black hair, and tiny silver slippers on her feet.



“Who is the little ragamuffin hiding behind the Lord Chamberlain?” demanded the Queen, spying Peter Dwarf. “Send him here, I would speak with him!”

Peter approached, frightened and dazed, and dropped upon one knee.

“Your Majesty,” he replied to her questioning, “I am Peter Dwarf; the kind Lord Chamberlain has permitted me to enter the hall.”

“I like this boy,” said the Queen to the stout Lord Chamberlain. “Put him into proper clothes and send him back to me; he shall be my page.”

So they took Peter through many snow-white rooms to a little room in the back of the palace. In it were a bed and chairs made of rosewood, and roses painted on the walls, and silver stars on the ceiling; so that when you lay in bed you felt as though you were in a bower, looking up at the starry sky.

“Here is your room,” said the servant who had brought him in. “And these are the clothes you are to wear.”

Peter took off his leather apron and his red cap, and put on a doublet and hose of light blue silk, and a mantle of dark blue velvet. But happy as he was in his rich attire, he did not forget about the king who was so ill. Every time he met somebody who might know, he asked:

“Is his Majesty any better?”

“No,” was always the answer, “He is very ill.”

At last the kind Lord Chamberlain told Peter what the doctors had said.

“Some wicked enemy of the King,” he reported, “is burning a waxen image of his majesty over a slow fire; and as long as the image lasts the King will live, but when it has all melted he will die.”

“Who can it be?” cried Peter. “Does no one know?”

“Nobody knows except the wicked person himself. We think—but say not that I told you—we think it is someone in this very palace, for the good King has no enemies among his neighbors.”

Suddenly Peter remembered the magic power that the dwarfs had given him.

“Let me try on everybody’s shoes,” he cried, “and when I come to the shoes of the wicked person I shall know where the waxen image is



melting!”

The Lord Chamberlain gave him permission to creep into every bedroom and dressing room in the palace. Minka always went ahead, and when anyone was in the room she waved her tail to warn Peter away, but when the chamber was empty, she said, “Mew,” and then Peter went in and tried on all the shoes he could find. But all the knowledge that came to him was a lot of little foolish secrets—where the Lady Natalia kept her jewels, and the Lord Richard had ridden over a chicken and had not paid the poor farmer a penny for it, and that the little chambermaid Clarissa was in love with a beggar-man. But he could not find out where the waxen image was melting.

Meanwhile he hardly saw the Queen at all. She was always with the King, bathing his fore-

head, smoothing his pillow, and getting his chicken broth.

“See,” said the chamberlain and the doctors, “how much she loves him!”

One day the King was tired of having so many people about him, and sent everybody away but the Queen and Peter who had come in to fill the lamps. The Queen was stroking the poor King's forehead. She had forgotten that Peter was in the room. As soon as he was asleep she doubled up her lovely white hand and shook her fist at him, whispering: “Melt—melt—melt! Another night and you are done!”

Peter thought his heart would stand still. Had he really heard aright? He crept out of the room as quietly as he had come, and hastened to the Queen's dressing room. Never had it occurred to him to try on *her* shoes! He

attempted to open the door; it was locked. So he turned sadly to his own room, and sat down to think it over.

Presently a valet came in with a message.

“You are to wait on the Queen at dinner to-night,” it read. Peter obeyed, and thought little more about it. But when the Queen was seated he stood behind her chair and he noticed that she slipped her silver shoe off under the table. Deftly he stepped out of his own, and while she was helping herself to pink ice cream, he tried to push his foot into her little shoe. But alas! the shoe was so small that he could not even get his toes into it! He tried and tried, but in vain; he had to give it up.

That night he walked disconsolately with Minka in the garden. They were just under the Queen’s window when suddenly, the casement was opened, and something which looked



like a fiery rocket or a shooting star flew out into the air—over their heads.

“A witch!” cried Peter, and then, “The Queen!” For at that very moment a silver slipper fell beside him in the grass. When he had stepped into it at dinner, trying to stand in it for just one moment, he had stretched it so much that now it was too big for the Queen.

As it fell Minka made a leap for it and tapped it with her paws—but no sooner was her little white foot inside the slipper than she began to wave her tail violently. She too had the magic gift of the Dwarfs!



“I believe you know,” cried Peter, as he followed her down the garden walks. “I believe you know where the waxen image is melting!” Peter took the slipper from Minka and she ran ahead swiftly and quietly, and led him over the fields and fences to a high, dark mountain. At the foot of the mountain stood a tower of granite, with great iron doors.

“Mew-ew,” said Minka, as she came up against the iron doors. “Mew!”

Peter tried to force the door but it was strongly locked and would not move. Then he peered through the key-hole, and saw a reddish light, like the glow of a great fire. A voice that sounded like the Queen’s was chanting a dismal verse and Peter knew from what she said that the image would be melted by dawn.

“Come,” said Peter to his cat, “I know what we must do; but it must be quick work! Oh



Minka—one more dawn, and it will be too late!”

He went into a cavern at the foot of the mountain. Here he called loudly down the dark passage way—“O Mushroom, Thorn, Stroke, Wisely! Help me—help me—help me!” And in another minute he saw little lights approaching from all parts of the mountain, as the faithful Diggerfolk came to his call.

Swiftly they set up a workshop, smelted the broken ore, hammered and polished and labored as only Dwarfs can. As the first streaks of light showed in the sky, they finished their work. Peter, who had taken off his silken clothes and put on a leather apron, now changed to the new suit of mail they had wrought and parted hastily from his friends with grateful thanks. Besides the armor, they had made him a sword, and most important of all a key to fit the iron doors. Soon he reached the tower

again and putting the key into the lock he used all his strength and finally the great doors swung open.

Before him in the tower-chamber burned a mighty fire; the flames jumped up around something that seemed like a human figure, stretched directly above them—but if you looked twice you saw it was a statue of wax, rapidly melting away. Over it the Queen was murmuring incantations while she watched the figure grow smaller and smaller at every lick of the cruel flames.

Suddenly the white cat leaped at the Queen and began to scratch her. This gave Peter time to put out the fire and save the waxen image before it was quite melted.

“I’m coming, Minka, I’m coming!” he cried, as the Queen seized her by the throat and tried to choke her. Minka fought valiantly, until



A wonderful lady stood before him in the shining dawn

Peter rushed forward and cut off the Queen's head with a single stroke of his sword. At that moment everything grew dark; a noise like thunder came from the depth of the mountain and Peter clasped his hands over his eyes, for he did not want to see any more.

When he looked up again, the sun had risen. Light flooded the room, and a wonderful lady, clad in white samite as soft and pure as Minka's fur, stood before him in the shining dawn. She held out her hands, and shaking back her golden hair said:

“Peter Dwarf, my good sweet Peter, I am the Princess Minka; don't you recognize me?” Then Peter looked into her starry eyes, and knew that his beloved Minka must have been enchanted by the wicked Queen many years ago, and that now the spell was broken.

So they returned swiftly to the royal palace,

where they found everybody rejoicing because the King was so much better that that morning he had eaten four buckwheat cakes with syrup for his breakfast. And the King dubbed Peter a knight and made him general of his army and for a wedding present gave him a palace with a great rose-garden and a banquet hall. Soon after this Peter and Minka were married. When the good King died, many years later, they were made King and Queen, and ruled in peace and happiness all the rest of their days.



THE CRYSTAL BOWL



THE CRYSTAL BOWL

Once upon a time in distant Orient Land, there lived a beautiful royal maiden, the Princess Zarashne. Her hair was long and black as the veils of night, her arms were fair as the pink sea-shells, and her gowns were as glorious in color as the feathers of the peacock. Everybody in the palace where she lived, and in the town outside the palace-walls, loved Princess Zarashne; even the animals who dwelt far away in the desert had heard how good and beautiful she was, and many of them came to town hoping they might see her—the lion and the tiger, and the striped zebra, the ostrich and the camel and the curious giraffe. But the keeper of the palace-gate was afraid to let them

in, so the only ones who saw her were the ostrich and the giraffe, because they could look over the wall and watch her feed her gold-fish in the fountain.

Most of all she was beloved by the Prince of all Orient Land, Selim Pasha the Proud (a Pasha is a very mighty kind of Prince, who wears a turban of heavenly blue and carries a curved sword in his golden belt). Selim Pasha rode through the gates of the Palace every morning at sunrise, on a snow-white horse, followed by a hundred soldiers on foot; on his shoulder he always carried a bird of paradise, who made sweet music for Princess Zarashne,





and in his pocket he brought his pet white mouse to dance for her. All day long he walked with her in the garden and told her stories about the world outside the wall, where great rivers flowed, and palm-trees grew, and the yellow desert sand stretched from one end of Orient Land to the other. The only thing he did not tell her about was the terrible magician, who lived among the desert sands; he did not want to tell her anything that would give her bad dreams.

The magician was a very mighty and ancient



man, called Bulbo. By his strange, black magic he had built himself an impregnable castle and had tamed a great river, and made it surround his castle with a deep, impassable moat. No army could ever pass these waters, or scale his ramparts of yellow sand; if he himself wanted to go out, he rode on the back of a big brown bat. All the creatures of Night, the bats and owls and toads and many wicked faery sprites, dwelt with him in his castle and were his body-guard.

Now it happened that Bulbo the Magician had left his castle and was riding through the air high over Orient Land, in the night-time, as was his wont. He was unusually far from home; in fact, the first light of dawn surprised

him just as his bat was fluttering over the royal gardens. The nightingale had stopped singing, and the birds of day had begun, the pansies and daisies and dreamy lotos-flowers were just waking up. Then he saw what seemed to him the loveliest flower of all—it was Princess Zarashne sitting alone beside the gold-fish fountain, waiting for Selim Pasha.

Bulbo spurred his bat, and swooped down among the rose-bushes like a swift, black shadow. Before Princess Zarashne knew what had happened, he had seized her and placed her before him in the saddle between the flut-



tering wings of the bat, and they were rising up, up, up into the blue morning air!

But just at this moment, the palace-gates swung open, and with a flourish of trumpets and a shout of greeting, Selim Pasha and his soldiers appeared. Great was their horror and dismay when they found the garden empty, and heard Princess Zarashne cry "Help, help!" far above their heads! Selim Pasha bared his sword and tried to reach the bat as it rose, but in vain—in the twinkling of an eye, the sorcerer had flown a thousand miles away.

In Bulbo's palace, Princess Zarashne found herself a prisoner. She was not cruelly treated, for Bulbo liked her and made her queen of his household. She had nothing to do but water the dark poppies and nightshade and beautiful poisonous berry-bushes that grew in his garden, and make necklaces of the pearls and shells



“Bore her away to his castle in the desert”

that the river laid at her feet on the yellow sands. But she was very unhappy, for her only companion was a monkey who followed her about as her servant, carrying her tea-cup and her shawls and never saying a word; and she wept to think of the days when Selim Pasha had walked with her by the gold-fish fountain, while the white mouse danced and the bird of paradise sang to her—for she never hoped to see the Prince of all Orient Land again.

Meanwhile, Selim Pasha the Proud was inconsolable without his beloved Princess. His soldiers could not help him against Bulbo's power, and no prophet, no wise man, no general could tell him how to get Princess Zarashne back. So he put on a black cloak, and put black ashes on his turban, and would not be comforted. When his people saw him in the street, and shouted: "Hail, Selim Pasha the

Proud!” he would hide his face in his cloak and say:

“Nay, do not call me the Proud—I am only Poor Selim Pasha!”

Then the people were very sad, and even the animals outside the gates felt mournful. The crocodiles in the rivers wept bitter tears, and the lions and tigers howled in the desert, and when the giraffes and ostriches saw that the garden was empty, they lost their appetites.

One day Selim Pasha met an old man who was selling bowls and vases of glass at the palace gate. Because the prince was wrapped in black and walked unattended, the old man did not recognize him, and thought he was just a humble citizen.



“Good day to you,” said the old man.

The prince stopped and bowed, for it pleased his sorrowful fancy to be taken for an ordinary man.

“Would you not like to buy some of my beautiful vases and bowls?” the old man continued. “I have brought them many hundreds of miles across the desert. Look at them, and you will not feel so sad!”

But the prince shook his head.

“I do not want vases of glass,” he replied, “what I seek is magic knowledge!”

The old man sat down and set his vases and bowls in a dazzling row upon the pavement. They shone in all colors, like the feathers of a peacock, and reminded the prince of Zarashne’s silken gowns.

“I am old and wise,” said the vendor. “I have more knowledge of magic than any man

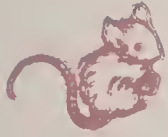
on earth—more even than Bulbo, who lives in the yellow desert. But if you would have a little—ever so little—of it, you must pay the price I ask.”

“Anything, anything you desire,” cried the prince, “though you ask all the treasures of Orient Land!”

“I will have none of your treasures. All I ask is your service. I need an apprentice in my workshop, many hundreds of miles away across the desert, and if you will come and blow glass for me for seven years, you shall have the secret knowledge for your reward.”

The prince thought deeply for a moment. What would his people say if they ever found out that their ruler had become a glass-maker’s apprentice? But then, was not Princess Zarashne’s return worth any sacrifice?

“I will go with you and be your apprentice,”



said Selim Pasha the Proud, Prince of Orient Land, “but wait until I get a bundle of clothes, and tell the head-cook not to expect me for dinner, and ask the Lord Chamberlain to feed my white mouse and my bird of Paradise until I come back!”

That same day they mounted camels and set out on their long journey across the desert. They passed the castle of Bulbo, but the rivers that surrounded it were so wide and the ramparts of yellow sand so high that Selim Pasha could not see over them, though he stood on tip-toe on his camel’s hump. Sadly he rode by and followed the old glass-maker to his city, many hundreds of miles away.

When they reached the city, the old man led him to a dingy little house made of bricks and

mud. It was very dark inside, for there were no windows.

“Stand very still, my lad, till I light the lamp, or you will break some precious glass!” said the old man. Then he struck a light, and Selim Pasha beheld a most wonderful sight. All about him were vases and bowls and cups of iridescent glass standing on shelves of crystal, and there were delicate flowers made of glass and glittering prisms that caught the lamplight and threw back a thousand brilliant hues.

“Here you shall work for seven years,” said the old man, “and I will teach you how to make all these things, but you will have to sleep on a mat upon the floor, and eat from the bowl after I have eaten, because you are an apprentice.”

“I will do as you say,” replied Selim Pasha the Proud.

So the Prince of Orient Land made glass

for seven years, and slept on a mat upon the floor, and ate from the bowl after his master had eaten. When the seven years 'were over, his master said to him:

“Selim Pasha, I have taught you all there is to know about glass-making; now make me a bowl of rainbow-colored glass, so large that a man can sit within it; so bright that no one can see through the glass because of its beautiful colors; and so light that the littlest breeze may carry it away.

“And when I have made the bowl,” said the prince, “shall I then have my reward?”

“When you have made the bowl, we will talk about your reward.”

So Selim Pasha sat up three days and three nights with the glass-blower's lamps between his knees, and the glass-blower's rod in his mouth. Finally he made a bowl so large that he

himself could hide within it, so bright that no one could see through it because of its beautiful colors and so light that the littlest breeze could carry it away. Then he noticed that the edge of the glass was not smooth, so he dipped his finger in water and ran it around and around.

Suddenly the bowl began to sing, as glasses do when you rub around the edge—and he could understand quite plainly, what it sang! The fairies that lived in the rainbow colors were singing together:

“Over the yellow desert sands,
Prince of all the Orient Lands,
Come, we will bear thee now!
O come away in thy crystal ship
And watch the ancient river slip
Under thy glassy prow!”

Then he knew that in this glass was the magic that he had worked for seven years to

learn. Carefully he took the great bowl out of doors. It was very early in the morning, and his master was still asleep, so he wrote “good-bye” and “thank you” on the door, and making no sound, climbed into the bowl that was blazing with color in the sunlight.



No sooner was he settled than a little breeze crept down the street, picked up the beautiful bubble, and wafted it high into the air! He floated over the roofs of the town, and he could

smell the breakfasts cooking, which made him very hungry. Then he passed over the green meadows that surrounded the town, and could see cows and oxen below him that looked no bigger than Noah's-ark animals. At last he came to the desert and by sunset he had reached the river that had flowed around Bulbo's castle. Then he felt the glass bubble sinking, down, down, down, until it rested like a ship on the river, and he saw the dim green waters gliding under him.

Finally the great bowl drifted ashore, Princess Zarashne was near the river gathering pearls and shells, and when she saw the beautiful crystal sphere, she ran swiftly and called to Bulbo:

“O Bulbo, Bulbo, come and see what the river has brought to you!”

Bulbo came, and looked in amazement at

the huge bowl. Fortunately he was a little man and doubled up with age so that he could not see over the edge of the bowl, and of course he could not see through it, because of its beautiful colors. Only Princess Zarashne could look over the edge, and when she saw who was inside, she could not suppress a little scream, though Selim Pasha had made her a sign to be quiet.

“What is it?” asked Bulbo, when he heard her scream.

“I saw a spider,” she replied quickly.

Bulbo called six of his black sprites to take the bowl on their shoulders and carry it to his flower garden. When they had set it down among the roses and pansies and dreamy lotus-flowers, Bulbo went indoors for his supper, but Zarashne stayed outside and looked into the glimmering depths of the bowl.

“O Zarashne, beautiful Zarashne,” whis-



pered Selim Pasha, “I have come to set you free!” And all the evening they whispered together, while the garden went to sleep and the moon rose and the nightingales began to sing. Then Bulbo came to the window with a candle, and called:

“Zarashne! It is time for you to go to bed!”

But Zarashne did not heed him, and at last he came out into the garden.

“Why do you lean over that bowl and look

into it all the time, Zarashne? I have called you seven times and you have not answered me!" he said in great anger.

"I see the reflection of my face," replied Princess Zarashne, and continued to gaze down and whisper to Selim Pasha.

"If you do not come into the house," cried Bulbo, "I will break the bowl!"

Then Zarashne was frightened and would have followed him, but she could not tear herself from her lover, who was saying:

"Goodnight, goodnight, most beautiful flower of Allah's garden! Goodnight, my princess!" So she lingered just another moment and then another, till Bulbo was too angry to call her any more.

"You are a vain, vain woman," he exclaimed, "to gaze so long at your own image, and I will put an end to it." He tore a big branch from

the nearest pomegranate tree, and before she could prevent it, he struck the beautiful bowl with all his might. It flew into a thousand glittering fragments; but in the midst of it stood Selim Pasha the Proud, Prince of Orient Land, his sword bared and shining in the moonlight.

“Treason,” screamed the little sorcerer, “treason!” and fell on his knees before the Prince.



Then Bulbo's servants, his bats and sprites, came running to help him. But when Bulbo had

broken the crystal bowl, the rainbow fairies who had been imprisoned in the glass, were all set free, and they took splinters of the glass for swords, and fought a dreadful battle with Bulbo's sprites, among the poppies and nightshade and the lovely poison berry-bushes. At last the rainbow fairies were victorious, and Selim Pasha sheathed his terrible sword.

"I will not kill you, Bulbo, because you are small and old," said the magnanimous prince. "But you shall be banished."

Then the prince gathered up the fragments of his bowl, which looked like common window glass now, for the rainbow fairies had taken all of the beautiful colors with them, and taking his glass-blower's lamp, he blew the pieces into a perfect sphere all around old Bulbo. Then he drew a great breath—poof! and the globe rose into the air, higher and higher among the clouds,

till the winds wafted it thousands of miles away. People who saw it and the little man inside, thought it was the moon. Where it came down was never known, but old Bulbo had vanished forever from Orient Land.

“But now we are in Bulbo’s palace,” said Princess Zarashne, “and your crystal ship is gone; how shall we get across the river?”

“Have no fear,” replied the prince, “the fairies will help us.” Then he called them all together, and they went down to the yellow sands, where they spread their shining wings and made a rainbow bridge over which Selim Pasha the Proud led his princess back to Orient Land.





His people were overjoyed to see him again, for they had long thought him dead. His soldiers had forgotten how to march, for they had been idle so long, and when they tried to blow the trumpets, they found them all rusty and useless. The Lord Chamberlain was discovered hiding under the throne, for he had forgotten to feed the white mouse and the bird of Paradise, who would have starved if the head-cook had not taken pity on them every day. But Selim Pasha pretended not to notice anything that was wrong; he invited everybody to his marriage-feast, for the lovely Princess Zarashne became his queen, and they spread a banquet-table three miles long so even the

humblest beggar could partake. There was another table, too, for the animals who had not eaten with a real appetite for seven years, and were awfully hungry now. And at this great banquet Selim Pasha told the story of his adventures. Some believed his tale and others did not, but they all rejoiced to have him back, and he and Queen Zarashne lived together in peace and happiness and ruled their people wisely for the rest of their lives.



THE MERCILESS TSAR



THE MERCILESS TSAR

Far, far away, on a strange northern shore by the White Sea, there was once a rich and royal city. The streets were paved with silver, the walls were shining marble, and the church steeples were topped with gold so they gleamed at night in the starlight like big bright moons. The city belonged to a strong and splendid monarch whom people called The Merciless Tsar. He lived in a palace of black marble and ivory with terraces of turquoise mosaic, windows of pure crystal and heavy curtains of silver cloth brocaded with brilliant designs. The Tsar had no pity for the poor and humble; he wrapped himself in a mantle of pride, and made subject kings

and princes wait on him at table, and help him into his coat when he went out to drive in his golden chariot behind twelve black horses. If a poor beggar was bold and foolish enough to cry out to him: "Alms, alms, for the love of St. Peter, O most wealthy and wonderful!" he would order the driver to crack his whip over the beggar's stooping shoulders and drive the unhappy wretch before his chariot for miles and miles. When people cheered him as he passed, he pretended not to hear because he thought he was too great to listen to them.

One day in winter he was driving by the frozen shore of the White Sea, when he saw a ragged young lad fishing through a big hole in the ice.

"Who is that hideous rag-bag catching fish through the ice?" he asked his chancellor who



sat on the front seat beside the driver.

“O most wealthy and wonderful, it is the humblest of your citizens, Hanka the Fool,” replied the chancellor.

“Take him by the collar,” ordered the Merciless Tsar, “and plunge him through his hole in the ice. I want to see his face when he comes up again!”

So the chancellor commanded one coachman to descend and dip poor Hanka into the freezing water, and of course the coachman had to obey or else have his head cut off. He grabbed The Fool by his collar and gave him a kick from behind, and Hanka fell screaming through his hole in the thick white

ice. The Tsar declared he had never seen anything so funny in all his life.

“Do it again,” he cried, “do it again!” Poor Hanka the Fool was nearly frozen to death before the Tsar grew tired of him and let him go. He had a cold for weeks after, and if his mother had not given him hot tea and put him to bed with warm flat-irons at his feet as soon as he got home, he probably would have died.



A few days later, while the Tsar was sitting in state upon his throne, feeling bored and cross and merciless, a stranger came to the city from the distant North, driving over

the frozen sea. He drove all alone in a sleigh with three white horses whose trappings were hung with icicles that tinkled like bells. His hair was long and flaxen, his blue eyes were clear as stars, and he wore a flowing white cape that looked like feathery, newly fallen snow. Of course everyone thought he would stop at the inn near the city gate, but he drove up the highway through all the town, and did not stop till he came to the palace of the Tsar. Then he reined in his horses, stood up in his sleigh and called with all his might.

“Hi, Brother Tsar! Give me a lodging for the night, for I am weary of wayfaring. Give me a bed and a place at thy board, and fodder for my horses, that we may rest!”

The Tsar thought the stranger must be a madman, and sent out a slave to drive him away. But the wayfarer would not go.

“Brother Tsar!” he cried again, “Brother Tsar!” Then the Tsar jumped up from his throne in a rage, snatched a whip from one of his coachmen, and stepped out, in all his pride and glory, upon the terraces of turquoise mosaic.

“Away!” he cried, “Away, or I will have thee bound and tortured!”

“What, thou wilt not grant me even a night’s lodging under thy roof?” exclaimed the wayfarer.

The Tsar cracked his whip.

“Begone, thou mad intruder!” he shouted.

“Yes, I will be gone,” returned the stranger, seizing the reins and jerking up his horses in great anger. “But henceforth there shall be war between thee and me. I will sack thy



city and send thee begging, O merciless Tsar, for the affront thou hast offered me today. Know that I am the Strength of the Storm and Ruler of the Great Ice, King Winter!”

The Tsar turned pale when he heard these words, but before he could make any excuses, the chariot with the three white horses and the tinkling icicles had turned about and was flying far, far away to Northward, over the boundless stretches of the Great Ice. So the Merciless Tsar went back into the throne-chamber and said to his chancellor, “Bah! How could King Winter sack my city, anyway? I’d like to see him try!”

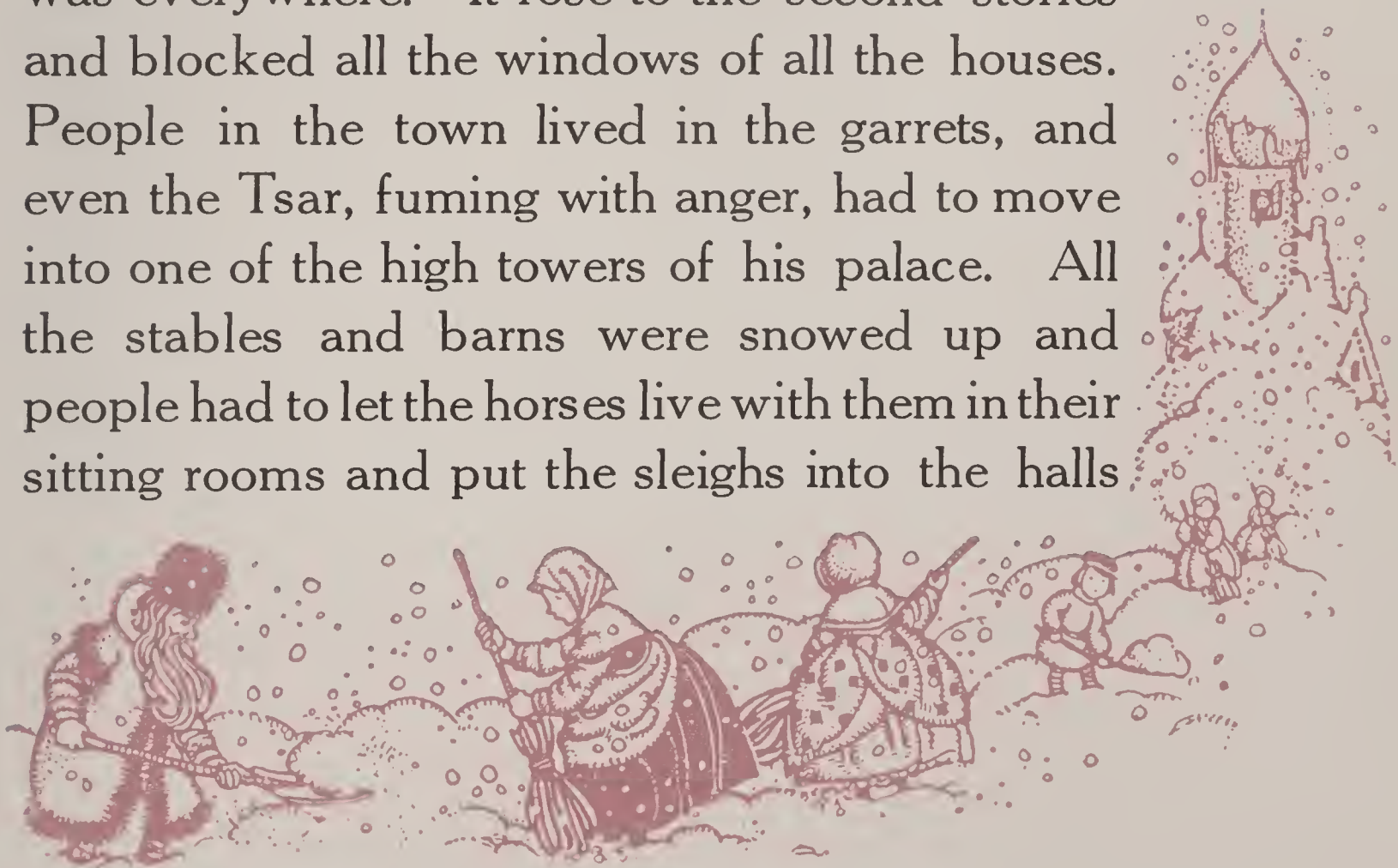
That very day it began to snow so hard that the children all through the city could not go to school. The boys went out and



shovelled the silver pavements, but soon they had thrown so much snow into the middles of the streets that even the strongest sleigh could not get through any more, and the streets looked like thick, white walls between the side walks. And still it snowed and snowed and snowed. Soon the piles in the street became so high that the boys and even the men could not throw any more snow on top. Then the sidewalks were all snowed up, and the steps of the houses were covered, and the snow rose in walls against the first-story windows.

Round the palace the piles were so great that the turquoise terraces could no longer be shovelled, and they snowed up just like the streets. The Tsar grew very angry when he saw the white walls rising outside his windows, making his rooms all dark and chilly. He sent

out his entire household to shovel and sweep; from the cook to the Lord High Chancellor, even the ladies in waiting had to go out with brooms. There were not enough snow shovels, but he made them use coal shovels and dust-pans, and the youngest kitchen-boy kept the window-sills cleared with the pancake turner. But still the snow came down and down, till there was no place to shovel it to, because it was everywhere. It rose to the second stories and blocked all the windows of all the houses. People in the town lived in the garrets, and even the Tsar, fuming with anger, had to move into one of the high towers of his palace. All the stables and barns were snowed up and people had to let the horses live with them in their sitting rooms and put the sleighs into the halls



and spare-rooms. But the snow fell faster and faster till it was level with the roofs and threatened to block even the dormer windows. Then they knew that there was only one thing they could do; they had to leave the city.

The Tsar ordered everybody to pack up as many things as the sleighs could carry, food and clothes and cook-pots and the children's school-books, money and jewels, tool-chests and linen-chests, cups and saucers, bed-clothes and brushes and tooth-powder, and flee from the city before the snow should bury them all alive. He himself headed the procession with ten golden sleighs, each drawn by twelve black horses. Thus the whole population of the rich and royal city climbed out of dormer windows or broken roofs, and drove through the snowstorm toward the South, where the great dark forests were. When they looked back for

the last time, the snow had already covered the roofs, till only the golden tops of the church-steeple showed above it, and a few hours later even these disappeared. King Winter had sacked the city of the Merciless Tsar.

Three days and nights the Tsar and his people had to drive, before they came to a place where the snow was light enough so they could shovel it and really reach the solid brown earth underneath. That was in the great forests, where owls hooted, wolves howled, and foxes barked all night, and big bears sat up on their haunches to watch the newcomers with doubt and curiosity. The people took saws and axes, hammers and nails out of their tool-chest and began to cut down big trees and build rude log-cabins to live in.

“Build mine first,” said the Tsar, sitting in his sleigh and jiggling his feet to keep warm.



So they all labored together and made him a wooden palace, with stables for his horses and quarters for the coachmen and a big wooden terrace for his Majesty to walk on after dinner. Then they made their own houses close around, and a wall of brushwood, thorns and vines about the whole settlement, to keep the wolves and bears away.

Thus they lived for months and months in great misery. Soon all their food was eaten up, and the men had to go hunting, but they could not kill enough game to feed such a large population. Then the Tsar became quite terrified, for he knew that he must starve very soon if they found no help. Several times he sent messengers to the distant shore of the White Sea, to find out whether the snow had not melted and his city reappeared; but everyone who came back said no, the city was not to be



At last . . . he saw a tiny square of window light
behind some thick holly bushes

found; you could not even tell where it had been.

“Oh, will no one tell me how I may recover my city?” cried the Tsar in despair.

“Perhaps the Wise Woman in the forest could tell you,” replied the Lord Chancellor. “She is King Winter’s mother—in fact they say she is the mother of all the kings in the world. And she is said to know everything. But it is hard to find her. You must come to her hut all alone, some cold night under the Northern Lights, and knock three times upon her door, calling, ‘Mother Mir! Mother Mir!’ Then perhaps she will answer you—and perhaps she won’t.”

So the Tsar waited for a cold, bright night, when the Northern Lights played across the starlit sky, and on that night he went out all alone into the deep forest. He wrapped him-

self in his richest purple cape, set his crown upon his head and put white ermine boots on his feet. As he walked unattended over the frosted snow, under the great pine branches, he looked so royal that the wolves in the forest stood at a respectful distance and did not dare to eat him, though he was all alone. He walked for an hour or more and wondered whether he had gone in the wrong direction to find the Wise Woman's hut. At last, just when he was ready to give up the search, he saw a tiny square of window-light behind some thick holly-bushes, and following that, he came upon the hut.

It was low and covered with heavy moss, patched with snow and edged with black pine cones. The little window pane was a sheet of ice. (In summer it melted away, but then the Wise Woman would not need a window pane,

for the air coming in would not be cold.) The door was made of rough bark and had a big, twisted root tied to it for a knocker. The Tsar picked up the root and let it fall three times: Thump! Thump! Thump!

“Mother Mir!” he called, and his voice sounded very big in the still, black forest, “Mother Mir! Mother Mir!”

At first he thought she was not going to open, but by and by the door swung back, all by itself, and he stooped and went into the little room. There was a fire on the hearth; near it on a pile of leaves sat the brown old woman, counting lily-seeds. She had hands like gnarled wood, and long grey hair that swept the floor. But her eyes were keen and clear and her lips were red.

“A million and three, a million and four,” she counted, dropping the seeds into a bag.

“A million and five, and six, and seven, and eight; a million and nine red lily seeds.” Then she tied up one bag, pushed it into a corner, and opened another with seeds of a different kind.

“Good evening to you, Mother Mir,” said the Tsar.

“Good evening, Tsar; have thy people sent thee to me?”

“Sent me!” he cried, drawing himself up so he bumped his crown on the ceiling. “Sent me, indeed! I am the most wealthy and wonderful Tsar and no one could keep me or send me.”



“Except King Winter,” the Wise Woman corrected him.

The Tsar flushed with anger and pride.

“That’s why I came to thee, Mother Mir. What shall I do to recover my buried city?”

“What thou must do, is very simple, O merciless Tsar. But if thou art not willing to do it thou shalt never see thy city again. Thou must repent of thy mercilessness, and become as humble as Hanka the Fool. Thou must give all thy wealth away; and let thy last gift be to a poor wayfarer, to atone for thy sin, that thou didst refuse a wayfarer shelter and food in thy palace.”

The Tsar was puzzled. He had never thought how wicked he was and did not know what it would be like to repent.

“How shall I repent, Mother Mir?”

“Go back to thy people, look into their

houses, see how hungry and unhappy they are because of thy mercilessness; perhaps it will make thee repent.”

“But how shall I recover my city by being humble, O most Wise Woman?”

“I have told thee all thou needst to know; now go thy way and let me count my seeds, for Spring will come and I must plant these flowers throughout all the forests of the world and they all are numbered, though people think they grow wild by themselves.” Then she began counting seeds in the new bag: “One, two, three, four, five—”

The Tsar went home through the wintry forest, under the Northern Lights, still wondering what it would feel like to repent. When he returned to his people he did as the Wise Woman had told him—stopped at one house after another, and looked in at the windows.



In the first house he saw a mother who was so ill that she had to lie in bed while the father cooked the dinner and the dog was trying to mind the babies; and the dinner for them all was one woody turnip. The babies were crying, the mother was crying, the dog was crying, and the father said over his cooking-pot:

“It is all the fault of the Merciless Tsar: If he had not been so proud and haughty and turned that strange wayfarer from his door, we would not be starving now!”

The Tsar, watching through the window, felt a shiver run down his spine. “I might send them a little of my wealth,” he thought, “just to

stop their crying.” Then he turned away and looked in at the next hut.

Here he saw an old man on his knees praying to St. Peter.

“O dear St. Peter,” he said, “please take me to heaven soon, for I have such awful back-aches that I don’t want to live any more. I got them from being whipped when I begged the Merciless Tsar for a penny!”

The Tsar felt his conscience twinge him a little. “I will send him a doctor to rub his back,” he said. And he turned away again and went to the third house.

Here sat a young girl, all alone, spinning



thin cotton thread with frozen fingers. All the time as she spun, the tears were running down her face. The Tsar took off his crown, turned his cloak inside out so one could not see the rich purple velvet, but only the lining, left his boots outside, and went into the hut.

“I am a stranger,” he said. “Let me sit down a moment and get warm. And tell me why thou art crying.”

“Because my lover is dead,” replied the girl, setting a chair for the stranger. “He had his head cut off for contradicting the Tsar. And now even if we should return to our city, even if I should be rich and care-free, I can never, never be happy again.” And she cried harder than ever.

“Now what could I do to help her?” thought the Tsar. But suddenly it occurred to him that there was nothing in the world he could do that

would bring her lover back or even make her any happier again. Then he felt so sorry that the tears ran down his cheeks, too, and he went outside and threw himself down upon the snow for unhappiness.

“Oh, I have been so wicked!” he cried. “I have been so merciless that I have made all my people miserable. And I can’t help the poor girl, and it’s all my fault—I have been so awfully, awfully wicked!”

All night long, he lay in the snow, even after all the window-lights had gone out, and no one knew he was there. When morning came and people opened their doors to see what the weather was like, they saw their most wealthy and wonderful Tsar, without boots or crown and with his coat turned inside out, lying face down, on the ground. They called the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chamberlain

and many other lords from the wooden palace, and ran to pick him up, for they thought he must be dead or at least fainted. But when they touched him he sat up all by himself and looked at their surprised faces.

“Your wonderful highness, what has happened?” they cried.



“I have repented!” replied the Tsar.

Henceforth he became so humble and mild that people called him the Merciful Tsar. He



took a basket of food and carried it to the poor people who had only one woody turnip to eat, and he went to the lame old man with a bottle of liniment and rubbed his back till it got well, and every day he sent some gift, a jewel or a gold-piece or a silver thimble, or something of the sort, to comfort the girl whose lover had been beheaded for contradicting him. He gave his wooden palace to his lords and ladies, and moved into a tiny brown hut, moss-covered and patched and without window-panes, way at the end of the village. No beggar ever went

empty-handed from his door; and if a little boy cut his finger or bumped his knee, the other boys would say:

“Go to the Tsar, Aliushka, he will put a rag with ointment on it and make it well!”

Soon he had given away so much of his wealth that he was quite the poorest man in the village. One day just as he sat down to eat his last piece of dry bread, a very weary old woman came to his door and said:

“Alms, alms, for the love of St. Peter, O most Merciful Tsar!”

“I have nothing but this piece of bread, but you may have it,” he replied, and gave her his frugal dinner. The old woman sank down upon the block of wood that was his only chair.

“Ah, but you don’t know how weary I am!” she sighed, nibbling the bread with her toothless gums. “I have no hut to live in, no place to

lay my head, no roof to shelter me from the icy winter.”

“Thou art sleepy,” he said. “Lie down on the bed.”

As soon as she had lain down and fallen asleep, he took a piece of charcoal from the fire place and wrote on the table, where she would surely see it when she woke up:

“Take my hut, and my bed, and everything I own. I have moved out. There is another piece of bread in the kitchen drawer, but it is mouldy.” Then he left the hut, shut the door carefully so the snow should not blow in and went to the village gate, where there was a public bench; there he sat down.

Presently he heard a great commotion in the village; a lot of people were coming toward the gate where he sat. In their midst walked Hanka, the Fool, with big boots on his feet, an

axe in his belt, and a fishing-rod over his shoulder. Everybody was shouting to him:

“Good luck on thy way! Good luck, Hanka! Good luck to thee, brave wayfarer, may all the Saints help thee against the wolves in the forest!”

“Where art thou going, Hanka?” asked the Tsar.

“Far away to the White Sea,” replied the Fool. “We are all starving in the village, so I am going to chop a hole through the ice and catch fish.”

“Alas!” replied the Tsar, suddenly remembering what the Wise Mother Mir had told him. “Thou art a wayfarer now, Hanka, and I should give thee my last gift to atone for my old cruelty to the wayfarer who came to my palace-gate. But I have nothing, nothing left to give, not even a safety-pin!”

“Give me thy blessing, O most Merciful Tsar,” said Hanka the Fool. “Surely with a Tsar’s blessing I could go safely in my long and arduous way. It would keep off the wolves and



bears and robbers that attack poor wayfarers in the forest.”

“Yes, I will give thee my blessing,” agreed the Tsar.

So Hanka knelt down in the snow, and the Tsar gave him a blessing for the journey.

Hanka travelled for many days through deep and drifted snow. Over his head the black crows flew from tree to tree, and all night when

he crouched by his brushwood fire he heard the wolves howling and the foxes barking in the great forest. But no beast or bird or prowling robber ever tried to hurt him; that was because he traveled with the Tsar's blessing on his head.

At last he came to a great field of ice and snow that he supposed was the White Sea. He took his axe and began to chop the frozen floor, because he was a fool and did not know that there was really solid land under his feet. Suddenly his axe struck on something that cracked like wood.

“What's this?” cried Hanka, jumping back and dropping his axe. “It can't be ice, for it isn't clear; it isn't wood, for it's too white; it isn't stone, for it's too brittle; I know!” and he jumped up and down with pleasure because he knew. “It's ivory!”

It really was ivory. Hanka was standing

on the buried city, and his axe had broken the ivory roof of the Tsar's palace!

He went on chopping, and digging the snow and splinters away with his hands. At last there was such a big hole that he could jump into it. There was a deep, dark chamber underneath, but Hanka was not afraid, so he let himself down through the hole.

Here he stood, in the empty, snowed-up palace of the Tsar! Of course he had never been in it before, and though it was dark and damp, and had not been cleaned for a year, he thought it was almost too splendid to be real. He took a match from his pocket, struck it on the wall and looked round by its feeble flare.

“Golden chairs,” he whispered, so much impressed that he could not speak aloud, “and velvet rugs and such bright, brocaded curtains! I have heard people talk about these things, but

I have never believed they were real. Here is a door, and a stairway; that must lead downstairs. Oh, I will go all through the palace and look and look!" He went softly down the stairs, striking matches to light his way, and putting the burnt ends into his pocket so as not to litter the floors.

The whole palace was just as the Tsar and his people had left it in their flight. From some of the rooms they had carried off the bed-clothes and things, but in others the beds were unmade and odd stockings and handkerchiefs and powder-puffs lay around, that no one had thought to take along. Hanka picked them all up and put them neatly on a chair. Here he found a candle, too, so he could light his way without striking matches all the time.

He went to the kitchen and found it very untidy, for the cook had left in a hurry. He



had left the cake in the oven, where it had burned to ashes and some milk on the window sill, where it had turned to cheese and then to something worse, so Hanka held his nose with one hand while he washed the pitcher with the other. But in a beautiful box he discovered some crackers that were still quite good, and on a shelf above it was a pot of jam, so he sat down on the table-corner and ate to his heart's content, for he was nearly starved.

When he could eat no more, he remembered how often he had heard people talk about the marvels of the great throne-chamber, where the

musicans used to play and the Lord Chancellor to read in a loud voice all the news from the Tsar's empire, and where people were brought trembling before the throne to be sentenced to death.

"I must see the chamber," thought Hanka. So he prowled through all the pantries and banquet halls and reception rooms till he came to a door of ebony and gold, richly inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

"This must be it," he murmured. "If I only dared to look in! Of course, it will be quite empty—the musicians have left it and the Lord Chancellor is not there and the throne is deserted—but still it must be very splendid."

Carefully he shot back the silver bolt and the great door swung open. A breath of very cold air struck his face, as though he had stepped into an ice-cave. And for a moment

he really thought he had. In the four corners of the room stood four great men of ice, with folded hands, heads bowed under the ceiling, and eyes that shone like cold December stars. They were the four Spirits of the North: Silence, and Frost, and Loneliness, and Northern Light, who guarded the city since the Tsar and his people had fled. And on the Throne in the middle of the room sat King Winter with a crown of ice upon his head and a foot-stool of snow under his feet.

Hanka's knees shook with terror and he



dropped his candle on the mosaic floor. The candle went out, yet the room was full of light, a still, blue light, like the reflections in a block of ice. The four great men did not move. But King Winter raised his hand and beckoned to the lad.

“Come here,” he said quite kindly. Hanka had fallen to his knees, and crept upon them across the floor, holding up his hands for mercy.

“Who art thou?” demanded the King.

“Have pity, O most wonderful King! I am only Hanka the Fool.”

“Have ye come back from the great forests, thou and thy friends?”

“Sir,” replied Hanka, kissing his feet, “It is only I who have come. I did not mean to chop through the roof of the palace. I meant to chop a hole in the ice of the White Sea to catch some fish, for the Tsar and his people are starving.”

“Thou hast come alone?” asked King Winter in surprise, “How is it that wolves and bears and all the wild beasts have spared thee, and robbers have not beaten thee to death?”

“Because, O Most Wonderful Majesty, I traveled with the Tsar’s blessing on my head.”

King Winter sat up, and even the four Spirits looked startled.

“But since when,” asked the King, “doth the proud Merciless Tsar stoop to give his blessing to such a beggar-lad as thee?”

“Oh,” cried Hanka, “he is not proud, indeed he isn’t! He is as humble as I am, even I, Hanka the Fool. We call him the Merciful Tsar, for he has turned from all his wickedness, and given his wealth away. I was a wayfarer, and he had no other gift for me, so he gave me his blessing, Most Wonderful King!”

At these words King Winter arose, the four

spirits lifted their heads, there was a murmur of many voices and then fairy music everywhere.

“Rise up, Hanka,” said the Ruler of the North. “My reign in the City is over, for the Merciless Tsar has repented and become as humble as thou. Go back to the great forests where thy Tsar and his people are, and tell them to return hither, for King Winter and his forces have left the city, and it belongs to the Tsar once more! In token of this, in case thou shouldst forget what to say, take that bag of snow-stars behind the Throne, and carry it to the Tsar.”

While he spoke, a whole army of spirits, snow-fairies and wind-fairies and genie, crowned with frost-flowers, gathered from all parts of the palace. Some came from the bedrooms, where they had been asleep in the bureau-drawers, some from the kitchen where they had been hiding under cups and mixing-bowls, some peeped down over





the pictures on the parlor wall, or between the curtains, or even out of the empty hall-stove. They all joined hands in a ring and danced around Hanka, who sat bewildered on the floor with his axe and fishing-rod, wondering where all these creatures had been while he had explored the palace.

“Joy, joy,” sang the spirits, “we are going home again, home to the North Pole, to our friends, the seals and polar bears, the long waiting-time is over, for the Merciless Tsar has repented—joy, joy, joy!”

Then there was a tinkle of icicles outside the door, as King Winter’s sleigh with the three white horses came jingling up. The palace doors flew open and Hanka saw that the snow had already melted down almost to the turquoise terraces.



The king leaped into his chariot, waved his hand to the humble fool who had followed him to the door, and away went the royal horses, over the frozen White Sea to the distant North Pole, with all the fairy train holding on and running behind as swiftly as the wind.

Hanka turned back and looked at the empty throne chamber. The four great Spirits had vanished, though he had not seen them running away with the fairies. But where they had stood, the floor was cracked a little, and four yellow crocus-flowers had sprung up through the stone.

Hanka felt very lonesome and frightened in the big, splendid palace. He picked up his axe and rod and the bag of snow-stars King Winter had ordered him to take, and ran as fast as he could through the open door, over the terraces,

through the town and gates to the open country outside. Everywhere the snow had gone away so quickly that the second stories of all the houses were quite free and the first stories just appearing. Beyond the gates, he came upon great streams of water that were running down to the White Sea, where the ice was melting and wiping out the track of King Winter's sleigh. Hanka turned toward the South, to the great forests where the Tsar's people had built their wooden village. He sang aloud as he walked, because the warm sun was shining on his back, and his stomach was full of crackers and jam, so he felt very happy despite the heavy bag of snow-stars on his shoulder. If he had not been a fool he would certainly have wondered why they were so heavy; but he was a fool so he just carried them and did not wonder at anything. Above him in the treetops the birds were singing as

happily as he, the air smelled sweet and warm, and in some places Mother Mir's flowers were peeping through the thin, wet snow.

"Why, I believe it's going to be Spring!" said Hanka.

In the village, the Tsar was still sitting on the bench beside the gate. The villagers came to offer him food, but he refused it, saying "You have not enough for yourselves. I will not eat your food. Give it to your children, good people!"

"But you will starve!" they cried. "Oh no," replied the Tsar. "Some good Saint will take care of me."

And in the night, when the village was quiet and dark, the crows in the forest flew to him and brought him some frozen berries, the squirrels brought nuts to appease his hunger, and the fairies from the great Forest brought partridge-



eggs and reindeer milk.

It was a beautiful sunny morning, when the villagers who stood about the gate talking to the Tsar saw Hanka returning, with his axe and rod and a bag over his shoulder. “Look, look,” they cried, “he is bringing a whole bagful of fish!”

“But where do you suppose he got the bag?” said the Tsar. “He didn’t have it when he left.”

They were not kept guessing very long. Hanka came running and shouting:

“Greetings, O Merciful Tsar, greetings from King Winter! He gave me a message to thee, but I have forgotten it, but here is a bag of snow-stars for thee, and thy city is all thawed out, King Winter has gone back to the North Pole. And I went through thy palace and found lots of

crackers and jam, which I ate. I didn't mean to steal, but there was nobody to ask for them so I had to take them."

The Tsar smiled and nodded.

"Thou art welcome to my crackers and jam, dear Hanka," he said, as he opened the bag of snow-stars, took it by the lower corners, and turned it upside down.

Out of the bag rolled thousands and thousands of sparkling, flashing diamonds! The people stood open-mouthed, and Hanka sat down with surprise when he saw what he had been carrying.

"That means we may return, for King Winter's war is over," said the Tsar. So all the people went back to their city on the shores of the White Sea, where the streets were paved with silver, the walls were shining marble, and the church steeples were topped with gold. The Tsar sat

on his throne again, but he ruled his people now with mercy and justice, so everyone liked to be brought before him to see his mild fatherly face.

Hanka was allowed to live in the palace all his life, and had a silver fishing-rod, a silken line and a diamond sinker, and was permitted to cast for gold-fish in the royal pond. King Winter came for a visit once every year with a little snow just to remind people of his past reign; but he always found the people ready to joke and laugh at the bad weather he brought, for they were all happy and contented who lived in the city of the Merciful Tsar.





· BIRDLING · NIKKO · MINKA



PETER · ZARASHNE · THE · TSAR ·

