A ROSE ENCHANTED

Virna Sheard

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A Rose Enchanted

A Fairy Story For All Ages

By VIRNA SHEARD

Author of "The King's Opal," "The Queen's Tear-Bottle," etc.

Illustrated by Norman Price.

It was old Betty of the flower market who told me this story—old Betty with her crinkly white hair, and her winter-apple face; her red Connemara cloak and cap with the flappidy white ruffles.

Betty said it was her grannie she got the story from; and her grannie got it from her grannie, and so on back and back to the very King and rose it is all about. He was an Irish King Betty said. For there were kings in Ireland in those days and fairies and grey elves and little people who had no name, but lived under the black thorn bushes, mostly.

I asked Betty if the King in the story was Brian Boru. This seemed to worry her a little, so I hastily withdrew the question, and said it did not matter. But she said, "Sure, and it does matther mavourneen, an' it might have been Brian —I dunno. It was just one of them ennyway that lived in them ould foreign days whin there was fairies around thick as daisies in the grass—fer those that had eyes to see them.—Ay, fairies, an' warlocks an' little green min an' the rest av thim! An' the things happened as I'm telling ye—though it ain't jest aisy to give names an' dates.—So kape whist an' listen—or I'll be tellin' ye no more!"

And this is the story, though I couldn't write into it the beautiful brogue of old Betty, nor her "nods and becks and wreathed smiles" as the tale unwound bit by bit—business allowing—there under her big umbrella beside her flower stall in the market.

Part I.

Now there are three kinds of fairies—according to old Betty—just as there are three kinds of people.

Firstly—those who are almost perfectly good. Secondly—those who are almost quite bad; and thirdly—those who are like "the little girl who had the little curl," and possess characters composed of a fascinating mixture of good and bad.

The fairy princess, Jewelette, of Betty's story, was like that little girl. Sometimes she was good and sometimes she was horrid.

The fairy king, her father, and the fairy queen, her mother, never admitted that she had been spoiled by their own over-indulgence to her whims and their doting admiration; they simply said that she was made that way.

But in their hearts they were often troubled over the princess, for they themselves were in the almost perfect class, and would fain have had her there also.

To them a sense of duty was not as O. Henry says, "that dull, leaden, soul-depressing sensation it is to so many of us." Far from it. To this fairy king and queen it was an uplifting and exhilarating feeling, and they always joyously hastened to perform whatever it dictated—unless it happened to suggest that they correct the princess.

With their little daughter, however, a sense of duty did not seem to count at all.

While she did the things she liked to do with delightful zest and eagerness —no matter how difficult they might be, the things she did not like to do she simply didn't do, to the consternation of all and sundry.

Yet even fairies have to learn to do the thousand and one things that fairies alone can do. They do not arrive in fairy-land a finished product of knowledge and attainment. Even there, there is no royal road to learning. The royal roads are all left to the bees and butterflies and beetles and their like, whom God has gifted in some mysterious way, so they are able to perform the tasks set them just as well the day they come as the day they go. But the bees make honey now as they made it in the days of Job. They apparently have added nothing to

their knowledge; and the butterflies and beetles and their brethren the ants do the very same things over and over in the very same old way they did them in the Garden of Eden. It is as if they had attained perfection too soon, and too easily. So, all things considered, both fairies and people should be content to leave the royal roads to them, and continue to struggle happily along the upward paths that lead to the new and beautiful.

One way and another the princess Jewelette managed to learn a good many things, yet she grew up at her father's court like a wild rose "set round with wilful little thorns."

She was so lovely to look at, and so merry withal—(when things went right)—that the fairies of every rank and age were attracted to her as flowers to the sun. But her moods were variable as the wind—her temper set aflame with a word, and to be near her was like being out in April weather,—one hour might be sunny, and on the next none could say where the lightning would strike or the rain fall.

The fairy folk far and near gossiped about the future of the Princess Jewelette and agreed that the king and queen were to blame for having spoiled her originally sweet nature.

With her to wish for, was to have, and that is the best receipt in the universe, the fairies said, to create a selfish spirit.

And the little princess was selfish, horribly selfish, as well as imperious and haughty at times.

She desired the best of everything for herself, first and last. As a rule this was conceded to her naturally, and then all was merry as a May-day. But on those occasions when she was expected to take a second-best—whatever form that second-best happened to take—she would turn suddenly into a little fury, and vent her rage on the unoffending fairies nearest at hand.

These deplorable outbursts of temper, roused often by some trivial cause, such as gaining only second prize in a game—or having to give up her place near the throne to some royal visitor—and things of that kind, were most upsetting to the peace-loving courtiers, and they made way more and more for her, and tried to smooth out all the crumpled rose-leaves that lay in her path.

Now, when they all played games in the fairy ring the little princess was always proclaimed winner. No one's rose-berry ball ever came through the last bent grass hoop and hit the tall mullein stalk, in their games of croquet, before her rose-berry ball. No fairy ever swam round the moonlit lily pond and caught the tame silverfish until she had accomplished this feat. No one ever found the green and gold elf—who was so like in color to the green and gold mustard

plants he could hide among them for hours—until the princess had found him, though all held that the elf helped her, by joggling the plant he was under.

No, it was not in a few things the Princess Jewelette wanted to come first; it was in everything.

It is not easy to be the most alluring, the most clever, the most accomplished, the most beautiful and the most all-round successful person at any court, but little by little all these advantages were conceded to the princess as by general consent, and therefore things ran smoothly except on rare occasions when some fairy, whose spirit was not equal to the strain, ventured a protest.

For in the hearts of them all resentment burned hotly. They longed to occasionally beat the princess at some of their games. They desired greatly to sometimes say something brighter than she did, or to out-distance her in one or another of their sports. But they put out these inward fires as best they could. In the case of the fairy maids-of-honor they were extinguished usually with floods of tears shed in private.

Still their policy did not change, for it brought the greatest good to the greatest number. So they outwardly maintained that no one in all the world could at any time or at any place, or in any way surpass their own Princess Jewelette. This she perfectly agreed to and everything was lovely.

But the King and Queen were no longer happy. With keen insight, they saw that while all the court and the fairies throughout their kingdom gave every homage to their child, in their hearts they did not give her love.

And so, though she got all else out of life that seemed worth having, she missed its very essence of joy.

It was not hard to catch the fleeting expression in the eyes of the little maids-of-honor, when the princess was particularly selfish; nor the half-concealed smiles on the lips of the courtiers when she was unbearably imperious. None of these things escaped the King and Queen any longer, and they were amply grieved by them.

Now in this country lived a very old fairy who was godmother to the Princess Jewelette. Wise was this old fairy, and of vast experience in the ways of her own folk, and also of mortals.

Indeed, she had almost reached the age when she would be made over into something new, for that is what happens to fairies as well as people, old Betty said. As this fairy had been kind and good during her length of sunny days and moonlit nights, she hoped she would be made over into a mortal; but even if she were only to be a perfectly new fairy again, with shining wings and a

strong light little body, and a rose-tinted radiant face, she felt she would be content. But to be a fairy and to be old, does not seem consistent—and the Princess Jewelette's godmother was growing tired of it.

So she sent her messenger, a grey elf, to the court of the King and Queen, and he told them she was coming to see them and divide between them (and some odds and ends of friends and relations), the jewels she had gathered together in her long life. For even fairies cannot take jewels across the border of one life and into another.

The royal pair listened to the grey elf with sorrowful faces, for they loved the ancient fairy and were not anxious to have her changed or made over in any way.

The little princess listened to the grey elf also, but her face was not sorrowful. It was only gravely attentive.

"Are you not grieved, my daughter," said His Majesty, "that your noble godmother feels the time is near when she will depart from us, only to return in some form we perchance may not recognize?"

The Princess Jewelette looked up with unshadowed eyes.

"Indeed, my father," she replied, softly. "I think she is very old and tired. She does not care to dance in the rings, and it is a long time since she floated across the lily pond. Now she only dips in the water at the edge, and then her attendants wrap her about closely and carry her away. I do not think she flies any more over the golden mustard fields,—they dazzle her eyes. All the color and strength has gone from her wings, and they are no longer lovely to look at. I think she is very old and tired, my father."

"That is true," said the King. "But what then? Are there not many to wait upon her and do her bidding? Where is there another with her wisdom and knowledge both of our land and the land of mortals? Where another so patient and gentle withal? The older she grows, the sweeter she becomes to my mind, and in her lovely eyes is the light that time cannot dim. There is much that you might learn of her, my little daughter, before you wed some gallant prince and leave us."

"She is very old," repeated the princess again. "What is there left for her to enjoy? I can think of nothing."

The King turned to the Queen with a swift glance. Their eyes met and she answered his look.

"There is Love," he said. The princess smiled absently, as not noticing any rebuke.

“To me it only seems wondrous sad to be so ancient,” she remarked with a little sigh.

“Peradventure it would be, my dear, if one remained forever so,” said her mother. “But with the God-of-All-Things there is no old age. There is only change. It is so great a mystery, this law of change; but it is a law for all alike. Yet in our own hearts is the power to make all change beautiful.”

The little princess threw out her hands in protest.

“I do not understand a word you say, mother mine,” she exclaimed. “Nor do I want to change in face or form or heart! If you loved me, you would not speak of such things.” Running to the Queen she lifted her lovely face to be kissed, though she frowned as might a spoiled child.

The Queen caressed her and sighed.

“You are too young, methinks, to understand, sweetheart,” she murmured. “Indeed, we would not desire you otherwise in face or form—only—only—”

“Only what?” questioned the princess, quite radiant again.

“Only sometimes we would have you a trifle kinder, sweetheart, or more thoughtful of others,” her mother answered. “But look! Look! Yonder comes your godmother and her attendants! Truly she is very feeble—so hasten to meet her my child! Hasten!”

The princess clapped her hands. “See mother mine!” she cried. “O see the dear grey elves bearing the jewel-box! I know it well. I think my godmother will divide her jewels to-day or the grey elves would not have brought them. I long to see them—the wonderful, wonderful jewels!”

Fluttering her silvery wings, the little princess fled across the garden.

Her godmother walked totteringly and by the aid of a tall ebony cane. Now and again she paused and leaned on it and then her little court of attendants awaited her pleasure.

They were all afoot, having left their coaches harnessed to green grass-hoppers, without the garden wall.

The ancient fairy wore a short quilted petticoat and scarlet cloak, beneath which were folded her weary wings. Upon her head was a white ruffled cap, and upon that a high black steeple hat.

Most of her following were grey elves, and they, too, looked old as grey warped twigs or the lichen on weather-beaten trees.

Six of them carried a black box studded with silver nails, and the weight of it bore them down.

The little princess alighted beside her godmother and caught her face that was like old carven ivory, between her two soft young hands.

"Dear Godmother," she exclaimed. "Now this is kind! But you are very tired—you should not have made this effort to come and see us! We could have gone to you so easily."

"True," said the ancient one, shaking her head. "But you do not often come, my dear, and I could not wait longer. I near my end. The end of all this,—" she finished vaguely, lifting her ebony cane and sweeping it around with a trembling arm. "So at last I said I would come myself and see you, and also divide my jewels among those here who are dear to me."

The grey elves tugged at the black box and the little princess helped the ancient fairy onward. The King and Queen came now to meet them, and all stopped beneath the shadow of a great tree.

Queer green twisted chairs were scattered about. A sun dial stood near pointing its finger eternally to the hours, and a fountain sent its rainbow spray high into the blue air. Below the terraced garden a lake sparkled as sharply as beaten silver in the late afternoon sun, and three black swans swam slowly around it, and then slowly around again.

The ancient one was given the seat of honor beneath the shadowy tree, and the King and Queen, the Princess Jewelette and all the fairies of the court, gathered near her, while the grey elves sat cross-legged on the grass and watched,—which is what the grey elves always do when there is anything to watch.

After all had been served with nectar and ambrosia and honey and little white rolls, and when all the pleasant gossip of the court had been talked over, the ancient one lifted her ebony stick and beckoned to the grey elves who guarded the black box.

"Bring hither my treasure-chest!" she commanded in her quavering voice. "Bring it hither, and undo the lock. Prithee—be nimble!"

The grey elves did her bidding swiftly and the black cover of the silver-studded box was lifted.

All the fairies, even the King and Queen and Princess Jewelette, gave little cries of wonder and delight, for it was as if the sunbeams and moonbeams and dew-drops of a thousand years had been imprisoned in the black box and crystallized there into gems of flawless beauty.

And there were pearls that only fairies of the sea can find—pearls tinted like the white mist of dawn when the sun first shines through it,—and there were opals iridescent and mysterious—the wonder stones of the world. But

strangest of all the jewels was a string of moonstones that wound in and out among the others, gleaming softly as moonlight on snow. For well they all knew that this string of moonstones held a magic none of the other jewels possessed, and brought to its wearer a charm which drew all hearts to them. Otherwise the necklace was of little value, for moonstones may be picked up on the tropical seashore on any quiet night. The ancient one lifted the jewels out, each lovely ornament by itself, and placed them upon a low table by her side. At last only the string of moonstones remained in the bottom of the box alone. There it shone faintly as though it were overlooked and forgotten.

The little princess gave one swift glance at the jewel-laden table, then turned and gazed down into the black box, the pink coming and going in her bewitching face, and her blue eyes growing dark as purple pansies.

After that one swift glance, she did not look at the table again,—though none seemed to notice this.

With trembling hands her godmother arranged the jewels to her liking, while all the court watched in silence.

"Then, I implore you, give me the moonstones."

"My dear ones," she said at last, "the time has come for me to set my affairs in order, for soon—very soon—I depart. Only the God-of-All-Things knows whither I go or how I shall return. These," her old hands fluttering towards the gems, "I will need no more. Therefore, it is my pleasure to divide them among those I love.

"First, O blessed Queen—take what you desire from those here beside me. Then His Royal Highness is to choose—then my god-daughter. All the maids-

of-honor are my friends, they are to choose next. Ay! All are to choose what they will except the Lady Mayblossom, whose grandmother was my dearest friend. For her I have chosen my own gift."

The Lady Mayblossom, who was sweet as her name, crossed the lawn and stood beside the ancient one. Her eyes were misty with tears, for she dearly loved the fairy godmother.

A little tremor of expectancy now ran through the waiting group, and the grey elves who sat cross-legged on the grass and watched, bent forward, pricked up their pointed ears and listened also. But they made no sound, for the grey elves are dumb.

"Approach, dear Queen!" quavered the ancient one, "and take what you will from among my jewels!"

The Queen stepped softly forward, bent her head and kissed the faded face of the old fairy.

"Why," she said, "as you desire to have it, I will, dear godmother—though it hurts my heart to do so. Indeed, and truly I will love whatever you give me, in that it has belonged to you—and I will guard it well." Then lightly, and as though the choice were of small moment, she chose a collar of pearls, and bowing again, withdrew.

The King then came forward smiling as though he would humor the fairy godmother in her whim.

From the table he took a ring of chased gold. It was heavy and unlovely—but it was a wishing-ring, and the King remembered hearing that one wish still remained within its magic power.

The ancient one smiled back at him, then slipped the ring on his finger herself.

"Wish wisely, dear friend!" she counselled. "Seven wishes had the ring to give, and six are gone. Not one has brought joy. Look you! I also still wear upon this palsied hand a wishing-ring given me long ago. He who gave it bade me not to part with it. Three wishes has it had to give. Two have I used, and they have brought me naught but grief. The third remains, but alas! I fear to use it. Therefore, with the ring you have chosen, wish wisely, dear friend. Wish wisely!"

The fairy king laughed and bent to kiss her hand.

"Peradventure I, too, shall fear to wish," he said. "But should I brave it out, I will remember your words, O kind one!"

Then the little princess drew near, her starry eyes shining and her face dimpling with smiles.

“Choose, my love!” said her godmother. “The most beautiful of my jewels are still here.”

The princess caught her breath quickly and clasped her hands together. She glanced once again at the glittering array on the table, then turned to the open black box at the ancient one’s feet, and without hesitation pointed into it with one rosy finger.

“I would have the string of moonstones, dear godmother,” she said.

The old fairy rose from her chair slowly and steadied herself by the ebony cane. Her face changed from its tender serenity to a sternness that became terrifying.

“Perchance I did not hear aright,” she answered, after a moment’s silence. “But if so, then hark ye! The moonstones are not for you, my child. Choose from the gems upon the table!”

The little princess opened her pansy dark eyes in wide astonishment, and drew herself up to her full height, with a certain gesture of disdain the fairy people of the court knew well.

“Not for me, dear godmother?” she replied with cold gentleness. “Then this being so, I decline your other jewels. But I pray you answer me of your graciousness—do you yourself wear the necklace of moonstones into that new country of change whither you journey soon?”

“Nay, verily!” returned the ancient one. “To fairy-land we come without jewels, and we leave it without them.”

The princess nodded assent, and her face lost its color and grew white as snow.

“Then I implore you—give me the moonstones,” she requested softly.

Her godmother leaned towards her, her hands folded on the crotch of the ebony cane.

“Little princess,” she said, “of all my gems, I love the moonstones best, though they are of small worth save for the charm they bear. Also, of all my friends, I loved best the grandmother of the Lady Mayblossom. For this reason —and others I care not to explain—I give the string of moonstones to the Lady Mayblossom.”

Bending down, she lifted the necklace from the black box, and turning to the maid-of-honor who stood beside her, frightened, and as though ready to fly,

the old fairy reached up and clasped the moonstones around her soft young throat.

The princess gazed as one not believing the evidence of her own senses.

The king and queen waited in tense silence. The fairies of the court stood poised as for flight; the grey elves sat cross-legged, all eyes, and ears, and eagerness.

Even the very birds stopped singing, and the leaves of the great tree overhead hung motionless.

Then, as in a flash, the princess caught the necklace of moonstones from the Lady Mayblossom's throat, threw it on the grass, and stamped her foot upon it, once! twice! thrice! The jewels crumbled or were crushed into the earth. Seeing them so, the princess laughed softly, but defiantly, and in the silence that followed, her words fell on the air without a tremor:

"So! So!" she said. "It is *so* I shall do to those who cross my will!"

The fairy queen covered her eyes with her hands. The king stood in silence, his face hardening. The little court fairies still were poised for flight, yet did not fly; and the grey elves sat cross-legged and watched, their goggle eyes staring wildly; and as they watched and listened, they shook like autumn leaves in the wind.

The Lady Mayblossom alone turned and fled.

The princess still stood, her foot upon the jewels, and the ancient fairy, leaning on the ebony cane, gazed at her fixedly.

Then she spoke, and her voice had lost its quavering tone and sounded young and strong again, while her eyes, that had never grown old, shone bright in her old, old face. Slowly she lifted the ebony cane.

"Move not!" she commanded. "Move not, anyone, except my grey elves! Go you, O grey elves, and bring hence a rose-plant that grows in a golden pot by the south gate of this garden. Bring it hither with care. Go! Be nimble!"

The six grey elves departed swiftly, and as swiftly returned. They bore a golden pot, from which grew one tall rose-plant. They placed the pot at the ancient one's feet. Green was the rose bush, with many leaves, but no rose or bud grew upon it.

The ancient fairy glanced at the waiting court.

"Harken ye all!" she said in that ringing voice. "You have seen what you have seen, and heard what you have heard. See and hear further. One and all, you know that again the Princess Jewelette has shown that her heart was to-day

dominated by love of self—and love of self only. Now, love we must all have in some form.

"Through love of others we grow to be like the God-of-All-Things. Through love of self, we grow to be unlike Him. That, my children, is to change, little by little, to what is evil.

"So, little by little, your princess is losing from her heart all love but that of self, yet hope is not yet gone. I would save her, my children, and to save her, she must be made to suffer, and she must learn to love *another* better than *herself*.

"One wish remains in this old, old ring of mine. With it I will turn her into a rose. But it will be *a rose enchanted*. In the heart of it will be held a drop of magic perfume. The leaves around the golden heart of the rose will be folded so closely that this perfume cannot escape unless the flower itself so wills; and while the perfume is held there, the rose will live on, and *never* fade. Should it let the magic essence sweeten the air, it will swiftly *die*. What may happen after, I know not; but in this matter I must not falter, but deal with the princess only for her spirit's good."

Raising her ebony cane, the ancient fairy looked around the assembled group. No one had dared to move or question her, yet fear whitened every face.

The queen clung to the king's arm, and the king was as immovable as though under a spell. The little court fairies seemed about to fly, yet did not, and the cross-legged grey elves gazed at the scene with unblinking goggle eyes.

The princess alone stood as before, disdain and anger in every line of her face and figure. In the shadow of the great tree she still seemed enfolded by the afternoon light and color.

Not for a moment had she thought of asking for pity, even if she believed her godmother would carry out her dire threat. She alone, among them all, looked quite unafraid.

The ancient one paused, as though waiting for some word of repentance or supplication—some littlest word.

There was only a dread silence in all the king's garden.

Then slowly the black cane swung through the air—once—twice—three times. A sudden darkness fell, as though the sun had been snuffed out like a candle.

A roll of thunder followed, and after that, slowly, slowly, the light came back. From a misty grey it grew into the radiance of afternoon. The birds were again singing in the garden, and a light wind ruffled the leaves.

All the fairies stood as before, on the green beneath the great tree—*all but the little princess Jewelette*. She was no longer there, but on the rose-bush in the golden pot bloomed a marvellous rose not yet quite blown—a red, red, red rose of perfect beauty!

The fairy queen slipped down to earth in a deadly faint, and they carried her away to the castle. The fairies, so long undetermined whether to go or stay, lifted their silvery wings and flew madly in every direction. The king stood as still spellbound, while the grey elves rose from the grass and clustered together.

"Hither!" the ancient one called to them. "Hither, my good grey elves! Lock again my jewels in the black box! Take it and drop it into yonder lake where the water is deepest. Then return. Be nimble! Be nimble!"

They did her bidding and returned.

"Hasten once more!" she said to them. "Hasten! Lift the golden pot wherein grows the rose-plant with its one blossom, and bear it to the garden of the great and lonely king who reigns over the first and most troublesome kingdom of mortals beyond the river bounding the land of fairies. Leave your burden within the stone wall of his garden, close by the bridle path, and near the great iron gate that opens to the high road."

As she spoke, her voice changed, quavered and grew old. Yet the king, listening, heard each word. He saw the grey elves lift the golden pot and fly away with it. Powerless to detain them, silent as though under a spell, he watched until they disappeared in the blue of the air.

The ancient fairy sank into her twisted green chair. Folding her withered hands on the crotch of her stick, she leaned her chin upon them. Her strangely young eyes gazed out over the king's sunlit garden, gazed long and lovingly. Then she closed them.

The king came close to her and called her by name. Again he called her, and his voice was shaken and very sad. When she did not answer, he stooped and looked into her old, old face, and then he saw she had departed to the land where all things are made new.

Part II.

Up and over the garden of the fairy king flew the six grey elves bearing between them the golden earth-filled pot from which grew the wonderful rose-bush.

On and on they flew making signs now and then to each other, and gazing intently down on the country with their great goggle eyes in search of the landmarks that were to guide them.

It was a long journey, but their grey wings did not easily tire, and they were always faithful to the orders of their mistress. Now, though, they were troubled and very sad, for each one of them had adored the little princess even with all her wilful ways and selfishness, and they deeply regretted the magic that had in the twinkling of an eye turned her into a flower.

Dumbly they communicated this to each other and their eyes filled with tears when they rested for a moment on the exquisite red rose.

It did not seem to them the punishment fitted the fault for which it was given. If the Princess Jewelette had desired the string of moonstones, they thought she should have them. It was for *her* to choose and *others* to give up,—to their way of thinking.

Beautiful as the Lady Mayblossom was, she was not to be compared to the fairy king's little daughter. She had seemed made of snow and peach-bloom—and her hair was like copper spun fine as cob-web. Always when the elves looked at the princess, this red-gold hair had dazzled them, and they—so devoid of color—so like the grey fog, and the grey clouds, and the grey river mist, that they could easily be lost in any one of them, worshipped her, as long ago mortals worshipped the sun.

Therefore, they flew onward with something almost like anger in their hearts. But they were good elves and struggled to overcome this feeling, knowing how just their ancient mistress had always been. For long years she had given herself to deeds that brought only blessings to mortals and fairies, and indeed, to little grey elves as well.

Onward they flew until the sun rolled down behind the hills and into the sea.

Then the river that divided the fairy country from that of mortals came in sight, gleaming across the twilight land like a silver embroidery.

As the moon rose they flew over the river, and now in the country of mortals the King's Palace and wide court garden appeared. The garden was walled by cemented stones of red and green and violet grey, and at intervals stone dragons with faces set and fierce kept perpetual watch and ward upon it. In the moonlight these looked like living things, and the elves shuddered as they flew, for never before had they been beyond the river boundary.

They flew with fast beating hearts to the great gates of the wall. Here the dragons set in the side pillars, were more fearsome than any of the others, for their eyes were lit with red lights and their wings seemed lifted for flight.

The grey elves looked about in dumb terror; but the orders of their mistress were imperative, and the golden pot with the rose-bush must be set within the garden.

With a last wild effort of strength and courage they darted over the wall, found the path and gently lowered their burden beside it.

The light of the full moon touched the half-blown rose to almost unearthly beauty, and the golden pot shone against the grass as though the sun had left a spot of brightness there. The grey elves turned their big troubled eyes around the unfamiliar garden and then back to the rose-bush that seemed to them dreadfully lonely in this unknown land.

Yet they could not discover that it looked strange or out of place. No—it was just an ordinary rose-bush bearing a red blossom of unusual beauty as far as anyone could see. Still their hearts misgave them, and they would gladly have carried the golden pot back the way they came.

But they were loyal to their old beloved mistress, and knew they must leave the little lovely rose-princess to her fate. So one by one they climbed up the rose branches, for the grey elves are small and light in weight as moonbeams, though they are strong to lift and carry. One by one they reached up and touched the rose with their tiny pointed hands, gazing at it with dumb longing. They leaned their faces downward, then shook their heads to one another. "No!" "No!" There was no perfume. By signs they spoke to the rose and bade her hold the magic essence fast; *never* to let it escape at dawn or dark, or in the light of the sun or moon, for that meant *death*.

Passionately they warned her of this impending tragedy, this desperate peril! They tried also to comfort her by saying in pantomime that some day her godmother might send them to bear her home again and lift the enchantment that bound her. They strove to remind her of the wishing-ring her father, the

King, had chosen; for though the wish had no power in the land of mortals unless used there, yet he might find his way over the boundary river.

She looked up into his face and smiled happily.

But alas, this thought gave them little hope, for although the fairies were permitted to enter many countries, to this one, only the elves, so far, had found the road.

The mortal king's garden was sweet and still and scented by innumerable night-flowering trees. Here and there a bird made restless by the vivid

moonlight, sang a few sleepy notes. A fountain played ceaselessly, and the sound of the falling water was like a lullaby.

The little elves would gladly have curled down under the rose leaves and gone to sleep, but the night was slipping away, they had performed their mission, and must return with word of its accomplishment.

With many sighs they lifted their grey gauzy wings and flew away toward the fairy country; so the rose-bush was left without friends in the wonderful garden.

The wind before dawn blew over its green leaves and the red flower swayed back and forth. At earliest light a humming-bird darted around and around it as though seeking for some sweetness, and finding none.

Then came the head gardener and looked the plant over, apparently puzzled. He examined it with minute care through his big horn-rimmed spectacles and shook his frosted head, for he was a very old gardener.

“Where be thee come from?” he questioned, for he always talked to his flowers. “Where be thee come from, thou pretty thing? Art some gift-plant a lady ha’ sent His Majesty? Ay! Ay! that be likely.” Then he laughed softly. “Pretty thing!—pretty thing!—” he repeated, “there be no lady half as lovely as thee—else had my royal master wed long ago. None so lovely as thee I warrant, nor half so sweet.” Bending down he almost touched the rose with his old wrinkled face “or half so sweet,” he said again, dreamily, then lifted his head and looked puzzled. “Why,” nodding, “why, bless me, pretty one! Thou ’ast no scent! No scent at all—an’ I be keen to catch the scent o’ roses! What now—what now? Hath a moth rubbed thee, or one o’ those long-beaked hummers?” He rubbed his white head and ruminated, then went along with his basket of tools.

“ ’Tis none o’ my affairs,” he soliloquized. “I’ll let it be, gold pot an’ all. But a rose wi’out scent, she be not a rose, say I. She be not a rose. I would na ha’ such in my rose-garden. I must let be—let be, though. But give me a rose wid scent, say I, even if it be a common hedge-rose, or a cinnamon bud, small as a button—Ay; I’d sooner ha’ a road-side briar sweet-scented, than yonder beauty. A rose without sweetness—she be like a woman wi’out love in her heart. Ay! Ay!”

Muttering to himself he went his way among the flower-beds.

Sunlight flooded the garden at high noon and it was a place filled with life and music. Butterflies hovered over the rose-bush—then left it. The bees hesitated on their flight near it, then passed by. A white moth touched it fleetingly; and none of these returned.

Only the sunlight seemed to abide with it—the sunlight common to all.

By and by a group of courtiers strolling gaily past noticed the rose-plant in the golden pot, for no flowers had hitherto grown near the bridle path.

"Heigh-ho!" sang out one young cavalier. "By St. Elizabeth—the lady of roses—in truth here is the pick of them all! His Majesty must be growing extravagant when he has his bushes potted in gold! Methinks I will clip the blossom—I know one could wear it most charmingly in her hair. A red rose 'gainst such raven hair, as I know of—well, 'tis beyond words to paint the picture!"

He touched the stem of the rose, and was about to break it, when one of the little court ladies stayed his arm.

"Nay! Do not pluck it, my lord!" she exclaimed warningly. "I have a presentiment that the King would not have it touched! See! It is a most rare blossom, and after all, it belongs to His Majesty."

The cavalier laughed. "Here's a to-do!" he said. "What is one rose more or less, sweetheart! Here to-day—gone to-morrow! 'Gather ye roses while ye may,' some poet hath said. The leaves of this one will be scattered on the bridle path e'er two moonlit nights go by."

"Not so!" she answered. "It is but half-blown. 'Twill live a week." Then she leaned down to it. "Why prithee," she cried, "it hath no perfume! Now, my lord," laughingly, "you will be content to leave it. There are a thousand scented blossoms growing in the rose-garden free for your taking."

He frowned and tweaked his small mustache. "I desire what I desire," he said. "If I desire a scentless rose, 'tis my own affair. This is the one I would have, and I shall proceed to pluck it."

The little maid-of-honor spread out her brocade skirts and stood before the rose-bush.

"Thou shalt not! Thou shalt not!" she cried defiantly. " 'Tis the King's rose and very specially set in this golden pot!"

"With all deference to you, dear lady," he returned, bowing low, "I most certainly shall—golden pot or no!"

So saying, he swung her lightly to one side and caught the rose stem to break it; but one of the thorns went deeply into his thumb, and he shook his hand free angrily.

The little maid laughed, with much delight, and stepping again between him and the golden pot, danced lightly before it.

“Little torment!” he muttered. “The mischief is in you, and a devil in the rose-bush! I have pierced my thumb to the very quick, and will not be able to touch my guitar this whole evening! I gainsay the dastardly thorn hath run through a nerve, for it throbs to the elbow!”

At this the maid-of-honor went into a perfect gale of merriment. “Alack! Alack!” she cried. “Call the court-surgeon! My Lord Harry hath stabbed himself with a rose-prickle!” So making merry at his expense, she caught her flowered gown over her arm and ran after the others, leaving the young cavalier to follow sullenly after.

When the sound of their voices had died away, the rose-bush was alone again.

Was it always to be so? she thought. Would everything pass by and leave her? She longed even for the summer breeze to keep her company, to stir her crimson leaves, and sway the green bush of which she seemed to be a living part. For, most strange of all, the Princess Jewelette, though changed to a rose, in some magic way was still the little princess, and by a mystic power could see and hear and feel and think, even as she had at her father’s court. But she could express nothing; no power was given to let any know of the enchantment that had befallen her.

Again and again in spirit she lived over the fatal hour in the garden, and traced each action that led up to the moment her godmother had so deliberately wrought her doom. Most horrible indeed it seemed to her, and fear and loneliness took up their abode in her heart.

Beautiful she knew she was as a rose; but to be only a rose, a thing plucked for anyone’s pleasure perchance, or torn by the wind and beaten by the rain, as must surely follow should she outlast the summer! She shuddered as she pictured her fate.

Then slowly the balm of memory came to her. Her godmother had promised that while the magic perfume was held in her golden heart she would not die. Some small comfort crept through her. Little by little the trembling that shook her red leaves ceased.

But to what end should she live? she questioned. Everyone and everything passed by. One rose in a great garden! Who would care if it lived or died? And a rose without perfume was a disappointment. None would desire it except for a whim, as the young cavalier had. The bees and butterflies and humming birds would all leave it untouched.

No man or maid would give it a second thought once they had discovered it was scentless. The old gardener had been right. It was better to be a common

hedge-rose that smelled sweet, or a highway briar that perfumed the air for tired travellers.

True, there was the perfume locked under her curled leaves—but that she must hold fast. Death followed if she set it free. Her godmother had said so. The grey elves knew and they had warned her. She must hold the perfume very fast. If none plucked her from the stem, and the wind and rain did not loosen her crimson leaves—perhaps—perhaps, she thought, the king, her father, would come with his wondrous wishing-ring that could turn her back into her own beautiful self! With the desperation of despair she clung to this thought. Then came another. She remembered that none of her people had ever, ever found their way across the boundary river to this country. To other countries they had often gone—but they had been warned not to cross the river to this one.

Black grief filled her heart. There was no way out of it all, she thought—no way, no way. Memories of her wilfulness, her unutterable selfishness, her constant haughtiness, haunted her as out of a mist of pain. This was indeed punishment for all her selfish deeds, but a punishment greater, it seemed, than she could bear.

At last one thought only dominated her, and it was that she must hide and cling to the magic perfume or she would die. For if she lived on, help might come. Her father would not forget, and the grey elves would entreat her fairy godmother to break the spell of enchantment.

Mortals she did not fear so greatly, for the rose branches were beset with sharpest thorns, but the high wind and the pitiless rain and the hot sun of noonday—these filled her with dread unspeakable.

The noon passed, and the flowers in the garden grew drowsy in the quivering heat.

No one came by—for there were many other roadways and gates, and none would take the bridle path when the sun was high.

After the merry court at her father's palace, this was desolation to the little rose princess. A very passion of homesickness swept over her. She longed for anyone she knew—even the dumb grey elves—when faintly, and afar off, she heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the beaten path. A faint interest stirred her, for the hours had been so long and monotonous.

Soon a man dressed in black came in sight, riding a great black horse, and beside him rode a woman with snow-white hair, but none could tell her age, for her eyes were so merry and young.

Behind these riders came two little grooms, who looked bored and preoccupied with their own affairs. They rode grey ponies, and were dressed in gay-colored cordovan leather jerkin and leggings laced with silver cord and thick-set with loose-sewn silver buttons, that jingled like little bells.

The rose wondered who the man upon the great black horse could be. He filled her with awe, he was so grave and dark and strong. Mortals were new to her, and this one was not at all like the merry ladies and gentlemen who had passed in the morning. They were not so different, except in size, from the folk of her own father's court. But no two could be more different than the cavalier who pricked his thumb and this man upon the black horse. The grooms were simply grooms such as might be anywhere—she thought—but the woman with her white hair and sparkling eyes was different again from any she had seen.

She wondered about her also, and listened intently to the sound of their pleasant voices as they drew slowly near. When a word drifted to her she understood it, as she had the words of the gardener and the little court-maid and the cavalier.

Of this she was very thankful, and she hoped they would not pass without seeing her. She longed to have them stop, if only for a moment, for the garden was so wide and lonesome.

She had forgotten she was a rose, until the riders were close beside her, and she heard the woman's voice speaking eagerly. "Look, my son!" she exclaimed. "How lovely a thing! Saw you ever such a perfect rose? Yet what extravagance to set a carven gold-pot beside the bridle path! It is quite lost," she laughed, "but in truth the rose is worth it—it is a very marvel! I must dismount and breathe its fragrance!"

"Nay, my mother," the man answered, "it shall be brought to you."

He beckoned to a groom. "The Queen desires yonder rose," he said; "pluck it carefully, and strip it of thorns."

The groom bowed, and turned to obey, but the Queen-Mother checked him. "No! No!" she commanded. "With all the thanks in the world, my son—I will not have it plucked. But I would see it closer. Bring hither the golden pot."

The groom sprang to obey, and brought the rose-bush to the Queen's side. She bent down from her horse, lifting the blossom to her face. Presently she looked up with a little smile and shook her head.

"It is without perfume," she said, "quite without. How disappointing in so wondrous a rose!" Then to the groom—"Take the plant away."

The dark man smiled also. "You are mistaken perhaps, mother mine; the rose is only half-blown, you see—" She shook her head again.

“ ’Tis but a small matter, your Majesty, but I am right. It has no vestige of sweetness.”

“Bring me the plant,” the King said to the groom.

The golden pot was lifted again, and the King drew the rose towards him. “In truth you are right,” he assented. “It has no sweetness, but instead is beset with most villainous thorns! A rose without perfume is like a woman without a soul, methinks. Yet withal, this is a rare and lovely thing. Wilt change thy mind and have it?”

“No, dear heart,” she refused. “I would rather have a bramble that was sweet. Perchance I am fondest of pansies, after all. They look up at me, and remind me of children. Here in this great garden, where are no faces so innocent.”

The King frowned. “We need no children in the palace garden, my mother,” he returned. “The times are full of peril on land and sea. My nights and days are overfilled with anxieties for the State—and thee. We need no children.”

The Queen-Mother sighed, then turned the subject lightly.

“Well, prithee, ’tis a rare flower, and a costly pot. Who could have brought it hither so far from the rose-garden?”

“Perchance I have a friend I know not of,” the King answered absently. “Of givers of gifts there is no end.” So speaking, they passed through the gates, and the rose was again left alone.

“The King!” she thought. “So that was the mortal King—of a land of mortals! Of a certainty he was good to look upon—though one would not think to find a king so grave and troubled.”

The Queen-Mother had more of youth in her eyes and smile, than he.

Was that the way, she wondered, of kings in this new land? No one in the fairy country showed such weariness. What could these perilous times be—what the heavy cares of State? A feeling of pity stirred within her golden heart as she thought.

That a king should look so sorrowful, she sighed. What then was the use of being ruler over a country of mortals? Strange that his eyes were so grave in his young face—strange the note of bitterness in his voice. Why should there be no need of children in the garden? What could befall them but joy? It was all a puzzle to the rose princess, and it took her thoughts away from her own doleful fate.

All through the late afternoon and on through the tinted twilight—on into the moonlit night, she wondered and wondered about the young king, and

sighed and pitied him. She forgot even to be lonely, though the birds and butterflies were asleep, and only the flitter-mice, the lantern-eyed owls and other fly-by-nights were abroad. Indeed, as dawn drew near, she had forgotten to grieve over her own sorrows, and only thought of his.

His words haunted her. “A rose without perfume,” he had said, “is like a woman without a soul.” Such words should have angered her—perhaps—but they did not, for she was not a rose without perfume.

Remembering this, she folded the leaves still closer about her heart. Death—death—would follow should the sweetness escape. Then, should the King ride by to-morrow, he would see only a withered flower upon the stalk, or a scatter of red leaves on the bridle path. There might be a scent of attar-of-rose on the air—nothing else. She shuddered and shuddered, then, as the night had been long, grew drowsy and slept as flowers sleep.

A week went by, a week of sultry heat, then one morning the old gardener came.

“Thou art a long-lived rose, my pretty,” he said, pausing. “A long-lived rose. But the wind will blow up, and the rains will come. Roses be like joy, my pretty. They last not long.”

So he tottered away. More and more lonely grew the little rose-princess. Over and over she counted the sum of her selfish deeds in fairy-land, and regretted them. For she had come now to know both sorrow and regret. Through all these intolerable hours she watched for the young king and thought of his grave face. But he did not pass, and the memory grew to be like a dream.

On the eighth morning, though, he came, one of the gay grooms riding behind. The rose heard the jingling of the silver buttons before they came in sight.

His Majesty was in black, as before, and rode slowly on his great black horse, for the day was warm. They had almost passed the rose-bush when the King spoke.

“How many days have gone since we took the bridle path with the Queen?” he asked.

“Eight days, your Majesty,” replied the small groom.

“Eight days! And the rose on yonder bush still blooms!” the King exclaimed. “Sure ’tis not the same blossom, Nicholas?”

“The very same, your Majesty,” he answered. “I noticed there was no other bud on all the plant but this alone on the topmost branch.”

“Strange!” said the young King. “Eight days, Nicholas, is long life for a rose. But there was something about the blossom, we remarked? Yes, yes, I remember. It was scentless, and my mother would have none of it. Women are like that, and I myself care not for such roses in my garden.” So saying, he rode away, the jingling groom following.

A great desolation swept over the little princess-rose as they went.

He cared not for such in his garden! Oh, if he only knew! she thought. If he only knew! If she could but find a way to tell him! But there was no such way. Everything passed because she had no sweetness. Almost she wished she were a cinnamon rose, or a briar. Perchance, then, the King would have broken her from the stem and fastened her on his doublet and worn her away. Quickly she scorned herself for the thought. She, a princess—truly a princess, though enchanted! For a little only, pride and anger filled her heart. Then she was left again to loneliness, and these things passed away.

Day after day passed, and now she had come to watch the bridle path hour by hour for the dark figure on the great black horse. Hour by hour she listened for the jingling buttons of the little groom.

And again one morning of sunshine they came.

This time the king drew his horse up suddenly beside the rose bush.

“Now, by Flora, the goddess of all flowers!” he exclaimed, “but this is past belief! The scentless rose still blooms, Nicholas! How many days since we took this path before?”

“Eight days, Your Majesty,” returned the little groom.

“Sixteen in all since my mother rode here with me then,” said the king “and still but half-blown. Dismount and bring hither the golden pot, Nicholas.”

The princess-rose trembled with excitement. “What next?” she thought, “what next?”

The king leaned down and touched the flower. “Unscented still,” he said, “but of a rare beauty. I will have this golden pot and plant taken to the room-of-books in the palace—Nicholas. Call the gardener.”

The old man came, pulling his forelock of white hair.

“A strange rose, this, Bellman,” said the king, “and one that knows not the time to die. Have it taken to the palace.”

“Ay! Your Majesty,” the old man answered. “It be a rare queer rose—as you say. I see all things in thy garden, but never have I seen bird or bee or moth

or butterfly stop near her. It seems a friendless thing, to these old eyes, and belikes is lonely."

"Lonely!" echoed the king, "then I should indeed have it taken to my palace. Loneliness reigns there, Bellman,—in spite of all the court."

"Is not thy mother with thee—my Master?" questioned the gardener.

"She is there, Bellman, but is ill since yester eve. My brothers are at enmity with us, as you who have known us always, have heard. The friend I love best has been lately killed in battle—and peace has not yet come. Much I envy you your days of peace here in the garden. But we must ride on—so good-morrow to you, old friend."

The rose listened until the last sound died away.

Then came an under-gardener and carried the golden pot and rose-bush to the palace. Afterwards an unbending footman placed them by a window in the room-of-books. It was a quiet room and filled with a golden gloom. Books lined the walls from floor to ceiling. There was no other flower in all the place and the red rose shone like a flame in the room.

A gladness flooded her, and though the place was more quiet than the garden, and there was no one in it, she was no longer lonely. For this was the king's palace, and sooner or later he would return to it. She listened for his step and watched for him.

By and by he came, and seeing the flower, went over to it, and lifted the half-blown bud.

"Most lovely thing," he said. "Whence have you this power to live? Dost not know you have out-stayed your time? Art perchance a rose of Heaven—blown by unkind fate on earth, and therefore fadeless? No. Not so. The roses of Heaven would be sweet of perfume."

Night came, but the rose was not afraid, for she thought of the king's words and waited for him to return.

Time went on, and always when His Majesty came into the room-of-books he stopped by the rose and marvelled at it.

"So lovely still!" he said one morning. "Not one petal drooped! Give me your secret, little rose, that I may keep eternal youth. And yet—no! I have no youth to keep, though my years are not many. Wars and the rumors of wars age me. Strife in the court, the jealousy of my brothers, the illness of my beloved mother, all these take the joy out of life. If I knew love—such love as one dreams of—But no, again. There is no beauty in all my court I could so love.

They are like you—little rose. Every one like you. They lack sweetness—soul. The nameless something—without which they are worthless.

"If you had been sweet, little rose, you would have been plucked long ere this. Ay—plucked and carried to the queen, for by my faith, never was there so bewitching a flower!"

Again he went away—and through all the hours that followed the rose-princess listened only for his step.

But there came a day of mourning to the palace, when it was hushed, and no slightest sound of mirth by hall or stair drifted into the room-of-books. No one of all the courtiers came and wondered at her lasting bloom. For often now they came and wondered at her—old scientists and philosophers; wise men of diverse cults, alchemists, and theorists, as well as the young and frivolous courtiers. The rose had become the fashion of the hour as a topic and diversion, and all knew of her beauty. But by the king's order no lightest touch was to be laid upon the plant in the golden pot.

To-day, though, no one entered the room-of-books except a little page to fetch a breviary, and he was garbed most dolefully in black from head to toe.

Having got the book, curiosity took him over to the flower.

"Queer little thing!" he said as though half-afraid: "All the court is guessing about thee! I myself think thou art enchanted, and if I could steal one crimson leaf and wear it upon my heart I never would grow old either. But that would not suit me to remain as I am. I would be a man. 'Tis hateful to be young and sent hither and thither at the whim of a maid-of-honor, and then, peradventure ha' one's ears boxed at any mischance. Truly I desire to be a man speedily! But hark you, sweet one. I want not to grow ancient! Nay verily! Nor to die! I like not the aspect of death. I like it not at all. Heed you, little rose. The Queen-Mother is dead, and to be entombed to-morrow. And she was not so ancient—and was of a merry heart withal. Yet she is dead," he shivered a little. "In the chapel she lies in state. To lie in state is a sorry business, lovely rose. Sooner would I be a page and alive!"

So he left the room, peering fearfully around, for the place was full of shadows.

The little rose was alone again, but she had now no thoughts for herself—nor any self-pity. All her thoughts were with the young king. It was the weight of his loneliness that hurt her—and she only felt his sorrow.

At noon the next day a bell began tolling. One by one the solemn, heavy sounds fell, setting the air a-quiver. The rose shuddered as she heard them.

“She is dead!” the bell said. “She is dead!—is dead! She is dead!” over and over and over again.

To be dead, thought the little rose. Why was it to be so feared? Did they not say in her own country that no fairy died but only changed? Yet, what was this change? Who could tell? Her godmother had warned her to hold fast the magic perfume, or she would die.

Fear possessed her. Mad fear! She remembered the face of the little page when he had told of the Queen’s lying-in-state.

And as she thought, the door of the room-of-books opened, and the king entered. There was no change at all in his garments, for he ever wore black, but his young face was like carven ivory.

He walked up and down the long room—up and down. Presently he stopped beside the rose-bush, and stood looking at the crimson flower.

“Wonderful!” he said at last. “Most wonderful of all things I have seen! A deathless rose in this world of death. Yet who would wish to live long, O wonder flower?” He shook his head and smiled a little. “I can think of but one thing that would detain me, willingly. I would know love before I pass on—” Then he shrugged his shoulders as at a fancy. “To be a king—and yet have bestowed upon one the gift of true love also. ’Tis too much to ask of Fate.”

Again he paced the floor and again paused by the flower. This time he touched it lightly.

“O beautiful—most beautiful!” he repeated. “If you were only sweet! Then I would to-day carry you to my mother as my last gift. She lies in such lonely grandeur, little rose. Methinks you might even yet bring her some comfort. The great wreaths and arches of white flowers—the mourning tokens—seem not to belong to her at all.”

The rose looked into the sorrowful face above her and trembled. Suddenly she understood that the hour had come when there was but one thing left for her to do. She must set the magic perfume free to sweeten the air, since the king wished it.

Then she would be carried to the dead queen and laid in her hand—and afterwards there would be no more—no more of all that she had known.

Yet strangely—now she felt no fear. A warm wind blew in through the window. The rose bent before it and the red leaves uncurled. The wind blew again, and the rose unlocked the leaves about her heart. In a moment a heavenly sweetness floated through the room-of-books.

With a cry of astonishment the young king looked about. “ ’Tis passing strange!” he said. “The air is turning golden, and sparkles as with broken stars! Now ’tis filled with incense! The perfume of Araby—or the wind from over a thousand gardens!”

Then he remembered the plant in the golden pot.

“The rose! the rose!” he exclaimed. “It is the deathless flower of all the world that hath unsealed its balm! O lovely one, I will carry you to the queen and you will give her joy even yet.”

He lifted the rose to his lips and kissed its petals, but even as he touched them, they curled at the edges and their color faded. One loosened and fell to the floor, then another.

The king gazed in sorrowful amazement at the change. Then as still another leaf fluttered to his feet a soft darkness crept over the room-of-books. Deeper and denser it grew until it was like the Egyptian dark of old. A peal of thunder followed, that shook the very palace.

Afterwards light and silence came back, little by little, until sunshine flooded the place.

The king stood as before, his hand about the rose. He had not broken it from the stem, yet the leaves were still withering fast. But more strange than even this—beside the king stood one as kingly as himself—only he was fairy small! His robes glittered with gold and silver embroidery and many colored gems, and upon his head was a crown.

“O Mortal King!” he said, bowing deeply. “I come from a land you know not beyond the last river. Far have I searched for the flower you hold—that I might bear it home. Only now, within this last moment have I found my way hither, and now methinks I have come too late. It is not a rose you hold, O Mortal King, but a princess of fairy-land who is enchanted. The ancient and wise one who so enchanted her has departed to another life—and alas! the charm has worked out to this dire conclusion.

“In the heart of the rose was hidden a magic perfume. While the leaves held it fast, she lived, but if she gave the perfume to the air—death was her portion.”

The young king looked steadily upon the withering flower from which the leaves still fell.

“Alas!” he said. “I am unacquainted with the ways of fairy-land. The ways of my own troubled country are often beyond my power of understanding,—yet it seems this little rose—and none other was e’er so lovely—gave her sweetness to me, and brought death to herself thereby. Would, O Fairy King, that I had power to return life to one so dear.”

The Fairy King lifted his hand on which was a dull gold ring.

"O Mortal Majesty!" he replied. "The fairy who placed this enchantment of the rose upon the little princess, gave also to me this wishing-ring. It is yet potent to grant one wish of the three it once could give. Only harm has come of it before. Now we will see what remains. Hold fast thy withering flower and I will wish upon the fairy's ring!"

Slowly the golden light faded again from the room—and deep darkness fell. Then the voice of the Fairy King sounded in the stillness.

"O ancient ring!" he said. "Grant me the one last wish in thy keeping! I wish that the rose-princess be restored to life!"

Once more came the rolling thunder, and the soft return of the sunlight.

The dazzling fairy king had vanished as he came, but in the room-of-books stood the young king as before. His hand touched no fading rose on the top branch of the green bush in the golden pot,—for there was no blossom of any kind there; only beside him was surely the loveliest princess in all the whole world! A Mortal Princess!

Her eyes were dark as purple pansies and her face colored like the apple blooms of May. She wore a gown silvery as cobwebs on the grass at dawn, but not a jewel decked her beauty anywhere. The red-gold of her hair floated about her and dazzled the young king's eyes—as in the other days the eyes of the little grey elves used to be dazzled by it.

She looked up into his face and smiled happily.

"O lovely princess!" he cried. "From what far country have you come? I pray you tell me! I pray you tell me!"

"Nay—I know not," she answered as one bewildered. "But what matter? I seem to have come over a long road—and all the way I have been watching for you—yes—all the way!"

"And I too," he said, taking her hand, "have come over a long road, and have been looking for you, my princess."

"Come!" she said. "There is a scent of roses on the air. Let us go out into the garden!"

"Verily—yes, sweetheart," he answered. "We will go into the garden. But first, first—" and a mist dimmed his eyes, "I must take you to one who sleeps. Her dreams will be sweeter afterwards."

So hand-in-hand they went out of the room-of-books, taking all for granted as well as each other—and asking no unanswerable questions of life, for this is

the old fond way of all true lovers.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *A Rose Enchanted* by Virna Sheard]