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THE ADVENTURES OF PETERKIN

BY GILLY BEAR

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"Inside his Pumperkin house"

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THE ADVENTURES *of* PETERKIN

BY

GILLY BEAR

AUTHOR OF "TOM TIT TALES," "THE GREEN TULIP,"
"FUN IN THE FOREST," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY HELEN E. OHRENSCHALL

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	PETERKIN PUMPERKIN	13
II.	PETERKIN AFLOAT	17
III.	PETERKIN AND THE WHALE	21
IV.	PETERKIN'S APPETITE	25
V.	PETERKIN'S COOKING	29
VI.	AN HOUR OF STORM	32
VII.	PETERKIN ESCAPES	35
VIII.	PETERKIN IN THE VALLEY	39
IX.	PETERKIN TAKES A FALL	43
X.	PETERKIN IN THE PALACE	47
XI.	PETERKIN TELLS HIS TALE	51
XII.	PETERKIN'S FATE	55

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CHAPTER		PAGE
XIII.	THE TOOTHLESS ENEMY	59
XIV.	PETERKIN'S RESCUE	64
XV.	THE WATER OF BOUNCEABILITY	69
XVI.	THE VALE OF THE BLIND	74
XVII.	PETERKIN PROMISES	79
XVIII.	THE VALLEY OF SILENCE	83
XIX.	EARS TOO SHARP	87
XX.	THE VALLEY OF DANCING LEGS	92
XXI.	THE VALLEY OF UP-IN-THE-AIR	97
XXII.	PETERKIN IN A MUDDLE	101
XXIII.	THE LOST PUMPERKIN	104
XXIV.	OUT OF HIDING	108
XXV.	A PRECIOUS PRISONER	112
XXVI.	THE VILLAIN'S STORY	116
XXVII.	IN THE CITY	121
XXVIII.	HOW PETERKIN TRICKED THEM ALL	125
XXIX.	PETERKIN BRINGS JOY	130
XXX.	VALLEY TO VALLEY	135
XXXI.	THE PATIENT PRINCESS	139
XXXII.	THE VILLAIN SATISFIED	143
XXXIII.	THE GLORIOUS ENDING	148

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LIST OF COLORED PLATES

"Inside his Pumperkin house"	*Frontispiece*
	PAGE
"An early morning peek"	21
"Then it grew darker than midnight"	32
"So they sat themselves on the flying sea-shell" . . .	43
" 'Take him away!' ordered the King"	55
"The whole leap took but a moment"	69
"A young peasant girl came toward him"	83
"There came floating toward him in midair"	97
"The windows in the palace were gleaming"	108
"She strained her eyes to watch the distant harbor" . .	121
"He jumped upon his shoulders"	135
"Where was it bound? Haven't you guessed?" . . .	148

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To Robert Stuart Marquis

ONE day old—
And all your life ahead of you!
How I wish that plodding I
Could be there instead of you!

Tops and toys and picture books;
Sliding ponds and summer brooks;
Birds among the tree-tops green;
Flowers thrusting to be seen—
And about you, like a charm
To protect you, Mother's arm. . . .

Just one day——
And thousands more to come to you!
How the chirrupy old crickets
Of the hearth will hum to you!

All the things that brightest gleam
In a mother's brightest dream:
Sunshine that is free from rain,
Laughter that is free from pain;
Faith and glory, love and hope
Lie along your life's long slope. . . .

One day old—
While within your cradle, you
Smile to think of all the things
Life will freely ladle you!

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HERE is the story of Peterkin Pumperkin,
Lived in a patch, and afraid of a bumperkin.
The wind came along with a jig and a jumperkin—
When Peterkin stopped, he was all in a lumperkin.

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I

PETERKIN PUMPERKIN

I KNOW you have all heard of the little man who lived inside a pumpkin. Just why he lived there I don't ex-

actly remember, but I can't imagine that he used to sleep so comfortably inside his tiny bowl of a bedroom.

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For, when the growly wind took to blowing over the pumpkin patch and set the fat yellow balls of pumpkins swaying from this side to that on their slender vines, poor Peterkin would be jounced clear out of bed and sent spinning round and round the circled pumpkin wall.

"Ugh, ouch!" he would groan. "My poor head's all bumps and bruises. Ugh, ugh! Why in the name of everything foolish did I ever come to live in a pumpkin? Why didn't I stay in a sensible house, and live like other folks live? Oh, ouch!" And then, as the wind gave one last roar and his jouncing little home gave one last, extra large somersault on its vine, Peterkin would usually find himself thwacked back into bed again, with his feet on the pillow and his head buried deep in the mattress.

The wind, of course, thought it the greatest fun in the world. The wind was only a jolly playmate, after all—even if he was a bit too rough about it. And the wind could never understand what made Peterkin so angry in the matter.

"Whee! I love to play free and frolic! I love to send the little leaves whirling and the dust mounds swirling, and the heavy laden pine-boughs tossing with sighs. I love to chase the thin gray wisps of mist and the spattering rain-drops as they fall, and to rattle the frosted window panes. Whee!

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I'm sure I'm more than gentle with Peterkin Pumperkin. I always take care not to snap his anchor stem! I always leave him fast upon his vine. Whee, whiz!"

But then there came a night when myriad snowflakes were falling over the patch. It was more than the mischievous wind could stand. He *must* get in among those flakes! He *must* make them jig and dart and dive in crooked merriment!

He rushed down upon them, charging with a trumpet's roar. And in his wild path he rolled the clumsy pumpkins to this side and that, until their rumble fairly shook the earth.

Poor Peterkin was dozing at his tiny stove, just then—for it was very chilly and shivery inside his Pumperkin house. Whee! whistled the wind. Whee! it shrieked, right over his head.

Then, suddenly, the terrible thing happened! The thing that Peterkin had feared so many years! SNAP! went the stem of Peterkin's Pumperkin—off the vine, out of the patch—free, anchorless, guideless! And away and away rolled the pumpkin house—down the bumpy field, across the ditch, through the brook, to the top of a steep hill. Then away and away, down, down, down, went Peterkin and his Pumperkin—over and over in swift, dizzy tumbles. Head up, feet down, head down, feet up—down, down, down! Then up

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another hill. Up, up, to its top, with poor Peterkin turning an unwilling somersault at every yard!

But, oh, at the top of this hill is a precipice—and beyond it, miles below, is the sea. Ah, what will happen now to Peterkin? His pumpkin house reaches the edge of the precipice, seems to linger for a short moment, then shoots far out and down, down into the sea! It sinks beneath the waves, then slowly bobs up again, sinks again, comes up again and floats peacefully away with the tide.

And now, with this strange happening, begin the marvellous adventures of Peterkin in his Pumperkin! Let's hope that in the next of them the wind, that merry playfellow, will try to be more gentle.

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II

PETERKIN AFLOAT

WHEN last we heard of Peterkin—do you remember?—he was afloat on the waves in his pumpkin house. And sailing swiftly out to sea!

Peterkin, as soon as he had gained his breath, climbed out of the tangle of bed-clothes and furniture which his sudden fall had thrown over and all about him. Then he pinched himself in every limb, and was glad to find everything whole and sound.

"Whew!" he gasped. "That *was* an escape! To think of landing in the sea!"

He pulled his little ladder out from under a tumble of pots

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and pans and bric-a-brac and blankets, and set it up against the wall. Then up he clambered, step by step, until he had poked his head through the hole, in the Pumperkin's top, which served for a door and a window and ceiling, all at the same time. It gave him just a glimpse of the open air and the wide stretch of sea on every hand. Waves—blue, choppy, hopping waves, as far as Peterkin could see . . . nothing but waves!

Well, there was nothing for it but to go back into his house and sit by the stove and begin to cry. Not that crying could help matters any—but Peterkin was sad at all these sudden happenings, and somehow his tears did make him feel a little better.

"Boohoo!" wept he. "It's all the fault of the wicked wind! One moment I was safe and dozing at home in my old pumpkin patch; the next, here I am bobbing and lost on the face of the ocean. The only thing I have to be thankful for is that there's still a warm fire in my stove. Boohoo!"

And oh, the saddest part of it all is that he wept so hard, and so many of his tears spilled down into the stove that—what did he do but put the fire out! And soon enough his pumpkin house grew cold and cheerless and wet with the briny waves which came dashing in through the door-window-ceiling.

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It was a dreary party now. Peterkin felt his yellow ball of a boat leap and fall with every wave. Everything rattled and jingled to the see-saw motion. He grew dizzy. He could scarcely steady himself to climb up the ladder a second

time. He could hardly see the white froth at the crests of the waves and the deep green of their troughs. He made out a ship passing by, miles and miles away. He screamed and waved his coat and whistled between two fingers—did everything he could think of to make the sailors see and save him. But the ship sailed on and away, until the white specks of its sails had faded from view.

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Night came on, gray and then blue, and the waves never tired of their ceaseless jigging. Peterkin crouched on the floor of his Pumperkin and thought of the fate which awaited him, and worried himself into a troubled sleep. Many times during the long, dark hours he woke up with a start, and, through the hole in the house-top, caught a glimpse of the stars and a smack of the salt spray. The last time he awoke, the stars had been swallowed up in the graying sky by a streak of glowing red, and Peterkin knew it was the dawn.

Later, when the sunshine came straggling into his shell on the drops of glistening spray, he climbed his ladder for an early morning peek. White mists were rolling back across the waves, and . . . oh! what was that?

Not a hundred yards away, a thin fountain, shimmering like silver, rose up out of the green of the sea and curved down again upon it. Again it came—and again! Up, up—fifty feet into the air, a gleaming fountain! And then, as it came nearer and nearer, Peterkin caught the glimpse of a black fin . . . and a huge jaw!

Ugh! What could it be?

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"An early morning peek"

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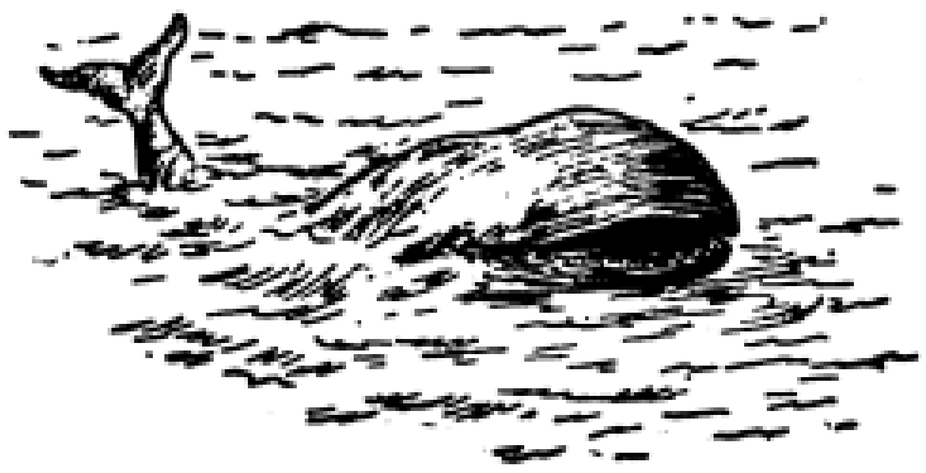
III

PETERKIN AND THE WHALE



A WHALE! Yes, it was a big, black, hungry whale! And it was drawing closer and closer to Peterkin's pumpkin boat every time he blinked.

Peterkin could see its forked tail now and its great, darkly gleaming sides. Once it disappeared completely under the foam, and when it rose again, it was so near that Peterkin saw its ugly little eyes and a white row of jagged teeth. Whenever it flashed its tail and fins, there was a great churning of water, and the Pumperkin would roll and rock so fiercely that it almost dumped its poor owner into the ocean.

The whale, I'm sure, did not know what to make of it. The

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whale was used to boats, of course—but boats with sails and pointed prows and sailors in the rigging. While here was something round and fat, and such a golden yellow! No bow it had, nor stern, nor sails, nor flags, nor rudder. "Is it really and truly a boat?" thought the whale. Well, this would have to be looked into very closely!

So the big whale came puffing and fountaining up to the little Pumperkin.

"Oh, oh," it sighed, "what a pretty thing to frisk with! Just like a play-toy! Here's where I have my day's fun!" And with that it dived deep under the pumpkin boat and came up on the other side. "Haw, haw," it chuckled—as only a whale can chuckle—"what bully good sport! Just to look at that little man who is peeking out over the side of this yellow ball! Just to see how surprised he looks to find me over here, where he didn't expect me to be! Haw, haw!" And the whale gave another frolicsome wiggle to his tail—nearly upsetting the Pumperkin again.

As for Peterkin, he was chattering with fear. He did not know what was coming next! Perhaps the whale was about to swallow him for breakfast. Yes, yes, it was surely up to some mischief, was this black whale. For it had disappeared again. Oh, what now?

True, the playful whale had taken another dive under the

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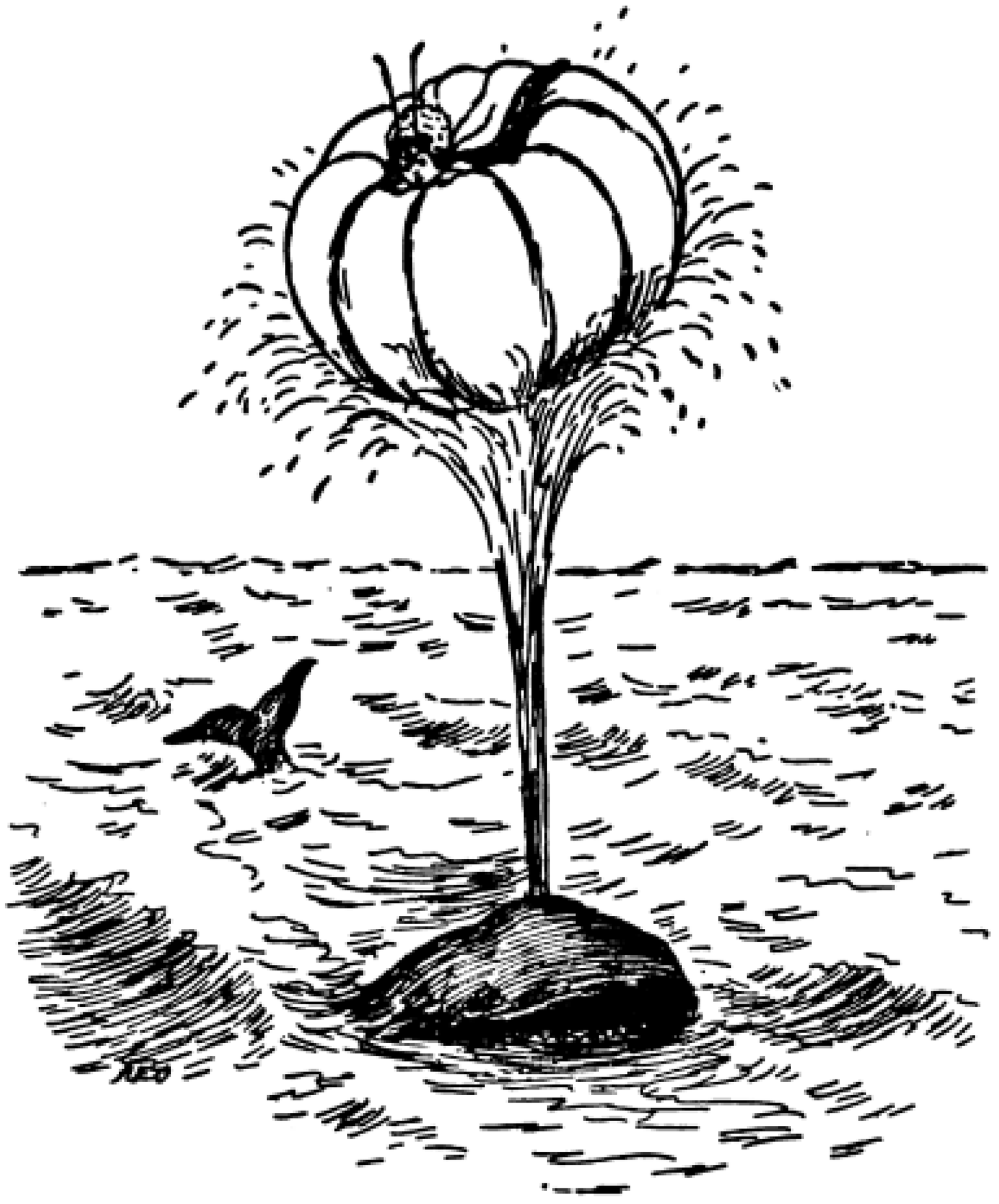
bottom of the pumpkin. But it didn't bother to come up on the other side. It just stayed there under water, directly beneath the Pumperkin.



"Haw, I wonder what would happen if I should squirt my fountain into the air?" thought the whale—and being a whale, it had to take a long while to think it over. In the

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dreadful pause, Peterkin trembled so hard that his stove and his bed and all the furniture took to rattling, too.

Then, suddenly, the Pumperkin, Peterkin and all, shot fifty feet high into the air! Up, up, like a bubble at the top of a mighty geyser, it rose with the stream of the whale's fountain. For the wink of an eye, it seemed to hang there—then down it came again—down with a spatter and splash into the trough of the sea!

Peterkin could stand it no longer. He screamed aloud—with such a scream as the whale had never heard. It was a scream to make every fish in the sea shudder along its fins.

"Oh, dear me!" sighed the whale, "I have made an enemy. I've been hurting somebody's feelings, I fear. I should have been very glad to make a breakfast of that little man and his yellow bubble, if only he hadn't minded and had acted cheerfully about it. But now, since he's so cross and cranky, I shall punish him by going away and never looking at him again. So there!"

Which was just what the big whale did. And it never could understand why the little man clapped his hands and laughed with delight when he saw it dwindle away into the waves of the distance.

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IV

PETERKIN'S APPETITE

NOW all this while poor Peterkin had not had a single bit to eat. Not a dry biscuit even. And as for a whole meal, why—that was out of the question. For wasn't his stove drearily cold? And the eggs in his basket all crushed by the many falls his Pumperkin had taken?

And he was hungry. So would you be, if you had gone so long without a meal—and Peterkin, for all he lived in a pumpkin, was not so far different from you. He sat and listened to the slap of the waves upon the bottom of his round yellow boat and rubbed his empty stomach mournfully.

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Suddenly, the Pumperkin gave a lurch and a fling upward. Then again and again! Oh, what was it now? Another whale? Peterkin rushed up his ladder, and . . . oh, it was *land!*

Yes, directly ahead of him, the waves were combing into a high, frothy surf thundering down upon a stretch of yellow sands. Behind that, he could see tall trees spreading their broad palm leaves in tufts of brightest green; and a low hill of glistening rock, where purple flowers clung and orange-leaved vines were twining.

"Land!" cried Peterkin in rapture. "Land at last!"

Sure enough, the pumpkin boat gave a last leap in the swirl of the surf and came down on something firm and grating. It was safe on the sands of the shore.

In a jiffy Peterkin had hauled up his ladder and let it down on the other side. Then down he climbed, waded swiftly through the foamy edge of spume and dashed up on the beach. Before he did another thing, he danced a jig—which was Peterkin's way of showing how happy and thankful he was. So you may be sure it was a very merry jig he danced!

Then he went wisely back and pushed and pulled at his Pumperkin until it was high and dry upon the shore. Next he lifted his cold stove out and set it in a dark little cave of

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the rocks, where the rain might never find it in stormy weather.

"But a lot of good my stove will be to me if I cannot find something to cook on it!" thought hungry Peterkin.

So he searched the length of yellow sand. But he found nothing there excepting a few empty shells, pink and gray, like the glow of a pearl. He searched the mosses under the palm trees—but only a few nuts had fallen from the tufts overhead, and these were so hard and so bitter that the taste

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of them puckered up his face with sour twists. He climbed the hill of glistening stone until he could see from its summit the tops of thousands and thousands more of just such trees—like so many green and waving feather dusters—a whole forestful, swaying to the horizon's boundary.

And there at last, on the tip top of the rocks, he seized upon a handful of the purple flowers and another of the orange-leaved vine.

"If nothing else," he planned, "I shall make a dainty salad of flower and leaf and eat it from a plate of pearly sea-shell."

But alas! he was still to learn the evil of plucking strange things for salads!

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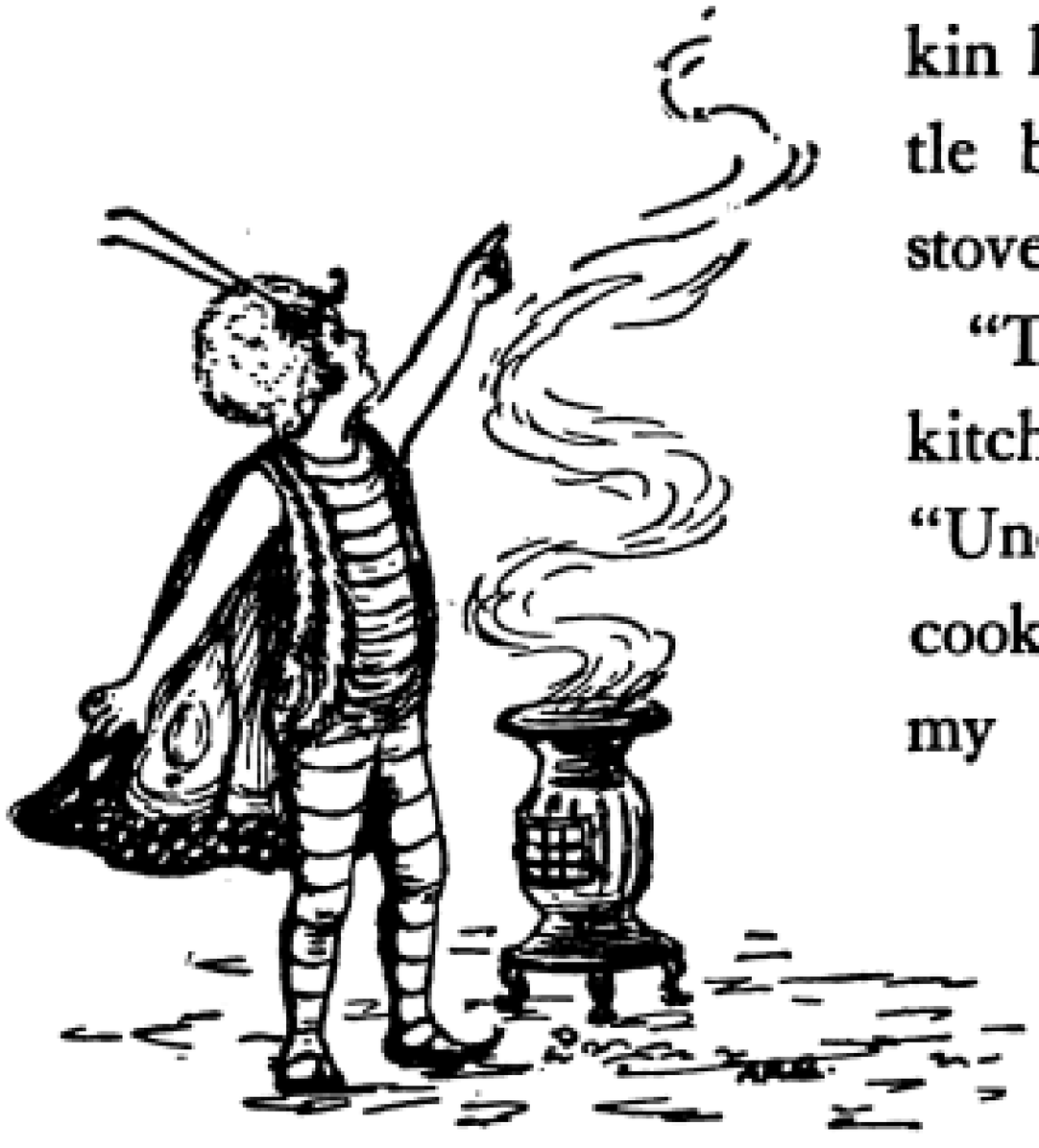
V

PETERKIN'S COOKING



HIS arms full of leaves and flowers, Peterkin hurried back to the little black cave, where his stove was in hiding.

"This cave shall be my kitchen," he told himself. "Under its shadow I shall cook my meals and brew my broths, and boil and broil and bake. . . . Only, I quite forgot, I have nothing to cook. Nothing but flowers and leaves."

He thought for a long while, and finally he decided that, instead of having just a cold and fragrant salad, he should heat them all up into a smoking stew. He should have a meal to warm the cockles of his heart.

But, when he had gathered the stalks of withered palm

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leaves and had crammed them into the cindery throat of his stove, he had to wait another little while before he could figure out just how to make a flame. At length he remembered having read the way to strike a spark with two pieces of sharp rock. So he snatched up a pair of stones and smashed them and crashed them against each other until the fiery sparks were darting down into the mouth of the stove—into the midst of the fuel. There was a sudden bursting into red flame, and the fire was started!

Then Peterkin—clever cook that he was—laid his purple flowers and his orange vines prettily within the cup of a sea-shell, and sprinkled them over with salt water of the surf. Then he laid shell and all upon the stove and waited for results.

Nor had he to wait so long. For, all in a twinkle, there was a monstrous pouf! Great billows of smoke, brown and

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lavender, gushed up from the heart of the sea-shell and spread themselves across the sky. There came a resounding crackle of flames . . . the whole shell, trailing its glowing mists behind it, rose up, up, above the tree-tops, into the clouds, and out of sight! It was gone, forever and aye.

For a long while poor Peterkin could scarcely realize all that had happened so much of a sudden. He stood staring up at the dwindling speck of the sea-shell and wondering . . . where could his meal have disappeared? And what must he do now for another?

"And I am so hungry, too," he sighed. "Not a bite to eat since I and my Pumperkin left the patch. Well, there's nothing for it but that I begin to search through the whole forest of green palms. Perhaps I shall find a scarlet cockatoo, or a yellow-tailed dove, to carry back with me for dinner."

But, indeed, he felt so weak from want of food that he could scarcely stand. He lay down on the sunny stretch of the sands and half closed his eyes. He could see, in a blur, that the low line where the sea and the sky met, far away, was smothered in black clouds—and that little streaks of angry red seemed to be flashing in the black. He asked himself, drowsily, was this a storm approaching? Was it a hurricane, or what. . . . And then, before he had time to answer himself, he fell asleep.

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VI

AN HOUR OF STORM

PETERKIN woke up with a start. Something was roaring in his ears. A rushing shower of sand stung his cheeks. The wind was shrieking behind him, across the low hill and in among the palm trees. At his feet, the waves of the surf were hammering down upon the beach in great, black, frothing mountains, until the earth itself seemed trembling. The air was cold and swept across his face in fresh, tossing gusts.

He jumped to his feet and ran. He was afraid of something—he did not know what. He ran, stumbling, to the crest of the hill. He could look out, now, across the sea of gray waves on one side and the sea of green tree-tops on

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"Then it grew darker than midnight"

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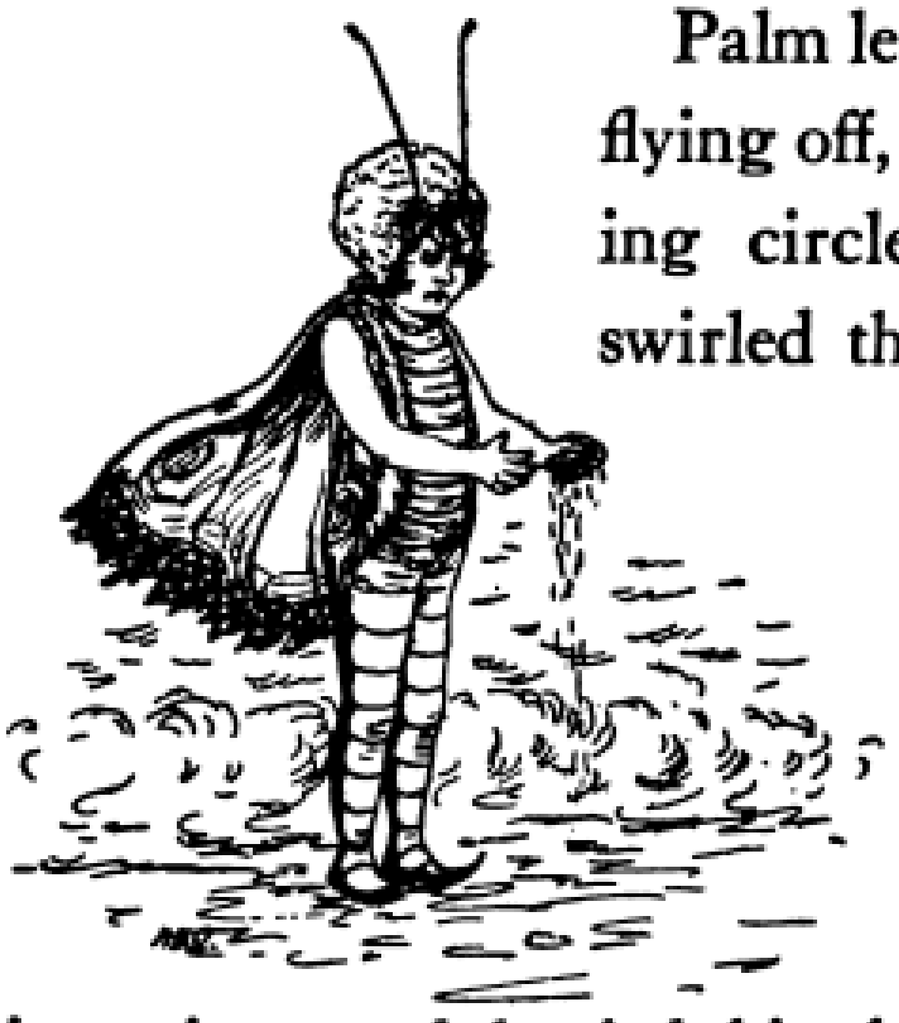
the other. Above him the sky was a mass of heavy, darkening clouds, a field of clashing, rumbling shadows. Every little while it would cleave apart, and down to the sea would spin the forks of blinding lightning in jagged craziness. Then all heaven and earth would mutter and roar and take to trembling.



Palm leaves, torn from the trees, went flying off, high overhead, in somersaulting circles. Eddies of golden sand swirled the length of the shore. The wind, heavy with salt spray, wailed louder and louder.

Then it grew darker than midnight. Peterkin could see nothing now. He knelt among the snapping, creaking vines and buried his face against the beaten-down flowers.

The rain began. A few warm, pattering drops at first—then a sudden heavy downpour, streaming and cold. The vines were floating with drooping leaves upon a lake of rain, and the little flowers disappeared completely. The beach below was guttered with brown water.

Gradually then the rain began to lessen. The clouds

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turned a lighter gray, until they broke apart in a long, uneven rift and showed a gap of blue. The sunshine came through this gap in a softly beaming shaft. High against the dark hung a curving rainbow, like an arch of jewels.

The rainbow faded, the sunshine grew stronger and more golden, the last wisps of cloud sank away in the blue of the sky. The sea was calm now and blue. Nothing seemed to be moving upon it excepting the tiny darts of gleaming sunbeams. All was peace again. . . .

Only—something—far out at sea—Oh! what was it? Something round and yellow! A tiny yellow spot, sailing out, out toward the horizon!

Peterkin looked down at the shore, his heart jumping into his throat. Yes, alas! His Pumperkin was gone! His pumpkin-house had been swept away by the storm—swept out to sea!

Yes, his house, his boat, his darling Pumperkin was sailing away from him—was lost and gone! Ah, what would his fate be now?

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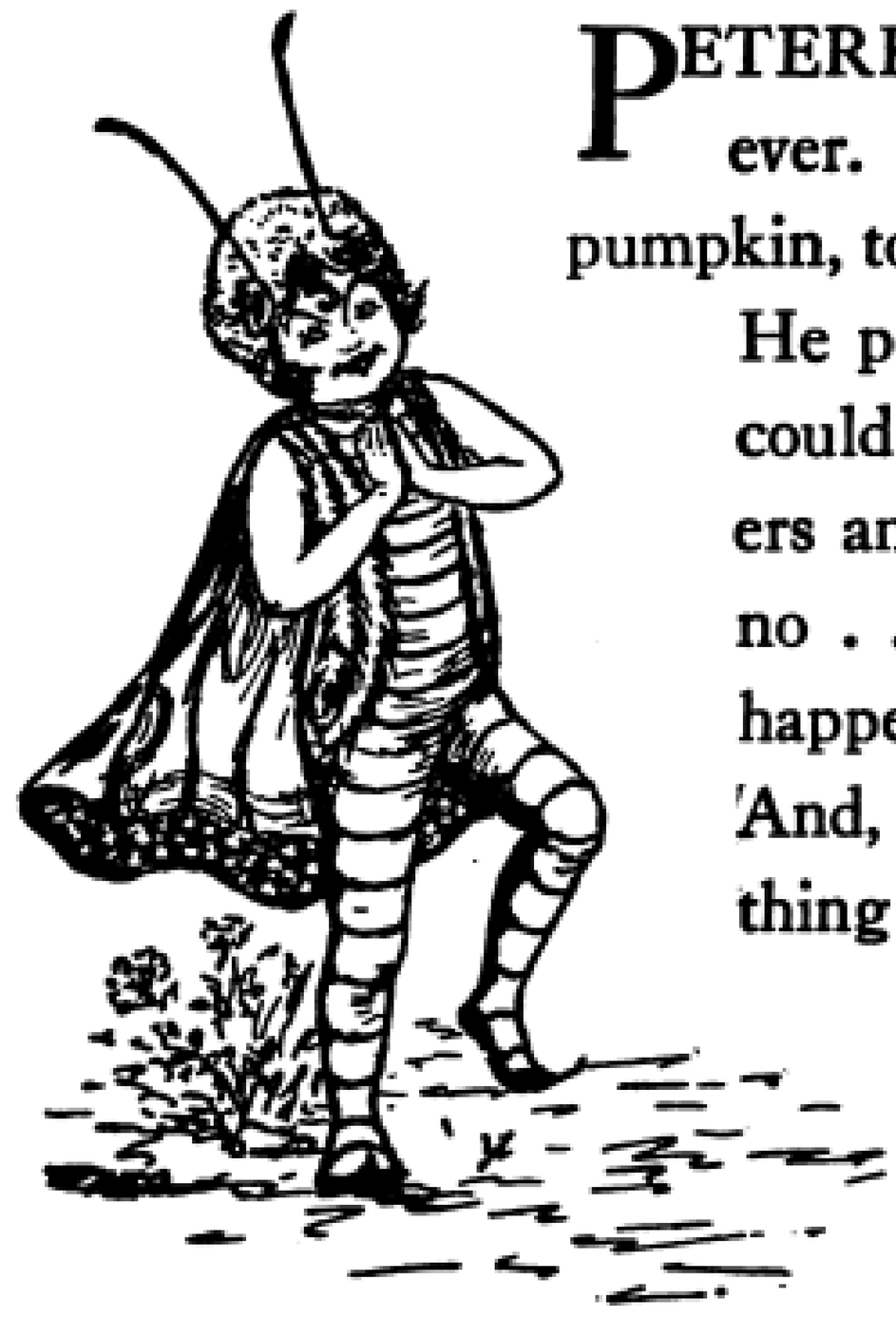
VII

PETERKIN ESCAPES



PETERKIN was hungrier than ever. He had lost his faithful pumpkin, too! Oh, what could he do?

He pondered a long while. He could try to cook some more flowers and vines on his stove. But, no . . . he remembered what had happened the last time he tried. And, it seemed, there wasn't anything else to eat on all the shore.

He must escape, then. He must flee this lonely beach. He must wander away to somewhere . . . he didn't know where—just somewhere else.

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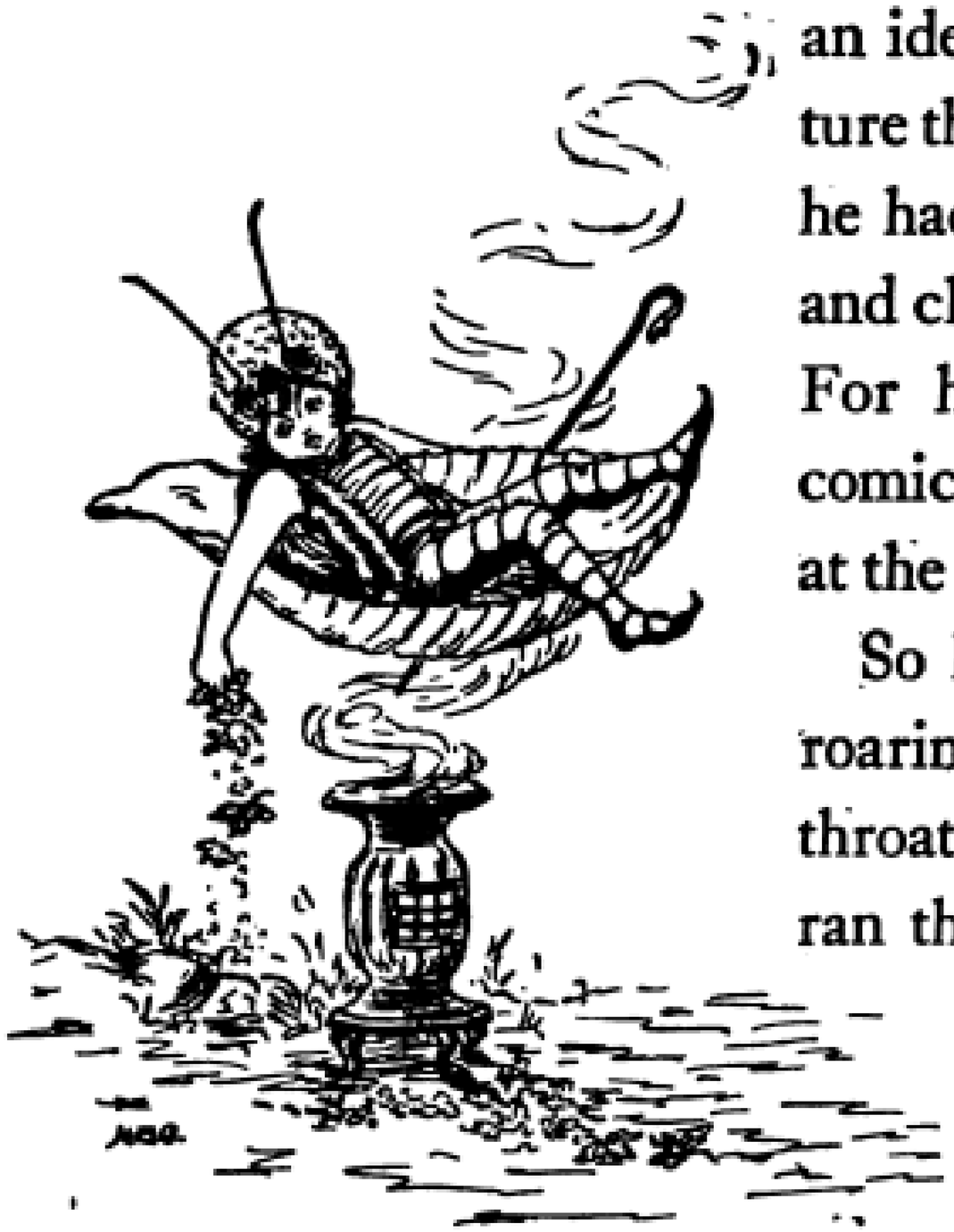
But how? For he had no Pumperkin now. His yellow house of a boat had been swept off on the waves, out beyond the horizon. At last, as he stood in deep thought, a merry idea came popping into his head. Indeed, it was an idea so full of mad adventure that, when it came to him, he had to burst out laughing and clapped his hands in glee. For he remembered what a comical thing had happened at the stove an hour before.



So he hastened to kindle a roaring fire in the black iron throat of its oven. Then he ran this way and that on the beach until, half sunk in the sands, he found a huge, pearly sea-shell. He tore it out and carried it back and set it on the stove. To make sure, he added a sprinkling of vines and flowers and silver sea froth. Then he climbed up on the top of his stove and sat himself down in the cup of the shell. Ouch! it was hot!

Just as before, there was a little curl of lavender smoke,

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a little shivering and rocking—then POUF! Up went shell and Peterkin and all!

Up, up, sailing up! Peterkin, clutching madly at the sharp sides of the shell, could feel the rush of wind against his face. He dared not look down, but he knew that the shore and all the wide-spread trees upon it were growing smaller and more distant. Something gray and filmy spun over his eyes; like a silken veil. He was in the clouds. Up, up, into the sunny blue again, where he could see the clouds below him now in great lazy billows. Up, up, always up!

Once the fragile shell groaned, as if it would give way into shatters and send its rider hurtling toward the hidden earth. Once it bumped against the great black, cindery side of a dead star and nearly turned topsy-turvy. Once its pearly lining cracked dangerously under the heated blaze of the nearby sun.

Now the flying shell and its rider were floating forward. And down, too. Down in a slow, curving line of grace—slowly, slowly down and forward, through the clouds and below them. Peterkin could see the high hills of a strange country now—a country where all the fields were yellow with grain, set in quaint squares like a checker board, and all the hills were soft with the green of pines. A silver thread of a river ran through the middle of the valley, and

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Peterkin could make out now the twinkling red roofs of cottages. It was the most peaceful scene he had ever come upon.

"Oh, how I wish I were there!" he sighed.

Which no sooner uttered than down dived his sea-shell straight upon the soft breast of a yellow haystack. Deep into the hay it landed, with never a bump or a scrape. Peterkin was safe in the valley.

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VIII

PETERKIN IN THE VALLEY

AN old farmer came hobbling out of his house, along the little path that ran to the edge of the haystack. His mouth was wide open, and his eyes well-nigh popped from his head at the sight of so strange a fellow in his haystack.

"Heigh!" cried the farmer, "what are you doing in my stack, eh? And what's that silly, pearly thing you have at your side? What are you doing in this peaceful valley, eh?"

"I'm flying," replied Peterkin, climbing down to the ground. "I've flown from there to here, from the earth

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to the stars, from the moon to the sun . . . and here I am, hungry as hungry can be. So come along, old farmerman, and feed me full of all the best things of your cupboard."

"Not I!" cried the toothless old farmer. "Not until you tell me your whole story."

So they sat themselves down in the shade of a blossoming tree, and Peterkin told the tale of his adventures; of how he had lived in the pumpkin patch, and the wind had swept him away, in his pumpkin house, far upon the sea; and of

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the storms and the frisky whale, and the desert shore, and the loss of Pumperkin, and of how he made his final escape in the cup of the flying shell . . . and here he was!

The old farmer listened, with growing wonder. He could only shake his head and lick his toothless gums with his long tongue and say, "Tut, tut, what a queer affair! Tut, tut, tut!"

Then he scratched himself very long and hard, and broke into a red-faced chuckling. It was plain to see he had just had a new, sly thought!

"I've never seen a shell," said he, "because I've never seen the sea. The sea is so far away from here . . . it doesn't touch our little valley at all. The thunder of its waves never comes to our ears, and the sting of its spray never flicks us. Perhaps that's why we're called the *peaceful* valley. We never mind anything excepting our own business, nor care for anyone who dwells outside the boundary of our hills. Tut, tut!" And he sighed.

"And yet, for all your happy valley," declared Peterkin, "you seem to be sighing unhappily for something. Tell me, what is it?"

"A new set of teeth," wept the old fellow. "That's what I need. I lost my old set—oh, so many years ago. And there's no place to find a new one in all the valley."

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"Ho, ho, that's easily fixed," laughed Peterkin. "You shall come with me on my sea-shell, up into the sky, over the hills, until we reach some huge and busy city. I have no doubt of it—you may find a new set of teeth there."

Now, that was just what the old farmer was wanting. When he heard this generous offer, he wasted no time, but ran to sit himself on the shell.

"But, ho, what about my reward?" said Peterkin. "Not so fast, please. First you must feed me a fine meal—a meal to take away all my two days' hunger and to make me fat and glad."

"Agreed!" cried the farmer.

So he took the starving Peterkin into his house and set before him a whole tableful of dishes: thick soups and red, juicy meats and white slabs of fish from the brookside, and frothy-leaved salads, ripening fruits . . . and a whole mountain of desserts. Peterkin did not know where to begin, and having once begun, did not know where to end. The result was that he ate the whole tableful, from the first soup to the last dessert.

But little did he guess what a wicked trick his appetite had played him.

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
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"So they sat themselves on the flying sea-shell"

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IX

PETERKIN TAKES A FALL

NO sooner had Peterkin satisfied his hunger and wiped his mouth than the old farmer fussed and fidgeted to start on their journey. Peterkin couldn't understand why he was in such a hurry — but then Peterkin had a full set of teeth, while the farmer had none. And it was in search of a new set that they were going.

So they sat themselves on the flying sea-shell and were off and away.

But it was strange what a creaking and groaning came from the faithful shell. True, it went up, up, as high as ever before; but it went so slowly and by such rickety

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jumps and bounds, as if its wings were lamed. The old farmer was almost jounced completely off his seat ten times. His long gray beard was tousling over his eyes in the helter-skelter rush of the wind. He well-nigh died of fright.

Peterkin, too, was afraid. Not that he wasn't accustomed, by now, to this skimming through the clouds. But something was wrong . . . yes, something was certainly wrong. His sea-shell had never acted this way before. Oh, listen! It was groaning and grunting now, louder than ever. Peterkin thought he could even hear a sharp cracking of its pearly cup. Suppose that it should break!

He looked down, sick at heart! Through the cloud rifts he could see that they were passing over a great, white line of mountain tops. Like glistening needles they seemed, as he gazed down upon them. The sunlight glanced dazzlingly along their snowy sides. Peterkin shuddered and turned his eyes away.

"Oh, oh, look again!" chattered the toothless old farmer. "We are past the mountains now. We are well above a brand-new valley, where a rushing river tumbles and froths, and oh, look . . . over there are the spires and roofs of a city. Gray and silver they are, all gleaming and tall. And we are flying straight toward them. Hurrah, now I shall get me a new set of teeth!"

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But long ere they reached the city, the sea-shell began to crack and split, and to wabble from side to side. Once it dipped so far that both of its passengers were almost tossed off into the air. The farmer clung fast to Peterkin and Peterkin to the shell—and both of them gasped in horror.

"Oh, we are too heavy a load," sobbed Peterkin. "I should never have taken you along with me."

"It's not my fault!" stormed the old fellow. "It's you who are so heavy. You ate and ate until you weigh more than four fat men should weigh. 'Twas your appetite that

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will kill us both"—and he sucked his toothless gums in rage.

"Ungrateful man!" cried Peterkin. "I am risking my life to make you happy."

"Yes," retorted the other, "and I am losing mine because you were so greedy!"

Therewith they fell to in wrath and cuffed each other and tore and tussled, swaying to this side and that and jouncing up and down in mighty thwacks.

"Out with you—out of the shell!" screamed the old farmer. And with that he seized poor Peterkin under the arms, and—for all he was so heavy—hurled him out into the air and down, down, down . . .

The sea-shell, lightened of the heavier part of its load, shot up higher into the air. Then suddenly, with a noise like the crack o' doom, it burst into many pearly pieces. The farmer shot down, too, as if from a gun. And down he came close behind Peterkin . . . and landed, with a fearful splash, into a fountain in the center of the market place.

As for Peterkin himself, you never could guess where he landed.

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X

PETERKIN IN THE PALACE

THROUGH an open skylight of the gilded dome of the palace. That's where Peterkin landed. Through the open skylight, upon a springy, cushiony sofa. Up he bounced again, almost to the ceiling—then down to the marble floor in a huddle. He lay there stunned and silent for a little while, aching in every limb.

A little lady stood over him when he opened his eyes. She was peering down at him with a white and frightened face—and Peterkin, for all his dizziness, thought he had never seen so beautiful a maiden in the world. For her startled eyes were blue—as blue as the sky had been, above

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the clouds—and her curls were a golden shawl upon her shoulders. Under the white of her lace and cambric gown, her little bare feet came peeping.

Peterkin leaped to his feet, as best he could—for he was sore and stiff. He made a handsome bow and smiled his

prettiest smile, with his hand over his heart, as if he were the gallant master of a dancing school. But this only made the little lady's eyes open the wider with surprise.

"And who are you? And where do you come from? And what do you want in the bed-chamber of her Royal Highness, the Princess Clematis of the Four Kingdoms?"

Peterkin was horrified. "Gracious me!" he stammered. "Where is her Royal Highness Whatever-you-called-her? I must apologize to her for bursting into her father's palace so suddenly. Indeed, had I been able to, I should have

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walked in very humbly by way of the kitchen door or through the garden gate. But, don't you see, I came so fast that I didn't have time to choose. So lead me to the princess and let me beg her pardon."

The little lady rubbed one set of pink toes over the other in a bashful fashion. Her laugh was as light as the rustle of green vines in the spring.

"You are pardoned, merry stranger," she said. "It is I, the Princess Clematis, who bid you welcome to the palace of the Four Kingdoms." Then she held out her hand.

Poor Peterkin! His face grew red with flushes. He sank to his knee—in spite of the big bruise on it—and planted a most courteous kiss upon her rosy finger tips. And, if the truth be told, the princess smiled a charming "how-do-you-do," and found it very easy to forgive him.

But just at that moment, there came a loud rapping at the door and a hubbub of angry voices and a clanking of swords and spears against the walls.

"Ho, hola!" thundered someone without. "Open the door and let me in! I shall find whoever dares to pop into my royal daughter's chamber, by way of the gilded dome. Ho, hola!"

At this, the little princess ran to fling open the door. And there, with a torch in his hand and a host of armed

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sentries behind him, stood His Majesty the King. Aye, no less a person than the monarch of the Four Kingdoms himself. Peterkin knew him at once by the jeweled crown which he wore atop his night-cap.

But before he could say a word, the little princess tripped to her father's side and commenced a sly tickling at his nightie, just where his royal ribs ought to be. And under his crown, the King was just a jolly old man after all. He tried very hard to purse his lips and frown—but under such gentle tickling, there was nothing for it but to burst into a great roaring of laughter. He laughed, laughed—until his eyes were wet and his sides were aching. All of which put him in a better mood and made him look more kindly upon his strange visitor. He clapped the frightened Peterkin upon the back and called him a merry dog, and ended by marching off with him, arm in arm, to the palace's spare bed-room to give him royal shelter for the night.

Thus it was that the princess, with a little wise tickling, saved a stranger's life and brought much joy to the Four Kingdoms. But you shall have all that explained another time.

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XI

PETERKIN TELLS HIS TALE

SO Peterkin went to bed in fine fashion. His couch was of cushioned velvet and his pillows of down and silk. Over his head were hangings of lustrous satin, with ostrich plumes and gilded crowns by way of ornament. And when he woke in the morning, several slaves were kneeling at the bedside, ready to bathe him and dress him and to do his slightest bidding.

"Ahem!" thought Peterkin. "I must admit that, after all, this is a better sort of thing than living in a pumpkin."

Just as soon as he was dressed in a princely robe of purple linen with gold clasps and jeweled collar, his slaves led

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Peterkin along a silvered hallway, where marble pillars gleamed with wreaths of precious stones, to a hall of gold. Here were a golden table and a host of golden chairs—

and behind each chair stood, waiting in respect, some member of the royal court in brilliant costume. No sooner had Peterkin stepped over the marble threshold than they set up a loud, wild cheering and waved their silken napkins to bid him welcome.

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He took his seat at their head, in a chair which stood upon a golden dais. Before him, in a glowing line, were platters of fruit, red-cheeked and orange and purple. The smell of fragrant dishes steaming came to his nostrils and sharpened his appetite. He seized a golden fork and reached toward a pyramid of hot, brown muffins . . . but oh, no! He was not to eat for a little while.

For, just at this moment, who should enter the dining hall but the little princess and the King himself! The King was in his robes of state: ermine and velvet and cloth of gold. As for the princess, she had given up her nightie for a gown of dainty blue on which a field of slender lilies was embroidered in pale silk. Her golden hair was in a braid now, with fluttering ribbons woven, like veins, amidst it. Peterkin's fork clattered down to the table at his first sight of her: he had no thought of food from then on.

There was a great bending of knees and bowing of heads of the courtiers and another round of cheers and fluttered napkins as His Majesty and his fair daughter entered. But where do you think they sat? Why, one of them at the right hand of Peterkin and the other at his left.

There was silence for many moments, during which the little princess lowered her blue eyes and pretended not to see that Peterkin, in the manner of all lovers, was staring

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eagerly at the rose of her cheeks and the bow of her little red lips. Oh, no! the princess saw nothing—but she was blushing, just the same.

"Hold!" said the King at length as he juggled a biscuit thoughtfully upon the end of his diamond-studded scepter. "We shall eat no morsel or a mouthful until we have heard your story, good stranger. So tell us it now. If it pleases us, you shall dwell in our midst, in all the pomp and comfort you have had this morning—and whatever you ask, for your happiness shall be ours." His Majesty shot a knowing smile at his lovely daughter. "But if your tale fails to please us, if it tells of cowardice instead of bravery, of weakness instead of strength—why, then, good stranger, you shall be driven out of our palace, out of the Four Kingdoms, with a tattered coat and an empty stomach—an exile in disgrace. So, hem your throat and purse your lips and make a good beginning of your tale."

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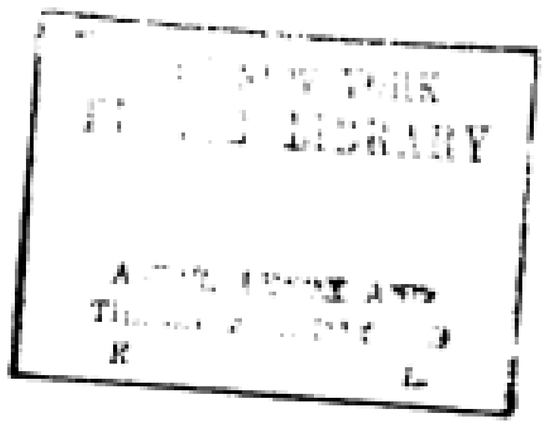
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"'Take him away!' ordered the King"

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XII

PETERKIN'S FATE

IT was an hour—a full and hungry hour—before Peterkin had told his tale. For he told to the King and his courtiers all of the strange happenings which had brought him floating from the pumpkin patch and flying in through the bed-room window. And, all the while he spoke, he could see the shadows of wrath grow darker on the brow of His Majesty and that the little princess's red mouth drooped sorrowfully. Peterkin faltered. He wondered what was wrong with his

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tale. How could it offend His Majesty? He went on slowly, until he came to the fearful experience he had had, in his flying shell, with the toothless old farmer.

The King could stand it no longer. He banged his scepter down so hard as to crack every butter-plate on the table. Up to his feet he sprang, his eyes flashing lightning.

"Yes," he rumbled, "yes, yes, yes! I might have guessed it! It was the arch enemy of our Four Kingdoms that you brought into our midst. Yes, yes, the Farmer Without Teeth! It is told in all our histories that he will work us harm. Every witch in the land has warned me to beware of him! And of you, too, you bothersome wayfarer! All the ancient history books have prophesied your coming. All of them described exactly how you would fly into my palace by way of the roof. This is just what they say:

"'Beware the daring little fellow
Who lives within a house of yellow;
He sails the sky in a skiff of pearl—
Through your window he will whirl.
He will bring what harm can do:
He will make you endless rue.'"

When they heard this fateful rhyme, all of the courtiers shuddered with terror. A little moan escaped from the lips of the princess. As for Peterkin, his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth.

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"Take him away!" ordered the King. "Away to the dungeon with him! And send out my royal army in search of the toothless farmer, that arch enemy of the Four Kingdoms. Away, to the deep, black dungeon!"

At once Peterkin was smothered in a great crowd of stalwart guards who bound him in heavy chains, who lifted him away and out of the banquet hall. The last thing he heard was the scream of the little princess.

Down, down, into the darkness of narrow cellars; down steep stairs of crumbling stone, where the air was damp and smelling of old mosses; down, still further down, they carried him. At last they came to a little iron door in a wall of black rock. There was a creaking of a rusty iron key in its lock, and a swinging of the little door on its stiff hinges.

"In with him!" cried the guards—and they tossed poor Peterkin, chains and all, into the furthermost corner of the cell. Then back went the door on its hinges, and creak, went the key in its lock. There was a faint sound of voices and footsteps dying in the distance . . . and Peterkin was alone!

A prisoner! Deep in the dark of the dungeon, he lay with his head in his hands and sobbed to think of what a fate had come to him. What a fine ending for his story!

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But then he remembered how the Princess Clem had screamed when he was snatched away—and he looked up and smiled. There was a tiny, barred window to his cell; and the sunlight came slanting through it in a narrow shaft, to make a little pool of brightness on the floor.

For the longest while did Peterkin lie looking at it; and dreamed, as all true lovers do, of what a pretty sight the princess was in her blue, lilied gown, and ribbons in her braid!

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XIII

THE TOOTHLESS ENEMY

WHILE Peterkin lay dreaming in the dungeon, the King and his guards were roaming the town in search of the toothless old farmer—that arch-enemy of the Four Kingdoms. But though they searched until the sun was low in the red west, they caught never a glimpse of him. He had found a secret hiding place which none could guess.

He had fallen, you remember, into the fountain of the market place. And what a splash it was! What a wetting!

Spluttering, dripping, he climbed out over the fountain's rim. With a trail of water streaming on the cobbled street behind him, he shambled along into the shadow of a door-

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way and stood there shivering and wringing his hands for many minutes. Then he wiped the water from his eyes and looked about him.

What had become of Peterkin he did not know—nor did he care. For Peterkin would be of no more use to him, now that he was in the King's city. He smiled a toothless smile to think of how completely he had fooled that little wayfarer. Never a hint had he given Peterkin of the wicked harm he meant to do to the Four Kingdoms—and of the sweet revenge that he would take! Hee, hee! and he gnashed his gums in hate.

He glanced over at the gilded dome of the palace. Strange lights were passing back and forth behind the darkened windows. Something had happened . . . the palace was astir! Ha, perhaps they had learned that he was come into their city. Perhaps they were setting out at once to find him and to pounce upon him. He had better flee somewhere and hide!

He started to step out into the street. Pit-a-pat, came someone's footsteps. A tall soldier, hurrying home to bed, clanked noisily 'round the corner. The old man fled back into the hallway, until his back hit against a door. The soldier went by, darting a suspicious glance into the shadow. The farmer crouched back, back, until . . .

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The door flew wide! He had broken it open!
The soldier, at the noise, stopped and looked about him

sharply, then retraced his steps. There was nothing for it!

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The old farmer plunged through the open door and slammed it shut behind him.

It was pitch black there. He groped and stumbled. His knee grazed against a step. He climbed . . . then another, and another and another, until he was at the head of a steep flight of stairs. Then another hallway, and another flight of stairs. His hands hit upon something straight and sharp. It was a ladder. Up this he went, too, a rung at a time, through a narrow hole in the ceiling.

A gust of wind caught him full in the face. Above him were the stars—and he knew that he had reached the roof. He crossed it on tiptoe, for fear of the crackle of the tiles under foot. A broken down, tumbled chimney stopped him at the edge. Clinging to its loosened bricks, he could peer down into the street and over the roofs of the houses of the neighborhood. On the other side, the lights had died away in the palace windows—and all was dark and still. Even the startled soldier had disappeared.

He lay down at the bottom of the chimney. Slowly he drifted off to sleep, shivering in his dampened clothes, and mumbling strange words between his gums.

All the next day he lay there, dozing in the heat of the sun upon the open roof. Every little while he raised himself on his elbow to look down into the street. He saw the

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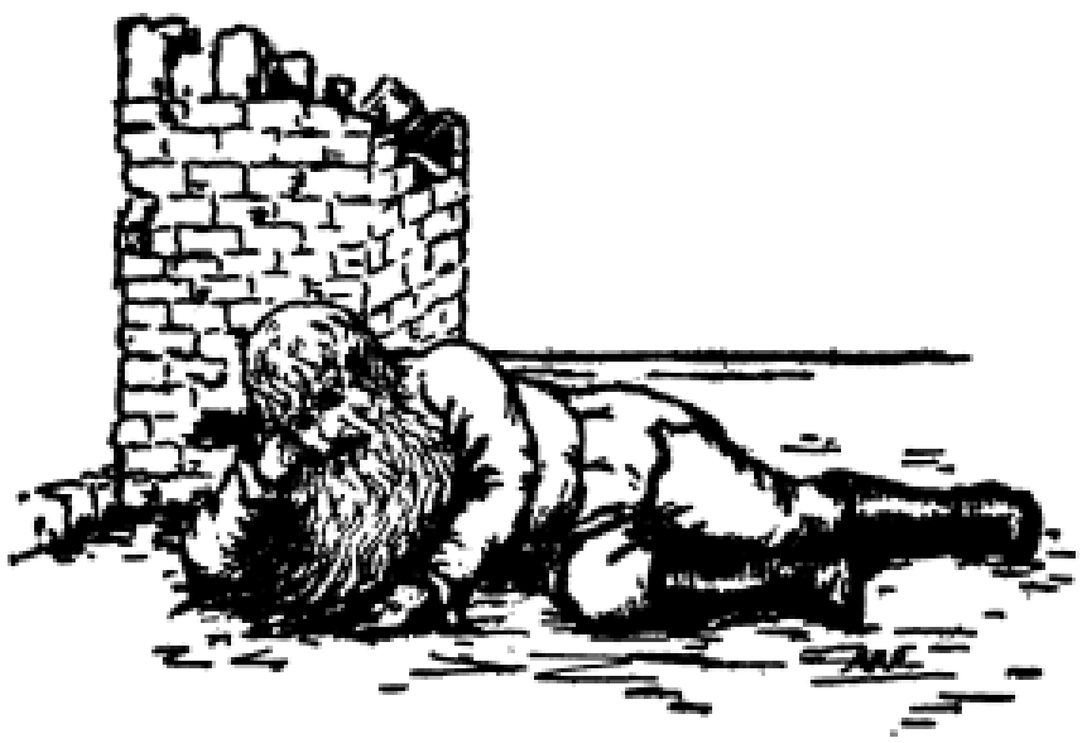
soldiers marching back and forth there, so tiny in size, and heard their faint shouts as they halted and searched each passerby.

So they were hunting for him, eh? Well, let them hunt! He would rest here against the chimney pots until the sun had set and the wisp of a new moon had risen . . . and then! Ah, then for mischief!



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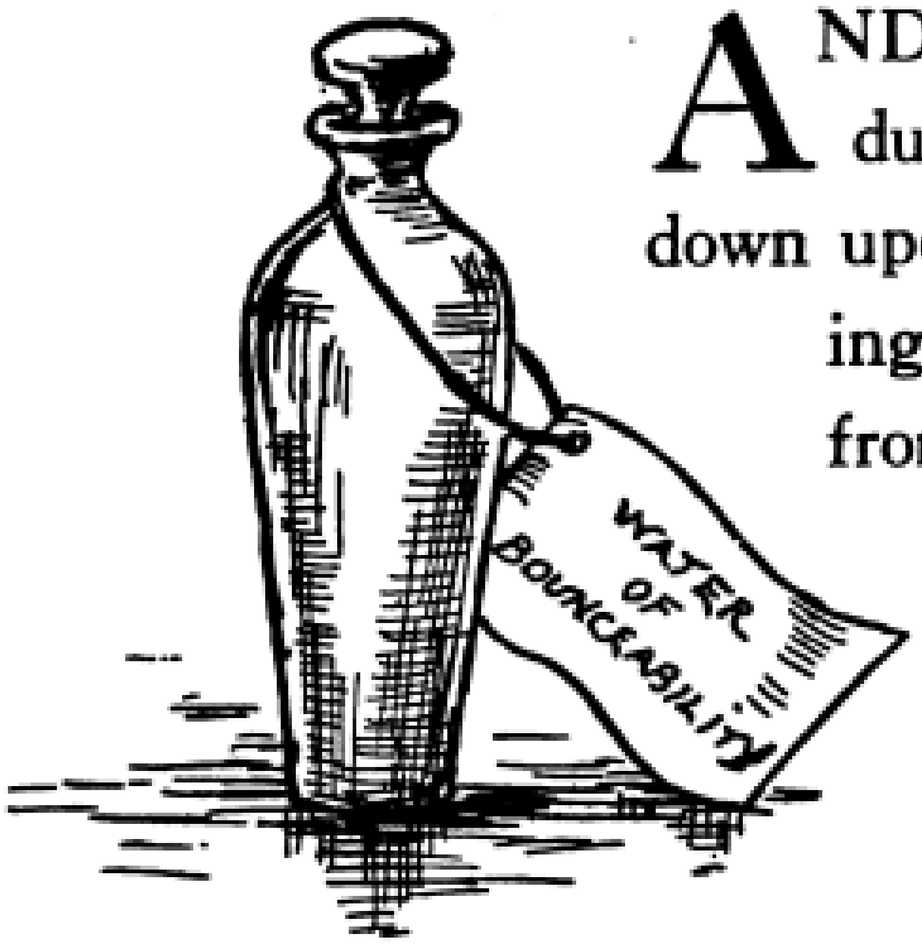
XIV

PETERKIN'S RESCUE



AND meanwhile Peterkin, in the dungeon deep, was lying face down upon the cold stone floor, trying his brave best to shut out from his head a thousand wild fears and torments which did not belong there. What if he should stay here in this dark cell for all his days? What if he should never again see the sunlight or hear the rustle of the trees? What should he do for food? And for drink?

He rose and walked up and down, up and down, across the little floor. He scanned each wall closely. No, there was no escape possible. The door was fast shut, and its

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iron bars firm. And the little window, through which the day was fading quickly, was higher, by far, than he could reach a-tiptoe. No, no escape!

The sky, through the window, was a little square of red now. Slowly it faded and grew dark. In the center of it a single star winked into view. Evening had come. And Peterkin must spend the night here, where the dew was gathering in gray, cobwebby streaks upon the chilly walls.

Then softly—as softly as the coming of the dew—there was a pitter-patter of light footsteps at the end of the hall. Someone was stealing down the mossy steps. Someone was approaching. He seized the bars with tightening fingers. His breath came fast. Yes, yes, it was——

The princess!

He could hardly see her in the darkness of the hall. He could scarcely recognize the blue of her gown and the glint of her golden hair. But he heard the jingle of many keys in her hand and the creak of the lock, as she tried each key . . . and failed!

"Oh, this one will open it," she whispered, each time. "Oh, this one must!"

Then, at last, she came to the last key in her hand. She thrust it into the hole: it fitted perfectly. She turned it—snap! The lock flew open. Peterkin hunched his back and

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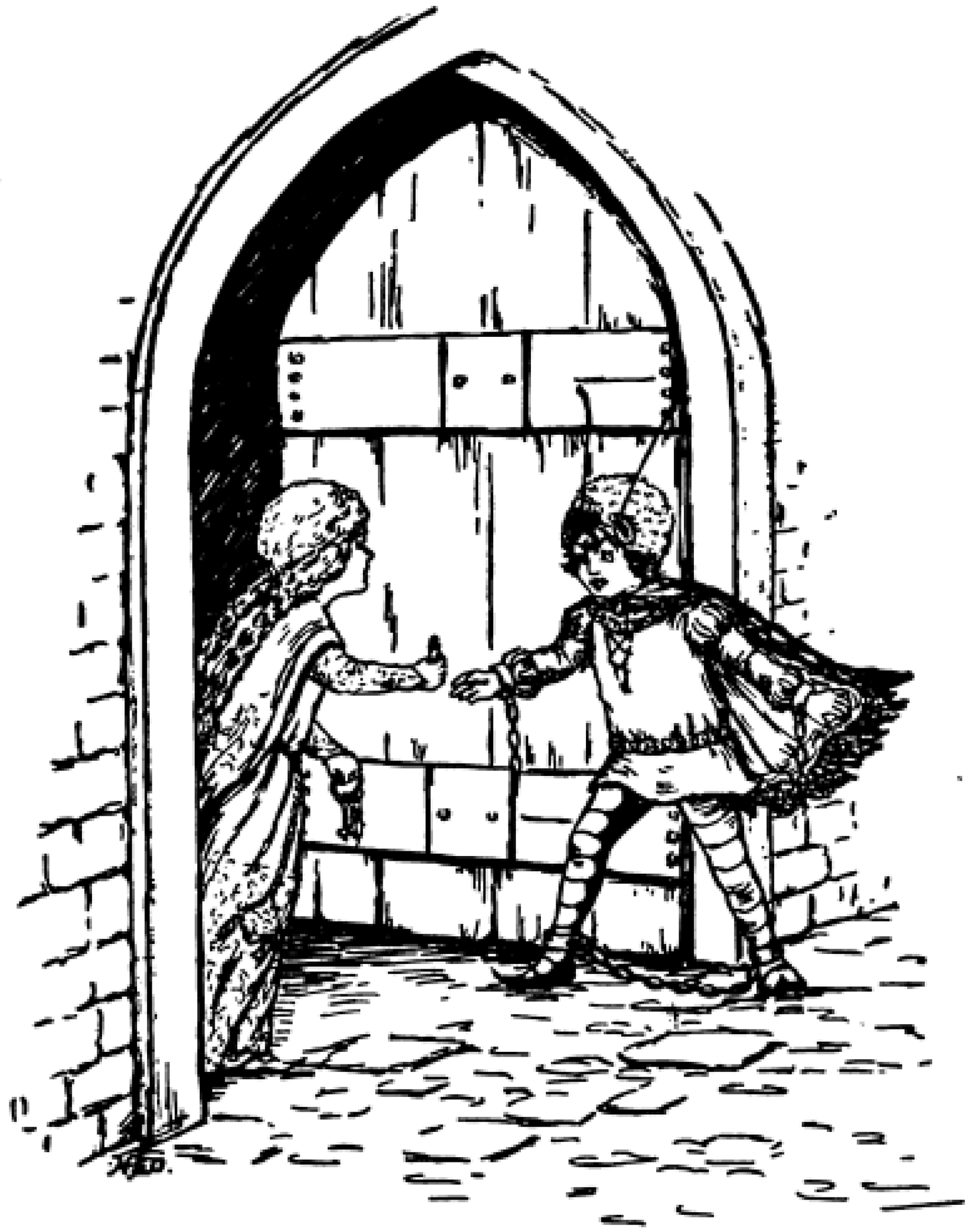
pushed against the bars. He was in the hall now—and free!

Neither he nor the little princess said a word for a long



moment. Then she took his hand and placed into it a little vial of purple liquid.

"Guard this well," she warned him. "It is the Water of

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Bounceability. Whenever you wish to leap over great heights, you have only to sip a little of it and then to bounce high up and away. And, alas, you have many heights to leap ere you are back in my royal father's favor. He is so angry at you for having brought his arch-enemy into the city that he has ordered your death at midnight. The hangman is already plaiting his rope and the carpenters hammering at a high scaffold. So follow me quickly to the city's edge, where none will find you."

Peterkin was close at her heels, all the dark way. Through pitchy tunnels she led him, far under the cellars of the city; through narrow cave-like passages, heavy with reeking gases, until at last they came up into an open space, where the woods came down from the slopes of black hills to meet the streets and houses. It was the furthermost edge of the city.

"I must leave you here," sighed the princess. "I must return and take the spanking which awaits me. But as for you, brave Peterkin, you have your choice: either you may escape safely into exile and never return to see me again—or else you may perform four mighty deeds. Aye, deeds so great that even the King, my father, cannot do them. But if you succeed in them, you may return here, so high in the King's favor that he will grant your dearest wish. Tell me,

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stranger, which will you choose?" Ah, little princess—I wonder if she blushed when she said it!

But Peterkin never wavered. "Need you ask, my Princess Clem?" he whispered.

"Then you must know," she continued, "that there is a misery in each of the Four Kingdoms o'er which my father rules. Misery, sorrow and tears. Go, now, to each of these Four Kingdoms and make its people happy. Give joy instead of sorrow and smiles instead of tears. More than this I cannot tell you, but go! You shall see strange things and do brave deeds, and I shall be sitting at my palace window, under the gilded dome, awaiting your return"——

Then, all in a twinkling, the little princess had fled back into the tunnel and was gone. Peterkin was alone.

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"The whole leap took but a moment"

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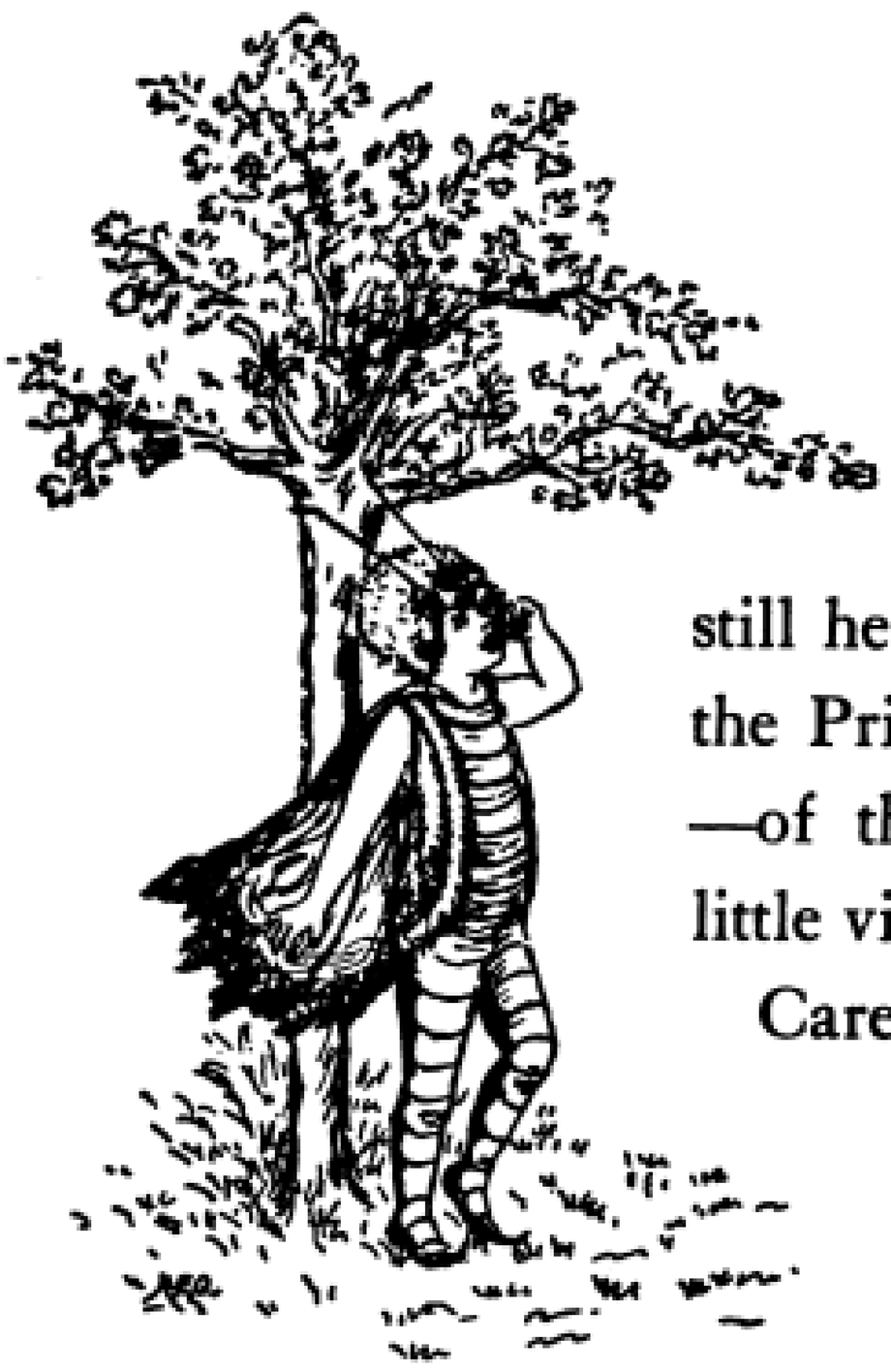
XV

THE WATER OF BOUNCEABILITY



PETERKIN turned his face at once towards the hazy line of hills which loomed through the darkness. He must escape over their crests while night was still here. He must take a sip—as the Princess Clem had taught him—of that purple liquid from the little vial in his hand.

Carefully he uncorked the bottle—and sniffed. What a sweet, fragrant odor! He touched his tongue to the rim. It was like melted candy—yet the taste of it stung like fire. His limbs seemed to twitch and throb at the touch.

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He drew a long breath—and gulped down a gurgling mouthful of the Water of Bounceability.

Immediately he knew that he might jump—*must* jump—jump anywhere, up into the sky, where the stars were, and over the distant hills. He made a little run, a hop, and then—up he went sailing far across the hilltops, down into the valley on the other side. The whole leap took but a moment: no more time than it takes the fluff of a withered dandelion to fly across a lawn.

Yet here he was thirty leagues or more from his starting place, in a strange, new valley! He wondered what the name of it could be. . . . It was such a wild and woody-looking place. He could not see very much, of course, for the stars gave little light, and the moon was but a thin, pale crescent. But he saw that all was tangled forests here and that wild, thorny heather and tall weeds had spread across what should have been clean meadows. An old road went across the heath, but it was overgrown with ferns and brambles and ditched with great muddy pools as if no one mended or repaired it—and no one traveled it. It was all a vast desert of waste and decay, hid by the dark of the night.

Peterkin knew how useless it would be to try to make his way forward before morning. So he lay down under the branches of the trees and slept.

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But early the next day, before the sun was up, Peterkin had started on his way. A difficult journey it was, too,

along the deserted road. There were puddles to wade and vines to skip and rocky barriers to climb. There were ruts

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where the leaves of the past autumn had buried themselves in a soggy mass or where the summer dust had sifted into foolish heaps. There were trunks of fallen trees across the road, and lizards, frogs and hedge-hogs crawled or hopped or ran beside them. All was desolate and wild. It was a valley of mysterious decay.

Then, at last, where the road slanted down to meet another long stretch of brown heathered fields, Peterkin spied a house. A huge, tall house, too, which must have been a splendid mansion once upon a time. But now it was shabby and needed paint. The bricks of its walls were losing their mortar; the slates of the roof were falling to the ground; none of the windows had curtains and few of them glass. There was moss upon the steps and in the eaves. The chimney pots were crumbled, and the lawn was high with choking weeds.

Peterkin wondered, Could anyone live here?

As if in answer to his question, a little boy came around the corner of the house. He came slowly, though he never stopped or hesitated a moment when he was within sight of Peterkin. He stumbled unsteadily through the weeds, with his hands held out before him. His face was handsome, truly—but his hair was in a fearful tousle over his eyes and his clothes were all in rags.

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"No wonder you can't see a thing," laughed Peterkin. "Take your hair out of your eyes!"

The little boy stopped short at the sound of a voice. He nodded his head sadly.

"What are eyes?" he asked. "I know I have two of them—but what use are they? Won't you tell me, stranger?"

"Why, silly!" roared Peterkin. "Eyes are to see with!"

The little boy smiled more sadly than before. "No," he sighed. "If you can see with your eyes, you are not of this valley. For I am blind. And so are my father and my mother, and all our neighbors, too. And so is everybody in this valley. All of us are blind!"

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XVI

THE VALE OF THE BLIND

THE little boy led Peterkin into the house to meet his father and mother. But they, like the boy, were in rags and tatters—and blind!

"You can *see?*" asked the father in wonder, when Peterkin had explained whence he came. "What does it mean to *see?* Isn't all the world a thing of blackness? Is there anything more to it than the dark nothing of the blind?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried Peterkin, his own eyes filling

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with tears of pity. "There's the sunshine and the trees, and all the bright flowers of the garden. There are birds of bright plumage, and moonbeams on the surface of the water, and the smiles on people's faces. Oh, the world is so full of things to see. . . . I could not tell you all of them."

The mother nodded. "Yes, that is just the way my father's father used to speak," she said slowly. "It was in his youth that this became the Vale of the Blind. Before that, it was known in all the Four Kingdoms as the Vale of Bright Eyes. But now——" Her voice sank away and she sighed.

"Tell me the story," begged Peterkin. "Tell me how this great misfortune came upon your grandfathers."

It was the father who answered him. "Our valley," he began, "was the happiest-hearted of all hereabouts fifty years ago. These things you speak of—these colors and sunshine which we do not know—were here in smiling plenty. The fields were neat and trim with golden grain. The pastures were like new-swept velvet, clean and green. The roads were smooth and bright. The houses were all handsome, with pretty lawns and gardens. Men wore fine clothes and took pride in themselves and in one another.

"But one day, there came into our Valley of Bright Eyes a haggard stranger. He was the saddest being that e'er

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trudged down over the boundary hills, my grandfather used to tell me. He wept, the whole day long, because he had no teeth. Think of it! he could not be happy for want of a set of teeth!

"Now, all their happiness had made my grandparents and their neighbors a kind, soft-hearted lot. No sooner did they see this man—who said he was a farmer—than they took pity on him. They fed him with porridge and honey—for they knew he could not eat what must be chewed—and they gave him a bed of fragrant blossoms to lie on when the night came.

"But he would not sleep, at once. He got up every little while to ask them: 'And are you sure this Valley of Bright Eyes is one of the Four Kingdoms, hey? Are you sure that the King of the Four Kingdoms is its ruler, hey?'

"Every time they told him 'Yes' he would chuckle and mumble strange words through his toothless gums. In the middle of the night, he arose and looked out across the moonlit fields, where the grain was rich, and down the gleaming road, where the handsome houses stood in sleeping order. He laughed aloud, this time, the story goes. Then he strode out into the road and ran and ran—faster than ever a man had run before.

" 'I seek a set of teeth!' he screamed as he ran. Up flew

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the windows, all the good folk roused from bed, rushing to see who could possibly be making such a racket. All along his way the people stared at him. They saw him take a

torch from out of his pocket. They watched him set it aflame. They saw him touch it, hot and sputtering, to the tops of the fields of grain, to the hedges and trees. . . . *He*

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was setting fire to their valley! They rushed down, seized him, and stamped out the fearful blaze in just the nick of time.

"As for the toothless villain, he screamed with merry laughter when they caught him.

" 'Hee, hee, my Bright Eyes!' he cried. 'You have been spying on me all this while, eh? Your eyes are too bright. You have been watching my revenge upon my enemy, the King! Too bright, too bright! From now you shall be blind—fast blind—you and your wives and your sons and daughters and your neighbors. From the Vale of Bright Eyes you shall now become the Vale of the Blind. And yours shall henceforth be a valley of ruin and decay. Blind, blind—and never again shall you see the gold of the day or the silver of the moon until I come to give you back your eyes—your bright eyes—hee, hee, hee!'

"And thus he fled from us. For the dark of the blind had come over the valley many years ago . . . and there is nothing left for us but tears."

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XVII

PETERKIN PROMISES

"AND so our valley has gone to rack and ruin," concluded the blind man.

Peterkin was silent for some minutes after he had finished. Then he shook his head wisely, sadly.

"Can you wait four days until I rescue you?" he asked.

"Four days?" The man, his wife and little son all burst into a bitter laughter. "We have waited for half a century already. We can wait a century, if only in the end we gain our eyes again, and win revenge upon our toothless enemy. Four days, ho, ho!"

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"You shall have both your eyes and your revenge," promised the stranger. "It was only three days ago that I sped through the air in the cup of a sea-shell, in company with this toothless farmer. Oh, if I had only known, then!"

"What? In his company? Are you a friend of his?" The blind family rushed in about him, as if to capture him and flay him.

"No, no," smiled Peterkin. "Not a friend at all. He tried to throw me hundreds of feet down to the ground. But he disappeared—and I do not know where he is. But I shall search the whole world over till I find him. And then—woe to him!"

So saying, he put his hand on the blind man's shoulder and bade them all good-by. They gave him a few wild herbs to put into his blouse for luncheon—it was all they had for food. And then he went on his way, singing all sorts of promises to them as he went on down the hill.

As he walked along the shabby road, he came to other houses, broken down and unpainted, all tangled in high weeds and matted vines. Each house was poorer than the last; each one more deserted than the other. And from each of them trooped little groups of blind folk, groping in darkness, to question him and to complain to him of their hard fate. All along his way he met the sight of their tears and

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heard the sound of their weeping. But wherever he went, Peterkin gave the same promise of happiness within four days and left a smile of hope behind him.

At length he came to the last house of the valley. It was high on the slope of one of the boundary mountains, almost at the edge of the gleaming white glacier of the summit. It was fast in the shadow of a huge, bluish ice cave, and long icicles dripped from its eaves and glittered like jewels in the sunshine.

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"And are you, too, blind?" he asked of the man who lived in this high house.

"Yes," replied the old man, sorrowfully. "I am no better than all the others in this valley, no matter how high I live above them. I, like them, am awaiting the rescuer who shall return my sight and bring revenge upon our toothless enemy."

"That is just what you shall have," promised Peterkin, "if only you tell me what is in the next valley, on the other side of the white mountains; and how I may reach there the best."

"Alas," sighed the old fellow, "those are two riddles which I cannot answer. I only know that in that valley beyond the ridge of the boundary, there is just as much sorrow as there is here. There is something wrong there—though I have never known what it is—and the great barrier of glacier ice has hedged us from each other. So come and rest here for to-day, and to-morrow, bright and early, you may come upon some scheme to cross into that unknown valley over the mountains."

So Peterkin took shelter there, in the green shadows of the ice cave, and slept a troubled sleep until the morning.

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"A young peasant girl came toward him"

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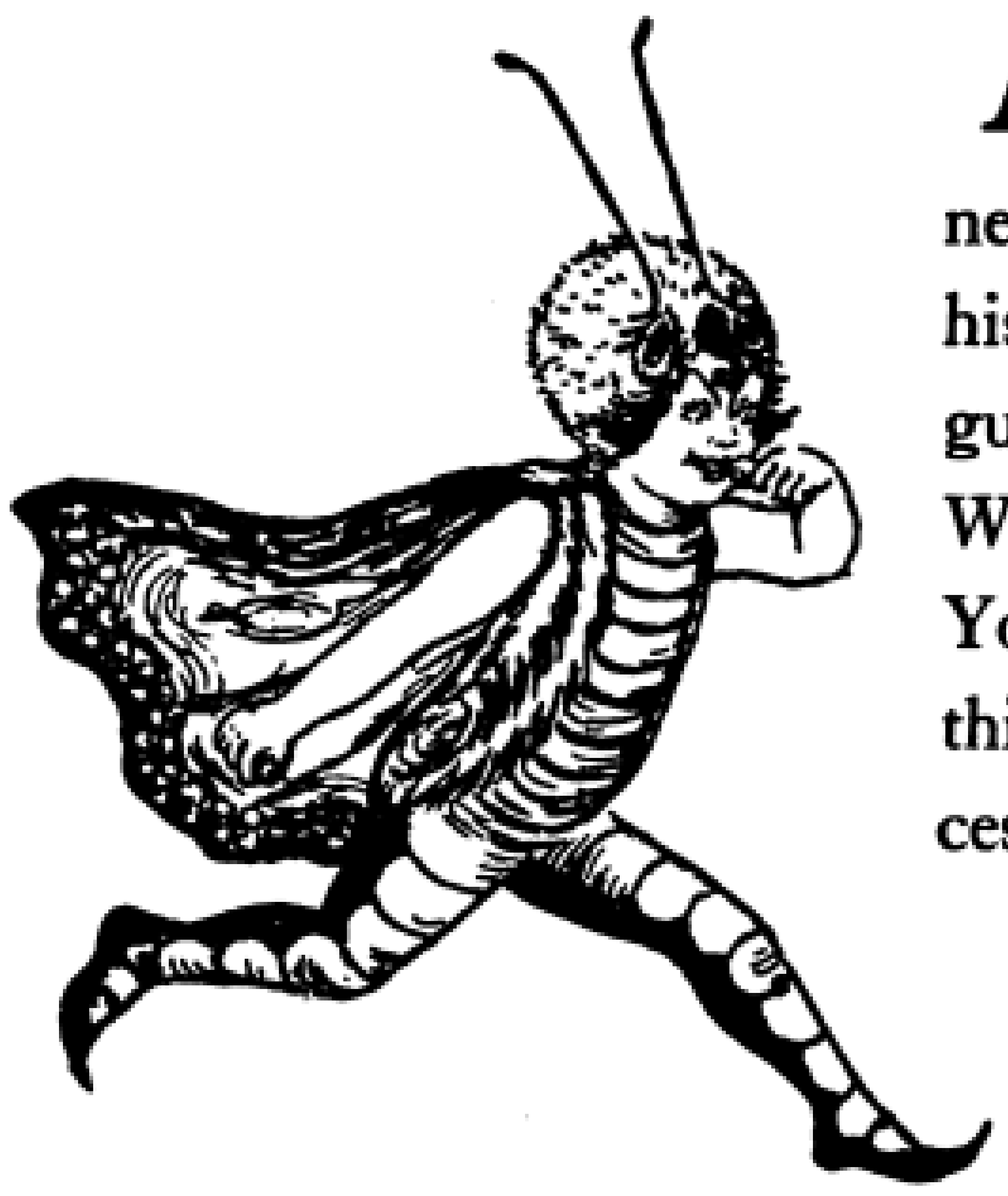
XVIII

THE VALLEY OF SILENCE



AS soon as dawn was over the glacier the next day, Peterkin was on his feet and sipping a good gulp from his flask of the Water of Bounceability. You see, he dreamed about this magic gift of the princess's as he lay a-sleeping . . . and really, what an easy thing it was to cross the boundary mountains, now!

Just one little swallow—and then a hop, skip and jump! Up, up and over! Over the tree-tops, over the glacier

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itself . . . then down into the valley on the other side.

As he floated to the earth there, a strange hush seemed to fall on him. It was the quiet sense of absolute stillness. He walked forward a little way, then stopped in bewilderment. Not a sound—not a whisper of anything. He could not hear even the crunch of his feet upon the greensward. He called out, but somehow his voice sank away into nothing. The trees rustled silently; a great, frothing brook went tumbling down through a bit of woods without a murmur. All was quiet.

A young peasant girl came toward him, leading a horse across the fields—but Peterkin could hear neither the patter of her feet nor the hoof-beats of the horse.

"What ho!" cried he, "I must have gone suddenly deaf! I can't even hear myself speaking. Here, girl, tell me what's wrong with my ears?"

The peasant maid halted her horse; she looked at Peterkin with startled wonder. Her gaze settled on his moving mouth—and her eyes grew larger and larger with surprise. Suddenly she snatched a little twig from the branch of a nearby tree, stripped it and commenced to trace queer letters with it in the dust of the road.

"Phew!" thought Peterkin. "She must be deaf herself. It's a good thing I went to school and learned to read and

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write!" Then he looked down at what the little girl had traced upon the road—and this is what he read:

"What are you eating?"

Peterkin laughed a noiseless laugh. Then he snatched the twig from her and wrote in reply:

"Nothing."

"Then what makes you move your mouth so queer?" she asked in writing.

"I'm talking," he scribbled back.

"What does talking mean? That's a word we know nothing about in this valley."

"Then how do you understand one another? And why don't you make words with your mouth?" he traced.

"We write to each other—like this. There would be no use in talking like you do. We are all deaf."

"All of you?"

"Yes, everybody in the valley."

"Oh, then this is a valley of silence," wrote Peterkin.

"Silence? What is silence?"

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"Why, silence is when there is no noise."

"What is noise?" she scrawled.

Poor Peterkin had to give it up after that. He tried to describe to her what the wind was like when it roared in wintry weather—or how the birds sing at evening in the woods—or how men can understand each other's smiles and scowls by simple noises which they make with their mouths. But she only shrugged her shoulders and sighed. At any rate, Peterkin thought it was a sigh—but he could not hear it.

So he marched along at her side in strange silence, making no noise and hearing none, until they came into the center of a little village.

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XIX

EARS TOO SHARP

THERE, in the silent village, they found a group of old men nodding on a bench in the warm sunlight. Across the brook a big mill wheel was turning; but it made no roar or clatter. A cart went by, but there was no rumble to its wheels. Down the street a blacksmith was hammering at his ruddy forge; but there was no clang or clatter to keep noisy company to the flying sparks. All was silence—dreary, unbroken silence.

The old men stirred when Peterkin approached. They knew him for a stranger. They rose and made a place for him beside them on the bench. Then one of them took a piece of white chalk from his vest pocket, turned to the

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brick wall behind him and began to write. The words he wrote were so many that, before he was through, he had covered the wall from top to bottom with this sad and mysterious tale:

"Once," he wrote, "this was the Valley of the Rippling Brooks. All were happy here, then. It was in my youth, I remember, when in our ears there ran the murmur of a hundred gleaming, merry brooks that cross the woods and fields and tumble from the hills in frothy white. The music of our laughter was like the music of these brooks—never slowing, never saddening. We were the happiest of all the Four Kingdoms.

"Then, one spring day, when the brooks were swollen and roaring with gladness, there came into our midst, from I don't know where, a strange and toothless man. He was a farmer, like ourselves, he told us—and he was forever muttering low words between his empty gums."

"The toothless villain again!" thought Peterkin.

"We gave him shelter for the night," continued the old man with his writing. "But long before the moon was up, he had stolen off to the fields where the brooks were white in the darkness—up the steeps to where the waterfalls were splashing into quiet pools with a cheery murmur. He reached over the low banks, listening greedily to the music

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of the water. He knelt, bent his face close to the gurgling eddies—and began to drink!

"We were all in bed by now and most of us asleep. It

was so easy to fall asleep in those good days, with the murmur of the softly playing brooklets in our ears—not at all like to-day, when night is a black stretch of silent terror.

"Suddenly, in every household, someone sat up straight

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in bed. In every household, someone had noticed that the sound of the water was growing fainter and fainter. First one brook and then another seemed to die down—as if it were suddenly drying up!

"We rushed out into the village square, across the fields, up the hills. The moon came out and showed us, gleaming bare, the dry and empty beds of many of our beloved brooks. Yes, nothing but dry, pebbled ruts, where no stream trickled and no water sang. Where was the villain who had worked this trick of tricks?

"We found him soon bending down at the edge of one of the last of our brooks. He was drinking, drinking, drinking. He was sucking the pearly water up, up into his puffed cheeks. He struggled to his feet as we surrounded him; he brushed the drops from his sagging mouth and started to run away. But he was bloated and heavy with all the water he had gulped and he could not move. We seized him and flung him into the water. He splashed and puffed and staggered clumsily, dripping, back into our midst. Hate was in his wet face, and his red gums were like round, snapping tongs.

" 'You men of the Rippling Brooks,' he hissed, 'your ears are far too sharp! Your happiness is all in the ripple of water—and I am here to take away that happiness. So if I

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cannot steal your brooks—why, then, I shall steal your ears! From now on, I decree that you, your wives and your children and all your neighbors shall be deaf. You shall live henceforth in a valley of silence, where not even the whir of a wren on wing shall come to your ears. Henceforth, all who dwell in this valley shall be deaf—and all who enter it shall be deaf, too—until I come again to set you free from the spell of utter silence.'

"Then the moon plunged behind a black cloud. This toothless demon disappeared with a terrific burst of thunder.

"And that was the last sound that has been heard in this valley since he cursed us with silence and sorrow."

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XX

THE VALLEY OF DANCING LEGS

PETERKIN'S next move, when he had sipped his Water of Bounceability and came flying across into the next valley, was to clap his hands over his ears. He had been deaf awhile . . . and now that he could hear again, all the thousand noises of the earth and air frightened and bewildered him.

He was wondering what was wrong with *this* valley. There must be *something* wrong with it, of course. And he did not have to wait very long before he discovered.

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A group of fat and puffing people jigged into view. Hop, hop—what could be the trouble with them? Why, they were dancing! Hop, hop—skippetty hop, with never a stop—puffing, panting, groaning with weariness, they danced a crazy path toward Peterkin.

"Hey, hey, stop!" cried he.

"We can't stop," grunted the chief of them. "If you want to talk to us, you'll have to dance along."

Then, before he could help himself, Peterkin had a dancing man, locked arms, on either side of him—and he was stamping, running, tripping, jigging along with them.

"Oh, heigh, stop! Let go of me—stop, stop!" he commanded, out of breath and red in the face.

"No, that's just what we can't do!" sighed the fat old chief. "We must dance on and on and on. Our legs are shot with pain, our lungs are like hot blasts, our feet are blistered and sore—but we cannot stop!"

Peterkin stumbled and fell flat. His two guides yanked him to his feet—then on and on in a breathless dance.

"Once," went on the hoarse and puffing chief, "we were the happiest of all the Four Kingdoms. We were just plain, sensible, walk-along folk. We loved to rest and doze in the heat of the noon. We loved to lie about and let our

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fields grow of themselves with rich wheat and tasselled corn. We were content to take our ease.

"Then, one lazy noon, there came into our midst—I don't know whence—a toothless man."

"What a villain this toothless enemy must be!" thought Peterkin, remembering all that had gone before.

"He was a genial farmer, it seemed to us," continued the breathless chief, as they whirled along the road, uphill, downhill, in their ceaseless jig. "He lay down with us in

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the shade of the trees and looked out across our fields and sucked his pipe through his toothless gums.

"'Ah, this is rare comfort!' he said in a cheery voice. 'You seem to be a happy valleyful here.'

"'Oh, aye,' I answered him, 'we love to take our ease.'

"'Do you love that better than all else?' he asked me slowly.

"I stretched my arms in sleepy comfort and nodded back with a smile. He looked at me slyly—ah, if I had only known what villainy was behind that twinkle in his eye! He rose slowly to his feet.

"'I shall show you all a pretty dance,' he said, baring his gums. 'Just lie there in comfort—it will amuse you—yes, and give *me* great pleasure, too!'

"Then slowly, gently, he began to shuffle his feet. You would never have thought that he could be so nimble. In and out and round-about he pranced with fancy steps. It was so pleasant to be lying there in the cool shade and watching. . . . Then it seemed as if he were inviting us to join him. His brawny hands were beckoning; his smile said plainly: 'Up, up—come along up and dance at my side.'

"First one and then the other of us struggled to his feet, and fell into a merry, jigging step. We laughed at the fun

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of it—not a laggard in the valley but was dancing with him.

"We grew breathless and tired. We wanted to stop. *But we couldn't!* When the toothless man saw this, he burst into a cruel roar of laughter:

" 'You would take your ease, eh?' he mocked. 'You loved more than all else to loll in the shade, eh? Well, henceforth you shall jig and dance from noon till night and night till noon in a never-ending wandering. Your ease is gone—and so's your happiness! From now on, until I come again to free you, you shall be known as the Valley of Dancing Legs. Hee hee!' and he was gone."

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"There came floating toward him in midair"

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XXI

THE VALLEY OF UP-IN-THE-AIR

THE chief of the dancing crew had scarcely finished his bitter story when Peterkin swore to have revenge on the toothless enemy—and to rescue these poor, tired folk in the bargain. Then he broke from their midst, took a long draught from his magic bottle, and bounced clear over into the next valley.

And the odd part of it was that he never touched ground there at all. Instead, he was caught in a swirl of strong and steady breezes which kept him aloft, floating, swimming through the air, high above the ground.

"Well," thought Peterkin, amazed, "I wonder if this is the fate of everyone in this valley?"

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Yes, sure enough, a few moments later, there came floating toward him in midair a family of children and parents and grandparents. Behind them, in a string, floated feather beds and kitchen tables, dishes, parlor chairs and stoves—and a hundred and one other things of a household. It was a home complete—but all up in the air!

Then other families floated past, with little tots in flying cradles and gray-haired patriarchs in cushioned easy chairs with blankets tucked about them. Wheelbarrows, topsy-turvy sheets and pillows, clothes and jugs and mugs and a thousand other things in helter-skelter spun along behind them in a far-away trail. Everyone, everything was up in the air. Aye, even Peterkin!

"Who are you? And what are you doing up here?" he cried to the father of one of the families which floated past.

"I'm Pater Familias," came the answer, borne upon the wind. "And I and my dear ones are up here because we can't be down below, on the ground."

"Well, why can't you?"

The Pater Familias steered his whole crew, table, bed and pots and pans and all, toward Peterkin. "We owe all our misery to——"

"What? To the toothless villain?" interrupted Peterkin.

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The whole family groaned and the pots and pans leaped at the mention of this evil person. "Yes, yes, the toothless villain—the enemy of the Four Kingdoms!" wept the Pater

Familias. "If it were not for him, we should now be down on the ground where we belong, living most sensible lives in our homes . . . and not flying from horizon to horizon above the tree-tops. We were happiest of the Kingdoms.

"But one day, when we were folk of the earth, there came

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flying over our heads this wicked, toothless farmer—anyhow, he told us he was a farmer. He came down into our midst upon a grassy hill.

"'Well, what do you love more than all else in this valley?' he asked us.

"'Ho, that's an easy question!' we told him. 'We love to keep our feet upon the ground, as all good, sensible people should.'

"He thought for a sly moment. 'But wouldn't you love to fly?' he asked us. 'Come, hop up into the air with me—up, up, as lightly as the birds on wing. Come, just try it—it's such a delightful sport, this flying!'

"Then, as if in obedience to his summons, a great breeze sprang up from out of nowhere and swept us all off our feet and up, up—up to where he was floating. And truly, for a few moments, it *was* delightful sport. But when we wanted to return to earth again—why, the farmer was gone—and there was no returning! We had been tricked into the air and there we must remain, floating, drifting, useless, helpless—we and our families and all our neighbors, together with our household, tables, beds and rags and tags, until this toothless fellow comes again to free us from his cruel magic."

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XXII

PETERKIN IN A MUDDLE

"AND so it is the toothless farmer who has caused all this misery in each of the four valleys," mused Peterkin, as he floated along at the side of Pater Familias. "Well, here's my solemn oath on it: I shall have revenge on him, and force him to substitute joy for sorrow in each of these stricken kingdoms."

Then he bade farewell to the People-Up-in-the-Air and floated away on the breath of the air—away to the boundaries of their land.

But it was not high mountains and snowy cliffs which hemmed this valley from its neighbors. Instead, the land

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below grew flatter and more yellow. Peterkin passed over wide, misty stretches of marsh and bogs; in the distance he could hear the faint roar of waves. Yes, he was coming to the sea. He was drifting fast toward that golden line of sands where the ocean met the land in a jagged, wavering line of frothy white.

He must swoop down to earth now—else he might be carried out into midwater. He must set foot upon the ground! But alas! try as he would, he was still in the Land of Up-in-the-Air — and up in the air he must stay!

Then he thought of his precious bottle of the Water of Bounceability. Perhaps, if he took a sip, he might be able to break the spell and to leap to the marshes below. He would try it.

He took out the bottle and uncorked it. He lifted it to his lips and let half of what remained in it gurgle down his throat. Then down he dived, head first. Down, down—yes, the spell was broken! Down to earth, just where the

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narrow strip of sands met the straggly marshes. He landed with a mighty somersault, roly-poly, into the muddy bog. He rolled over and over, crashing through the slimy rushes and the sand, to where the waves were churning. He was sprawling face downward, dizzy and dazed. He staggered to his feet, looking about him mournfully.

"All sea and sand and dreary marsh," he sighed. "Over there, lost in the blue of the sea, must be the city whence I set out—the city of Princess Clem. Well, I shall have to finish my bottle of Water of Bounceability now—and fly in that direction."

So he groped in his pockets for the bottle. But oh, the saddest of all things had happened now! He found the bottle broken—and the water all spilled and wasted!

Aye, his fall had smashed the precious vial—and there was no more of the magic liquid left to carry him home!

What now? Peterkin looked mournfully out across the blue sea, towards where the city of the palace and the Princess Clem must lie; then he looked back across the marsh, where poisonous mists were gathering in low, curling clouds; he searched the shore in vain for the trace of anything or anybody. . . . No, he was alone and helpless!

Ah, well, he did not know the great surprise which was in store for him!

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XXIII

THE LOST PUMPERKIN

AND what do you think that surprise was?

The Pumperkin! Yes, his old, long-lost Pumperkin!

Peterkin caught his first, golden glimpse of it as it came up over the distant horizon. It was floating in on the tide from the far mid-ocean. It was dipping slowly, peacefully from one rippling wave to the next; it came up to the shore at last, bobbing in the surf, then pitching down with a last lurch into the soggy marsh.

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Peterkin ran to it. Yes, there could be no doubt—it was his beloved Pumperkin, his old home—his boat-house of a pumpkin which had been torn away from him by the tempest wind. . . . He scaled up the side and peeked in through the ceiling window. Yes, all was as he had left it. There was his tumbled bed in the corner, there were the chairs, legs up. And there, sure enough, was his ladder, with its top peeping up above the edge of the roof. All that was missing was the cook-stove.

Peterkin climbed over the edge and down the ladder. He was safe now. He was hopeful and happy. He had only to push and shove a little bit and—away, away he went, bound for the home of his Princess Clem!

How good it seemed to be in his pumpkin house again! He wondered how many seas it had passed over, whither it had wandered, where it would lead him now. For, of course, there was no such a thing as steering these roly-poly pumpkins: wherever it floated, Peterkin must float along!

Away it sailed, over the waves, in the clutch of the lazy tide. Away, until the marshes and the golden strand were lost in a hazy mist. Up one wave and down the next, with the spray dashing in through the ceiling window. How like the first few days it all was—those first few days of the marvellous adventures. Peterkin smiled to think of them,

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and of how many wonderful things had happened to him since first his house was torn from his stem in the pumpkin patch.

And now he was on his way to the most thrilling adventure of them all. He was bound for the city from which he had been banished; he was returning either to his happiness or to his death. As he looked out across the waves, he

wondered how it would all end; was he going to find that toothless old villain? Was he going to bring back joy into the Four Kingdoms, and a smile to the lips of their monarch? Was he going to win the hand of the gracious Princess Clem? Or, after all, would the whole search and struggle end with his being captured and put to death? Or with the toothless villain murdering him? Well, he swore he should put up a hard fight. . . . For he knew a way to bring this cruel enemy to his knees. At least, he thought he did!

So he sat and thought it all out, while his pumpkin boat sailed closer and closer to the other shore. Do you know what was on that shore?

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Why, a city, of course! The very city for which our Peterkin so dearly yearned. The city of the golden palace —and of the Princess Clem!

And the city where he would find the toothless farmer! Perhaps Peterkin guessed that much . . . for his cheeks grew a little white as he watched the distant spires and golden dome, all agleam in the sunset.

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XXIV

OUT OF HIDING

NOW we must return to the toothless old villain. Do you remember, we left him dozing snugly in his hiding place atop the roof of a deserted house? He was waiting for the gray dusk, when he might steal out upon his wicked business. Perhaps it was the King himself he wished to harm, this visit—but I can't be positive of that.

Anyhow, when night had come and the streets were bare again of people and little dim lanterns were swinging in the shadows of the balconies, the old wizard crept down the stairs again, into the black vestibule. Then out he darted —out into the street.

The windows in the palace, across the narrow street, were gleaming with bright cheer and threw big yellow squares

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"The windows in the palace were gleaming"

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of light across the cobbled gutters. The old villain, when he stood a-tiptoe, could see the gilded walls and the jeweled ceilings. He caught just a glimpse of a corner of the throne itself, all in a glory of precious stones and carvings. And once he thought he could make out the shadow of a man all decked in royal robes—and a crown on his head.

The wizard trembled and growled at this sight of his ancient enemy. He raised his crooked finger threateningly in the dark and snarled a terrible oath. Then he sped on, up one gloomy, lonely alley and down the other, across wide boulevards and empty squares, dodging into the shadows at every sudden creak of a shutter or rustle of a tree. Once a company of soldiers marched past him—left, right, left, right, with weary, lagging steps. He had just time to slink out of their way and flee into a little court-yard, darker than the cloudy sky—blacker than black itself. He could see nothing here. He groped, he stumbled, he felt his way warily. Just ahead of him he heard a strange gurgling of water, low and soft, as if from a distance. He stopped short, bewildered.

Then it seemed as if the tramp of those soldiers from whom he was fleeing was growing louder—that they were coming nearer and nearer. Had they discovered his whereabouts? Were they chasing him now?

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He could not keep his toothless gums from chattering. In fear he rushed forward in the darkness. A couple of

wild steps and—down he went! Down through a great

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sewer hole! Down, down, below the street, into the rushing, roaring water which was sweeping through the great brick tube of the underground sewer!

Whiz! What a roar! Whiz! What a rush and dash and smother of gurgling, thundering water! The old magician was swept swiftly along with the stream. He sank, rose again, coughed, sputtered, sank again. Then, as he rose a second time, he took a long breath and lay quite still. Yes, he was floating! He would not drown here, anyhow!

As he sped along, lying on his back atop the rushing water, with his gums tight shut and his eyes wide open to the dark, he wondered where he was floating. Where was this water rushing? Where did the great sewer end?

Then, of a sudden, the roar of the water grew louder than ever. He shot out, out into space—and then down, down, into the gushing spray of a waterfall. Then down, deep down, under the surface—and up again. He beat his hands frantically about in the churning froth. He shook the water from his eyes. Where had the great tube emptied him? Where was he?

Why, in the sea, to be sure—in the sea!

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XXV

A PRECIOUS PRISONER

IT was late in the night when Peterkin's pumpkin boat came riding into the city's calm harbor. The reflections of the stars which had winked up into the sky were dotting the black water with melted gold. Red and green lights from the prows of sleeping boats and piers lay glowing in the easy tide. Not a sound—excepting the soft slap of little waves along the bottom of the drifting Pumperkin.

Peterkin, as he stood on his ladder's top rung, looked out across the harbor toward the huddled houses, gray and looming, with dim lit window panes blinking through the dark.

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Over the roofs he could make out the form of the huge dome of the palace—and he knew that there was the room of his princess. Aye, there was Princess Clem!

Could she be asleep? The hour was so late . . . perhaps her nurse had tucked her, long ago, into her warm and comfy bed. But, no—oh, no! For, suddenly, he caught the gleam of a little light from the window just below the dome. Yes, he was sure it was from the princess's window. She must be yet awake. She must still be watching—be waiting—for his return, as she promised she would do, and his heart gave a great throb for joy.

His Pumperkin drifted slowly in toward the shore. He heard a strange roaring, angry and deep. It was the rush of water he knew; perhaps some sewer, speeding its underground course and emptying itself, at the last, into the sea.

In the midst of the rumble of water, he thought he heard a short splash; something dark went down in the white froth of the water, then rose to the surface near his boat—then sank and rose again not an arm's length away. Peterkin peered over the edge to see what it was. He gasped and almost shrieked; it was a man! He reached down, made a wild grab at the floating jacket—pulled, tugged, hoisted—ouf! and he had the drowning one inside his Pumperkin.

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He gazed down into the face of the rescued. A loud cry escaped him. It was the Toothless Farmer!

Yes, the toothless old villain—the arch-enemy whom he had set out to find! And you and I know how it happened

that this old farmer came to be plunging into the sea so suddenly and without warning. . . . But Peterkin didn't!

The toothless one had an unlucky time of it, didn't he? For here he was in the very clutches of the hero—at the mercy of Peterkin, whom he had played so false—Peterkin,

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who had resolved revenge upon him for all the wrongs he had done in the Four Kingdoms!

No sooner did he open his eyes than he saw heroic Peterkin above him, fists clenched and anger in his eyes.

"Ow, ow," chattered he, his red gums bobbing with fear and chill, "don't threaten me! Why do you clinch your fists at me, eh? I've never met you before, have I?"

Peterkin laughed scornfully. "What a lie! Don't you remember who it was who brought you into these Four Kingdoms, not so long ago, astride of a flying shell? Don't you remember whom you tried to fling off, down to a crashing death? What! don't remember me?"

The old man grew green with fright. He wrung his thin, crooked fingers. "I—I thought—I thought you were dead," he moaned. "I didn't dream of your escaping death . . . dear, oh dear, I suppose you'll kill me now, eh? Well, just let me tell you my story, first—oh, please, let me tell it —please, please, please!"

And, of course, who could resist such pleading? Certainly not Peterkin, who folded his arms sternly and waited for the end of the tale.

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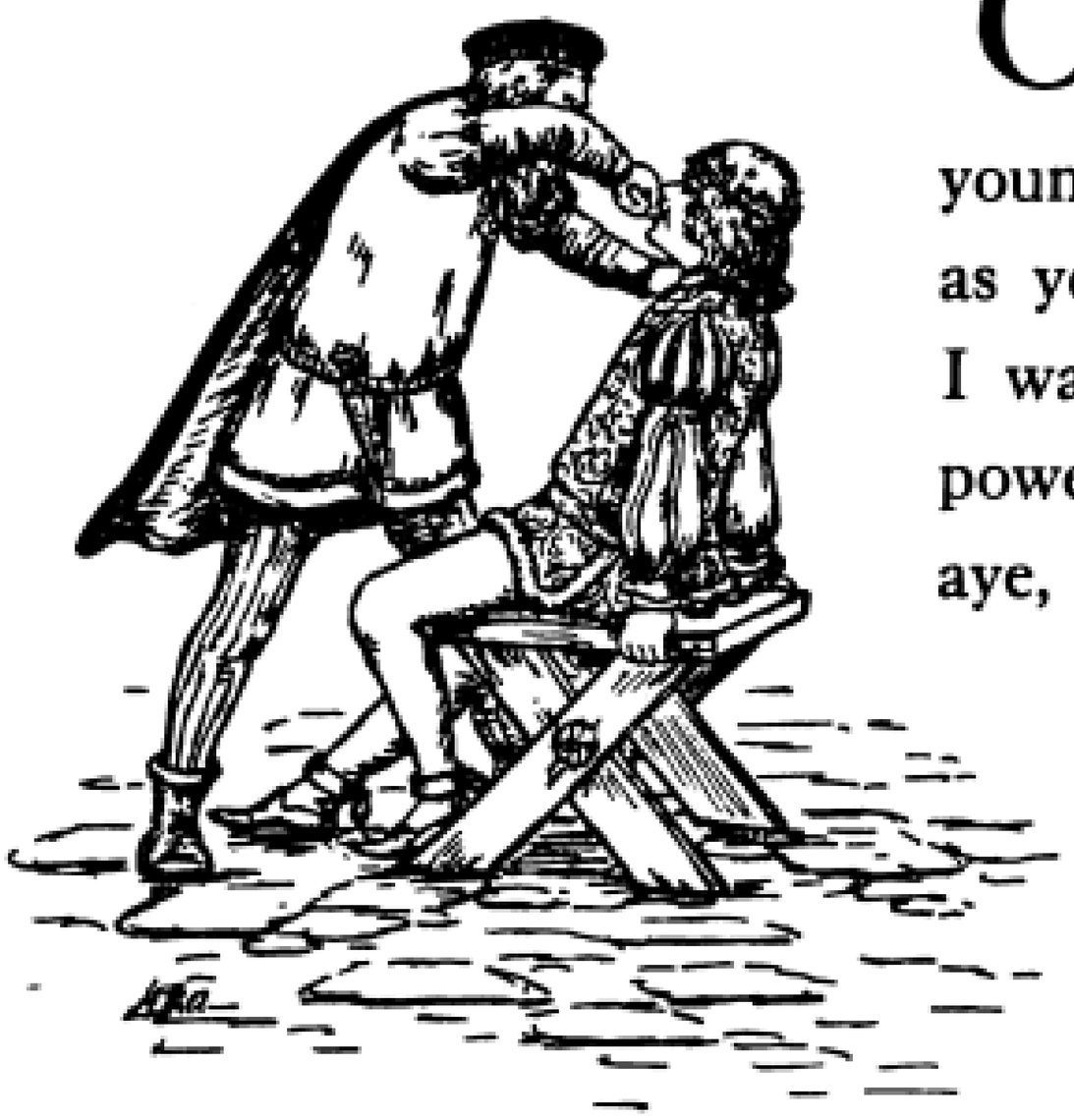
XXVI

THE VILLAIN'S STORY



"ONCE," began the old villain, "I was as young and as happy-hearted as you are, stranger. For I was handsome, rich and powerful. I was noble—aye, more than noble—for I was a prince of the court of the Four Kingdoms. I was the son of the King's older brother—and some said that I, not he, should be the king upon the jeweled throne.

"This thought was like a flame to me. It burned and flared within my mind in jealous heat; I came to wish for my royal

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cousin's death, so that I might succeed him to the honor of all honors of the kingdoms. I took a secret oath that ere I grew much older, I should murder him. Hee, hee, that's the extraordinary sort of a villain I was!

"But I had one thing of which I was more proud than all the world: my set of teeth! A set of white, sharp, glistening teeth! They were more splendid than the teeth of any other nobleman at court. They were finer even than the King's own teeth. They were my constant pride, my dearest joy! With them I could eat all the rarest things of the kitchen. I could chew tin pans and pots; I could crumple pewter kettles; I could crunch thick venison steaks and the horns of a full grown cow. My teeth were my greatest power—and my joy!

"But all the while my heart was black against my royal cousin. I coveted his crown, I longed for his scepter. My jealousy grew until I could hide it no longer. I made a journey into a far distant forest, where a famous witch lived in her cave. And there I dwelt for many months, learning all her wicked magic. She taught me how to curse whole valleys of people—how to bring sorrow to hundreds. But alas! she could not teach me how to kill my royal cousin.

"'When shall I be King?' I asked her each morning.

"And every eve, after a day of pondering over her cal-

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dron, she would answer: 'When you have learned to kill man with the joy of your life.'

"Then at last I understood. What could possibly be the joy of my life excepting these, my beautiful teeth? I must return and *bite* my royal cousin to death!

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"I hurried back to the Four Kingdoms. I met the King in his gilded dining hall. Before his host of cowardly courtiers, I threw myself upon him and sought to bury my teeth into his breast.

"But ah, under his velvet robes, he was wearing a coat of strong steel links. My teeth crunched against them—and could go no further. I fell back dismayed. A hundred men—courtiers and guards—were upon me, pinning me to the marble floor.

" 'Take him away!' cried the King, my enemy. 'Take him away, and pull out all his teeth!'

"And one by one, in the dark dungeon, they pulled out of my gums the joy of my life—my white, my sharp, my glistening teeth. Think of it! Think of the pain, of the deep shame!

"But I swore a deep revenge, and when I was banished, I went to live as a simple farmer in that neighboring valley where first you beheld me. I have spent all the rest of my toothless, joyless days in taking terrible revenge upon this cousin King—this royal wretch who stole my proud possessions. I have brought sorrow into each of his Four Kingdoms, and I shall kill him—him and his pretty daughter, Princess Clem! Hee, hee!" He gave an evil chuckle and gnashed his gums in hate.

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Peterkin shuddered. "And is there nothing will satisfy you?" he pleaded.

"Yes!" snapped the old man. "A new set of teeth! Teeth as white and sharp and glistening as the set they robbed me of. A new set of teeth—or else revenge!"

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"She strained her eyes to watch the distant harbor"

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XXVII

IN THE CITY

WHILE the toothless villain was finishing his cruel story, the dawn began to flicker in the eastern sky. And, beyond the gray piers, in the houses of the city, the early risers were already up and stirring. Thin wisps of smoke commenced to float up out of the houses' chimneys to prove that cooks and housewives were already at their ovens.

The dome of the palace was beginning to flash with the first rays of the sun. Just beneath it, the curtains of the little princess's window were flapping strangely. It almost

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seemed as if she were standing behind them and peeking out upon the city's roofs, as far as the harbor beyond.

Aye—and so she was! With her fair curls tumbling to the clean, sweet morning breeze and her little white nightie fluttering softly, she strained her eyes to watch the distant harbor. Perhaps she saw something strange there—something she had never seen before in all the Four Kingdoms. Perhaps she had guessed it was the Pumperkin—and that in its big yellow cup her wandering lover had drifted home again, in triumph and in glee.

Of course, her nurse was very shocked to find a royal princess with her head far out of the window; but Princess Clem never bothered to explain. She laughed and she laughed all the while her many maids were dressing her—and indeed they had not seen her in so happy a mood for many a weary week.

"Put on my prettiest gown," she bade them. "Dress me in my gown of pale blue silk—the one on which white lilies are embroidered, tall and shimmering. And run blue ribbons through my golden braids—ribbons as blue as my eyes, and deck them with pearls as white as my teeth."

At that the nurse looked shocked and horrified. "Oh, hush, Royal Highness," whispered she. "Have you forgot-

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ten no one must mention that last word in this domain? Teeth are never spoken of here—*teeth* is a banished word! And all because of that wicked villain——"

"Ha, ha," broke in the princess gayly, "lots of good things are banished from this land—and lots of good heroes, too! But they always come sailing home again at

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the end of a hero's task. . . . And as for that villain, he'll soon be one no longer, mark my words."

And mark her words they did, although they did not understand one of them. Yet, inasmuch as she was a Princess Royal, they dared not argue with her.

After this came breakfast in the great gilded dining hall, in her chair at the side of the throne, where Princess Clem must peel her father's orange and break his egg and—oh, do everything a daughter ought to do, no matter whether she be a king's or a beggar's child. But this morning she did it all with such a strangely happy smile—and all in such a furious, giggling hurry. . . .

"Bless my soul," declared His Majesty, tilting one eyebrow up to meet his crown, "it would almost seem as if my little daughter had found a sweetheart, eh? Her smile is so bright—why, I'll wager my crown she's in love! Ho! I shall have to look into this."

But he did not have to! For, before he had swallowed another mouthful, he knew the whole story!

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XXVIII

HOW PETERKIN TRICKED THEM ALL

AYE, he knew the whole story, did His Majesty. For enter at that very moment a dusty, breathless messenger—a sailor from the wharves which fronted on the harbor.

"A ship—a strange ship is in the port, Your Majesty!" he cried, as he knelt at the side of the table. "A ship more strange than any we have ever seen. A ship entirely round, with neither prow nor stern nor sails nor flag—a ship of golden brown, and the very shape and color of a huge garden pumpkin!"

Then the King remembered the famous story which Peterkin had told him weeks ago and he knew who had dared to come back to his city in spite of the order of exile.

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"What?" bellowed His Majesty, his face growing purple with rage. "This bold adventurer, this scalawag Peterkin, back in our midst? Come sailing back in that pumpkin boat of his, eh? Well, he shall suffer for it, I promise you. He shall be caught and clapped back into the dungeon cell from which he so mysteriously escaped."

At that, the little princess, at his side, blushed a very rosy blush and hung her head, so that they could not see her tears.

"I swore death to this fellow, if ever he came again into my power," hissed the King. "And death it shall be! Ho, my trusty guards! Arm yourselves with ropes and heavy chains and run to the harbor, in search of the lost prisoner. We shall have to give him a taste of death, death, death!"

Whereupon all the soldiers, all the courtiers, all the nobles of the land, armed themselves, clattering, growling, thundering. And down to the wharves of the harbor they swept, leaving the gilded dining room deserted. Even the King himself left his half eaten eggs, and forgot to clap the cover on his dish of honey—and ran off, with his crown toppling over one ear and his royal robes dragging in the mud, all the way from the palace door to the planks of the piers. Only the little Princess Clem was left, in terror and in tears. She wept, poor thing—and made a sorry mixture of her tears in a pitcher of cream.

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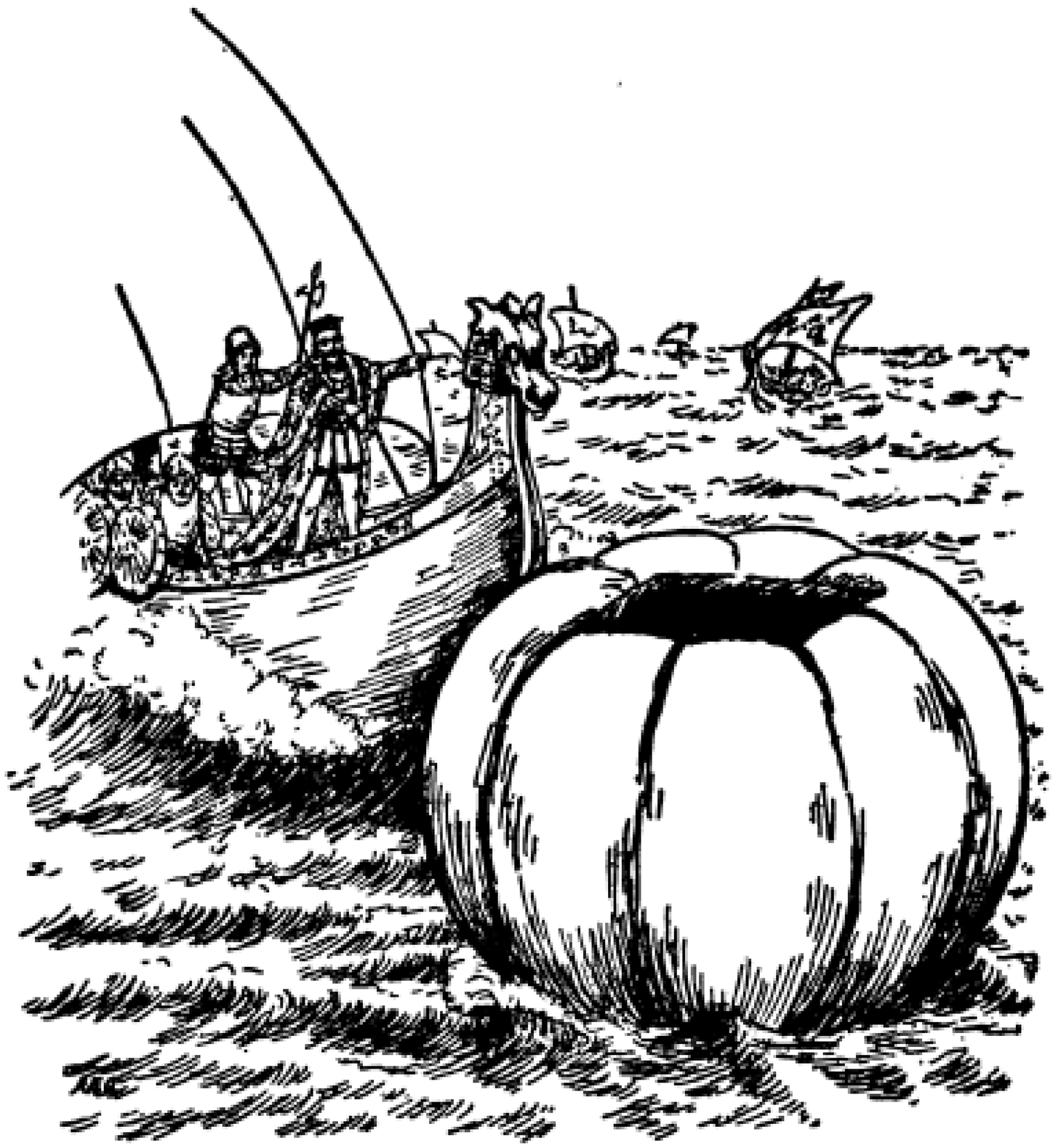
Out from the shore, in a hundred boats, dashed the King and his cohorts. Out and around they spun, circling the peaceful pumpkin. Then closer and closer—and always pushing closer.



"Heigh, wretch!" cried the King, who stood, straight and tall, in the bow of the royal barge. "You are captured and you cannot escape. You are surrounded by a thousand warriors, all armed with ropes and heavy chains. You are

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a prisoner again, and death shall be your punishment! Rush in, brave boatmen, and seize this dog of a Peterkin!"

So in sped the boats, crashing against the sides of the poor Pumperkin.' Then up with ladders—up with the men, climbing the steep, bulging sides of Peterkin's house. Then, one peek through the ceiling window and—what a cry went up!

For Peterkin was gone!

Nothing could be found of him, no matter how hard they searched—in every nook, behind the chairs, under the bed and everywhere. He was gone!

. . . . . .

And only you and I shall know the secret of where he disappeared. For when the dawn was breaking, Peterkin had seized his old companion by the shoulders and had whispered into his hairy ear:

"Come, you shall have that set of teeth you crave. You shall have the whitest teeth in all the world, if only you do as I order. But if you do not, I shall have to punish you as all wicked villains must be punished. So take your choice, my toothless enemy. Will you do as I desire?"

To be sure, the ugly old man could only mumble a consent through his red gums. Whereupon Peterkin leaped upon his shoulders and cried:

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"Fly first with me to the Valley of the Blind!"

And away they flew, leaving the Pumperkin just as the King and his cohorts found it: empty and alone.

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XXIX

PETERKIN BRINGS JOY

I'M not sure what the old villain thought of the scheme of flying to the Valley of the Blind—but he dared not disobey. For Peterkin's grip was firm upon his shoulders—and Peterkin's breath was hot against his cheek.

So over the mountains they flew, into the tumble-down, joyless valley of darkness—the valley where the toothless villain had stricken each innocent one with blindness.

There, across the neglected road, at the edge of the wild grown heath, they found the sorrowful family of those who first had told the tale of woe to Peterkin. Their clothes

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were more wretched than ever; their house was crumbling to the point of falling apart. And they wept bitterly when they heard Peterkin's voice again.

"But cheerily ho!" laughed Peterkin. "For I have brought you another stranger—well, not exactly a stranger, either. For, like me, he came to visit you once before. He

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brought you sorrow then—but this time he is sworn to bring you joy. When once you have eyes to see him——"

They rushed about in a close circle, surrounding the spot whence came to them the sound of Peterkin's voice. "Who is he? What is his name?" they demanded in a stormy chorus.

"He is known as the toothless farmer——"

At that, the hubbub swelled to a tempest of curses and wailing. The old villain had scarcely time to fall to his knees when the avenging blind men, groping in the dark, clutched him, plucked at his clothes, at his hair, at his eyes. Peterkin alone could save him from their vengeance. He screamed aloud, as he tore them from their prey.

"He has come to give you back your eyes! From now on you will see! Aye, see everything—the sunlight and the summer night sky, the fields, the smiles upon your little children's faces. Oh, do not touch him lest he keep not to his promise!"

Therewith the blind folk fell back, waiting in a hushed and nervous circle. "Aye, we shall not touch him," they promised.

Then the old villain, trembling and repentant, made a hurried sign in the air—a mystic, magic sign—and the sunlight streamed into the eyes of all the valley folk. Every-

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one could see! Yes, could see each other—could see the rags in which they were dressed, the ruins of the houses, the wild heaths, the broken, rutted roads—and planned at once to build anew a happy valley. Their eyes were re-

turned—and so should their laughter. Henceforth, the years of misery and darkness should be forgotten—and theirs should be what, long years before, it had been: The Valley of Bright Eyes!

Thus was the first errand done—and Peterkin smiled to

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think of what an easy, happy one it had been. And now they must go on, over the mountain boundaries, from one valley to the other, bringing the same gift of happiness and hope.

"Come," he whispered to the toothless villain, "you and I are not through yet. Now, don't look cross and think of rebelling—for you are in my power, and there is no escape for you, unless you will obey my every order as nobly as you have this first one. Besides, think of those brand-new teeth which you shall have as a reward!"

Even this was not enough to persuade the old man to go along peacefully; he sulked and gnashed his red gums and tried all sorts of magic tricks, but all in vain. For Peterkin's life was a charmed one, now that he had the love of a Princess Royal to guard him!

And, at last, when the old fellow saw that the people of the Valley of Bright Eyes were glancing at him angrily, as if they meant to lose their tempers after all, he took Peterkin upon his shoulders and flew dutifully away with him, over the boundary mountains.

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"He jumped upon his shoulders"

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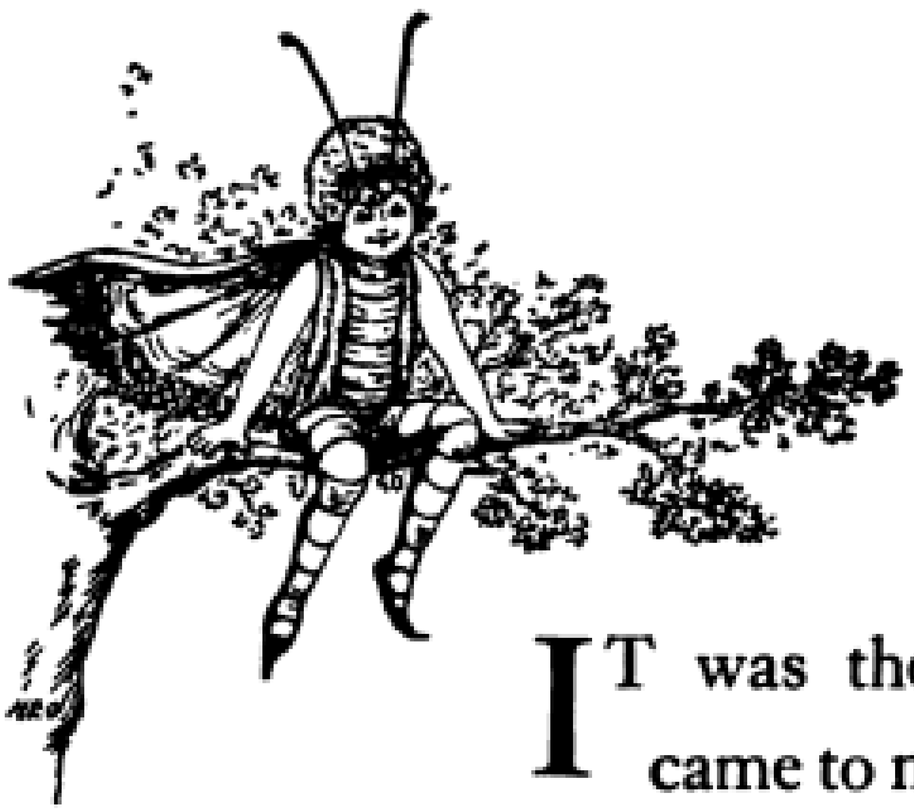

XXX

VALLEY TO VALLEY

IT was the Valley of the Deaf they came to next. And presto! by a twitch of his lean fingers and a mumbling of strange words, the old man had given back the hearing to each of its people.

What joy was theirs, now! For they could hear the song of the birds and the chatter of their own glad voices and—oh, yes! the laughter of the thousand brooks, which once had played so great a part in their sad history. But all that was over now, and they had only smiles and thanks for Peterkin and forgiveness for the toothless villain who had done them so much wrong.

They were all listening to the chirp of a little sparrow's young, high in the nest, when Peterkin and his captive flew

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away. Peterkin looked back a moment, to watch the joyous smiles upon their faces—and he, too, was happy in their new-found happiness.

And so he and his companion came to the Valley of Dancing Legs, where all the folk were racing hither, thither, everywhere, and all about, in weary, dreary, jigging, jogging flocks. Uphill, downhill, over fields and woods they went, never halting, never resting—on, on, lungs almost bursting and legs ready to drop off with weariness.

"Halt!" cried the toothless one. And then, with a moment or two of whispering and winking, he brought them all to a happy halt. Poor folk! It was the first rest they had had for so many years! They fell down, each of them, panting, groaning, utterly motionless. Ah, they would be happy now! Already, as their legs grew rested, they seemed to be smiling more peacefully. . . . Peterkin and his companion might go forward now into the next and last valley. For all would be joy in this one from this time forth.

So on they flew, these rescuing two, to the Valley of Up-in-the-Air. And only a few mystic symbols and commands, when down came all those floating, flying people, down to the ground they loved! And down came their beds, their chairs and tables after them—and all was set to rights!

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Thus, in all the Four Kingdoms did happiness succeed grim sorrow and smiles broke through the tears. Thus was

the whole domain made joyful through the brave work of the little stranger, Peterkin!

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"Where now?" cried the old villain, rubbing his sore shoulders. "I am tired of carrying you wherever you ordered. My back is well nigh broken with the load of you."

"We shall make one more flight," said Peterkin, "and that shall be to the window of the palace, just beneath the gilded dome. Come, away with us—to the Royal Princess's window."

"But—but, oh, no!" screamed the old fellow, quaking with fear. "That palace is in the city—don't you understand, in the city of my bitter enemies! And they'll kill me if ever they catch me there."

Peterkin laughed. "And they've sworn to kill me, too," he chuckled bravely. "But never you mind—we're going back anyhow."

And in spite of the old villain's terror, Peterkin jumped upon his shoulders and whipped him up, over the marshes and the sea, toward the faint gray glimpse of towers and steeples in the far distance.

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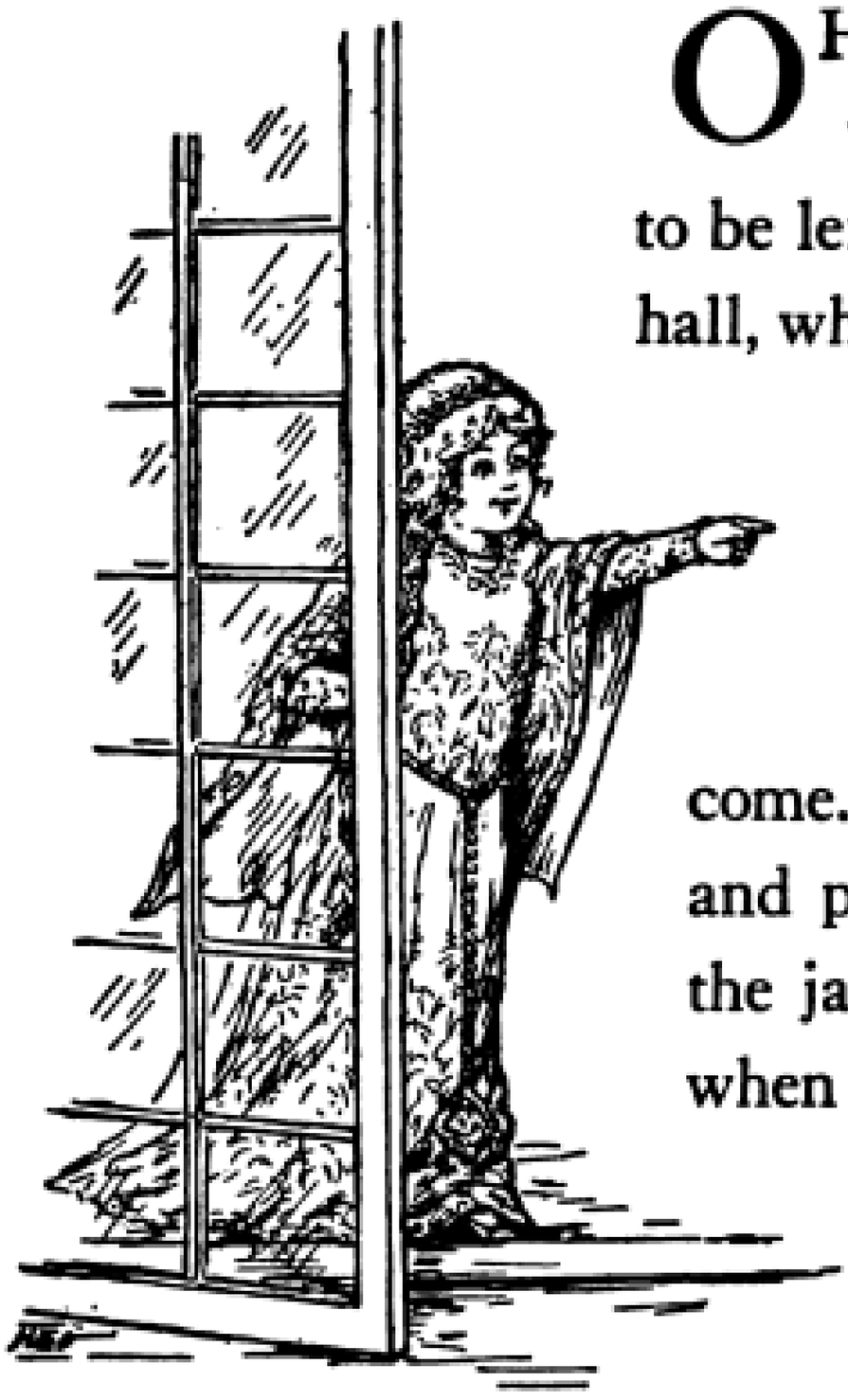
XXXI

THE PATIENT PRINCESS



OH, little Princess Clem! Think what a sad thing it was for her to be left alone in the deserted dining hall, while her royal father and all his guards rushed out to kill her brave returning hero!

She had tried so hard not to cry—but the tears *would* come. They flooded the table-cloth and plates and set the omelets and the jam pots floating. It was only when her prying nurse came in to fetch her that Her Little Royal Highness could dry her eyes.

But, all day long, she walked up and down, up and down,

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in the wide Throne Room. With nervous step she marched from one gilded corner to the other, her heart in a flutter of fear.

"But haven't you heard?" cried the nurse. "They found his Pumperkin—but it was empty. The poor Peterkin must have been drowned!"

That only made the princess weep the harder. Yet she never lost hope—oh, no; she was not that sort of little lady to lose hope! And gradually she came to realize that Peterkin must have escaped, somehow, from his boat, and was safe upon some new adventure. But when would he return?

All day she paced the marble floors, her blue eyes lighted with a gleam of tears. Once she stopped to look out of the window, and she saw a great commotion at the outer gate of the court-yard. A messenger was there, seeking admission: a ragged, dusty man, who asked with eager face to see the King. The little princess recognized him at once: he was a subject of the Valley of the Blind. . . . Only, had he recovered the sight of his eyes? She wondered how.

And while he spoke, there came up behind him on the road another messenger—and this one was from the Valley of the Deaf. And then another from the Valley of the Dancing Legs. And, lastly, one from the Valley of Up-in-

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the-Air. Why, here were messengers from each of the stricken Four Kingdoms—and each of them was smiling happily!

Aye, true! For a little while later, the four of them had

audience with His Majesty in this very same throne room, where the princess could hide behind a curtain of cloth of gold, and could hear each word they said.

"We are saved!" cried he of the Valley of the Blind.

"And so are we!" cried he of the Valley of the Deaf.

"And so are we!" cried each of the others.

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"Our sorrow is gone. The curse of the toothless villain has been lifted away from our valley. We are the happiest folk in all the Four Kingdoms!" declared he of the Valley of the Blind.

"And so are we!" declared the other three in chorus.

"But—but I don't understand," stammered the King, mopping his royal brow in wonder. "All in a day, here is my whole domain changed from one of sorrow to one of joy. Tell me, who has wrought this splendid change?"

And with one accord they answered, "Peterkin!"

His Majesty's scepter crashed to the floor, but he took no notice of it. He stared at them as if he thought them mad.

"What? That same little scalawag of a Peterkin who fled from our dungeon and who escaped us so neatly but yesterday?"

'Twas then that little Princess Clem came darting out from behind her curtain, dancing and laughing roguishly.

"The very same, my royal father! The very same Peterkin! And look!" she cried, stopping short at the window, "here he comes now!"

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XXXII

THE VILLAIN SATISFIED

NO mistake, either! For Peterkin it truly was, coming toward the palace! Peterkin, astride the shoulders of his old companion, flying through the clouds. At first they were only two specks, dark and tiny; then, coming nearer, they grew larger and larger, until the courtiers, crowding at the windows, could see the eager look in Peterkin's bright eyes and could catch a glimpse of the red gums of the old villain under him.

Nearer, nearer—then swooping down from the clouds and in at the window came the two travelers, into the midst of those who thronged the golden throne room.

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The toothless villain ran and cowered in a corner, trembling with fear. But Peterkin stood forth boldly, his head thrown back with pride.

"Here am I, Your Majesty!" he cried. "Here am I, returned whence I once fled. You may thrust me back into that pitchy dungeon—you may kill me, but——"

Great cheers drowned the rest of his words. One and all, the courtiers, the nobles, the King himself, were waving jeweled hands and making a joyous thunder of his name.

"Peterkin! Peterkin, our hero! Peterkin, our saviour! Brave, mighty, magic Peterkin!"

He fell back and rubbed his eyes. What did it all mean? Could he be dreaming?

No, for the King had risen from his throne now and was coming down its golden steps straight toward him, with arms outstretched.

"You have swept the shadows from my domain!" he cried. "You have brought laughter into faces which once were bathed in tears. You have given joy for sorrow—and joy—aye, untold joy!—shall be your reward! Ask of me now whatever you most wish, and I promise it shall be yours! But first of all, we must take our proper revenge upon the villain you have so neatly brought into our power."

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"Ah, that's just it, Your Majesty!" interrupted Peterkin. "Here's my dearest wish—and surely you'll not have the

heart to refuse it. I ask for mercy for your noble cousin, the toothless farmer. Indeed, if only you provide him with

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a new set of teeth, I'm sure he will make a very loyal and faithful subject evermore."

The King grew red in the face, at this reminder. But he had given his word—and not even a king can go back on that!

"How now, my villainous cousin?" he roared, turning to the old fellow. "Will you cease your wicked magic all the days of your life, if I forgive you for the sake of generous Peterkin? And, if I do provide you a new set of teeth, will you try very hard not to bite me?"

"Oh, yes—indeed, yes! I am so sick of soups and jellies: I am longing for the crunch of a good beefsteak. And oh! my royal cousin, what a feast I shall be able to eat if only you give me a brand-new set of teeth! And I shall be so proud of them I'll do nothing more than sit in a corner and grin the whole day long!"

So, when the little princess had joined her prayer for forgiveness to those of Peterkin and the rest of the courtiers, the King could do naught but order his royal dentist to appear upon the scene. And the dentist took very good pains to make an exact measure of the mouth of the old fellow, who went on mumbling in a most delighted way:

"Hee, hee! New teeth! A brand-new set of teeth! Well, now I am satisfied! No more villainy for me! the crunch

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of a good beefsteak. And I shall be the happiest, most satisfied nobleman in the land!"

Which set the whole court to cheering and clapping their hands louder than ever!

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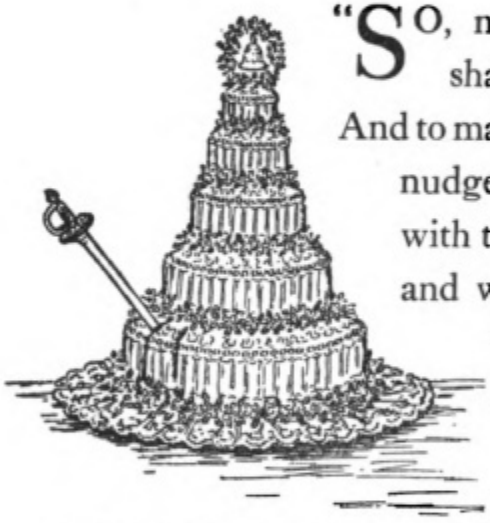
XXXIII

THE GLORIOUS ENDING



"SO, now," said the King, "you shall have your true reward." And to make it the more impressive, he nudged our Peterkin in the ribs with the end of his golden scepter and winked his royal eye at the Princess Clem, who stood nearby in blushing joy.

Straightway the courtiers gathered about their new hero, lifted him high upon their shoulders and bore him away, out of the throne room, out of the pillared halls, into the center of that very same market square which flanked the sunny palace. And there they cheered him, long and loud:

"All hail to Peterkin, Prince of the Realm! All hail to

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"Where was it bound? Haven't you guessed?"

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Peterkin, beloved of a Princess Royal! All hail to Peterkin, hero of heroes and King-to-be!"

It was only then that modest Peterkin could guess how great were the honors and rewards which had befallen him. For a golden coronet they placed upon his head—and a purple robe upon his shoulders. And a golden sword upon a jeweled belt went 'round his waist to mark, from this time forth, that he was chief commander of all the King's guards.

And, the very next day, at the hour of ruddy sunset, when all the windows of the palace burned with a bright reflection, and the moon was sailing high up, white and wan, into the clouds, there began the celebration of the most magnificent marriage that e'er was held or will be held in all the Four Kingdoms. And you know well enough who were the bride and bridegroom!

The banquet which followed was so splendid an affair that for three days thereafter the court doctor and all his chemists were kept busy at compounding cures for indigestion. For there were twenty different soups to taste—and each one thicker than the other. There were fish from the sea, the river and the brook; roast peacocks, with their tails still spread in blue and shimmering beauty; stuffed pigs with brown and crackling skin; all sorts of jellies, jams and ices; bonbons heaped in silver dishes, and—ah, yes, a wed-

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ding cake which towered so high that it touched the gilded ceiling. Think what a time the princess must have had cutting it to pieces—as all thoughtful brides do—with Peterkin's sharp sword!

Of course, you are curious to learn how beautiful the

bride appeared. But that's beyond my power to describe. I can only tell you that she was more lovely than ever she had been before; and that her golden hair was twined with precious rubies, with a rivulet of diamonds on her forehead. Her gown was of silver white brocade; but on it were em-

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broidered, in fine gold, a complete set of pictures of the marvelous history of her heroic husband. The Pumperkin, the adventure with the whale, the meeting with the old villain, the flight from the dungeon, the rescue of each of the four joyless valleys, . . . all were depicted there. Everyone wondered, to be sure, how such a handsome work of art could have been made so hastily—but ah, they did not know that, in her long hours of lonely waiting, the little Princess Clem had nearly ruined her dainty fingers with the needle and threads of the loom. For happiness is always born of toiling; and love grows greater for a little patient hardship.

The villainous cousin, now very peaceful, was very proud of a set of false teeth; and munched and munched in hungry bliss upon a plate of his favorite beefsteak. The King, at his end of the table, smiled down upon his feasting friends in joy and perfect bliss. Here was his whole domain reborn into happiness and hard at work and play again. Here was his only daughter wed to the nation's hero. And—this is what made him smile the broadest—here was a chance to climb down from his royal throne, within a year or two, and place his heavy crown on Peterkin's own forehead. For, if the truth must be told, the King was growing a little tired of playing King and wearing

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velvet robes the whole day long; he longed, as old men always do, for the comfort of his big clay pipe, his shirt sleeves and his slippers. And here were a new King and a Queen, all ready made, to rule his land with virtue and with wisdom.

Then, while the banquet was at its jolliest, the bride and bridegroom stole away in a coach that was drawn by six white steeds, and clattered down the festooned streets to the steps of the royal wharf. And there, in the moonlit harbor, the Pumperkin lay waiting. But oh! what a different Pumperkin! For plates of gold were on it now, and a hundred gay flags, and a sail of blue satin. There were sailors to tend it, too, and a great fleet of skiffs to bear it company across the sea.

There was music on the waters and the soft and tender strains played by the royal harpists were caught up by the breezes and carried straight to the Pumperkin. It seemed to sway gently up and down, up and down, as if the waves kept time with the music.

Inside his snug and comfortable boat-house, Peterkin was telling his dear little bride the many wonderful adventures that befell him from the time they had parted in the dungeon to the happy hour of his return. And while they were thus in sweet converse, the Pumperkin was gliding on. . . .

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Where was it bound? Haven't you guessed? Why, for brave Peterkin's old home, the Pumpkin Patch! That's where the honeymoon would be—and then . . . Then back to the Four Kingdoms, to reign for years in peace and power and glory.

And some day, when you, too, have grown up and have wed a Princess Clem, and have come into a kingdom of your own, you will live—as they lived—happily ever after.

THE END.

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Tom Tit Tales

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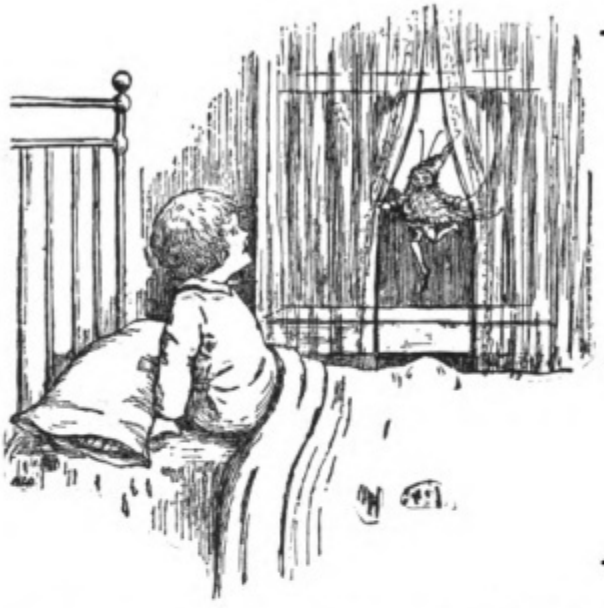
By GILLY BEAR



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