

Young Folks.

THE DOVE MAIDEN. A CATSKILL FAIRY TALE (Continued).

It was not easy to escape from the mermaid who had caught Snowdrop. She wished to present her to Neptune, she said, and she could not afford to lose her. Then Snowdrop clasped her arms about the neck of the lovely mermaid and kissed her, entreating that she might be released.

"I must find the dove chain for my mother, who is watching for me all this long time," she pleaded, and the mermaid made no further objection, but carried her to the shore. The mermaid was only frolicsome. How astonished the dove mother would have been to see her child carried in a mermaid's arms, with her star-rose crisp and dry!

For the first time Snowdrop remembered to use her ring by wishing herself at the palm-tree, and she found herself there sooner than any steambot could have taken her. She saw nobly, and looked down into the well. A rose-colored bubble came up to the surface from the cool depths.

"Don't pester me in the grove," said a voice, and the bubble sank. Next a blue bubble appeared.

"Throw water over Don's head," and the second bubble sank.

"Then up came a green bubble.

"Carry the enchanted waters of this well." "What shall I carry it in?"

"In me," replied the green bubble, and popped out of the well upon the grass—a beautiful flask.

Snowdrop walked through the grove, thinking she would soon flush the mermaid. State trees arched over her head to form a cool, green vault; the turf was velvet smooth, and along the paths were spread tempting fruits.

Snowdrop recalled the words of the rosy bubble, and walked on, turning neither to the right nor left.

Giant Drubb was seated in an immense arm-chair, bawn out of granite, which commanded a fine view of the surrounding country, so that he should know what was going on. Just as Snowdrop crossed near an orchard ran in front of the giant and passed. Drubb stared at the orchard with all the eyes in his head, because it was unusual to see an orchard there.

"I am a step nearer, and I will catch you in my hand. You would make me a dainty breakfast," cried Drubb.

Snowdrop climbed behind him, and sprinkled his first two eyes on the right with the enchanted water. This blinded his eyes; and always hiding behind the heads arising against him, she contrived to annoy the whole team.

"Dear me—is it night?" growled Drubb. "I thought the sun was still hours high, but how short the days are growing!"

Snowdrop slipped the dagger from his sheath at his side and wished herself away from the terrible monster. The mermaid had waited for her on the shore, amusing herself by singing sweet songs to bewitch the fishermen.

Down they went through the rushing waters, and this time Snowdrop was not afraid. It was an easy matter to use Drubb's dagger on the cruel chain which bound the lady; but Snowdrop was surprised when the whole city rose to its place on the blooming plain, the houses marble and stone, instead of clam shells and corals.

You see, Giant Drubb had made a sort of off-hand earthquake to immerse the city; no one ever heard of a town coming back that had been swallowed by a real, terrible earthquake. The Queen was very grateful.

She lost no time in leading Snowdrop up the steep path to the wise woman on the mountain. They found her in a hut perched on a crag, where a goat might climb—and indeed she was nimble and sure-footed as any goat. She liked to live near the stars, where the thunder crashed and the lightning seemed to leap from rock to rock.

The visitors entered her hut, where an owl was perched on one side of the hearth, and an eagle on the other.

"Who have we here?" she muttered, peering at Snowdrop.

"I will give you my ring if you tell me where the dove chain is," said Snowdrop, eagerly.

The wise woman smiled and smoothed the little girl's hair.

"I live nearer the clear heavens than those below. The stars are my jewels," she said.

"This dear child has rescued me from prison, and in return she desires to find her mother's dove chain," said Queen Korner.

"Yes, yes; I know, Madam Skimp did all that mischief because she could not marry the fairy king; and it was his gift. I hear all the news from my two friends here."

"I saw Skimp fly away with the chain in the form of a hawk," said the eagle.

The wise woman sprinkled some dried herbs on a mortar, and a white cloud rose in the air, so that the two visitors could not see her at all. When the smoke cleared, she shook her head.

"Go to the fairy king. Perhaps Skimp will tell you, after all."

The eagle offered to carry the guests down the mountain on his back, and they found the ride very pleasant. Snowdrop could only think of her lonely mother now, who must anxiously watch for her return, and so decided to seek the fairy realm at once.

Everything was in confusion; the fairy queen had been stung by a gnat, which caused her death, and the king was again a widower.

"That comes from marrying beneath his rank. She was only Skimp's maid of honor," cried the eagle.

Snowdrop heard them, for she stood behind the bluebell in which they were swinging.

"Bless me!" exclaimed one, raising her eyes, which was made of the eye-hole of a cannie needle set in steel, "who comes here? It is Madam Skimp, and no other."

Sure enough, it was Skimp, who heard of the queen's death, and decided to return to the court, in hopes of winning the seat on the throne beside the king.

Skimp was lovely. She had bathed her face in flower-down; her robe was sewed out of gold-floss, with a bodice formed of a single ruby, and trimmed with diamond dust. Her hair was combed into a high water-fall; her hat was made of a beetle, and her fan was a diamond-down. Never was a more charming toilet seen; the other fairy ladies nearly died of envy when she minced about, waving her fan in a fashionable manner; and in kneeling before the king she showed two little gold boots with red heels to great advantage.

The king thought he had never seen Skimp look so pretty; and when he bade her rise from her knees, he proposed to drink her health in amber honey, which was served in beehive-cups. Although he was still dressed in mourning (a sable moth's coat), as a token of respect for the departed queen, he had not slipped all of the honey before he made Skimp an offer of marriage.

The honey sweetened her temper so fully—that or propriety—and she again felt ashamed of her naughtiness. Snowdrop made her presence known, for the little people were so much absorbed in their own affairs that they had no noticed her.

The king invited her to be seated on the soft moss, as his chair was too small for her tall; and you have no idea how big and clumsy she appeared, among the fair spirits as great a contrast as Giant Drubb was to herself.

"Dear, good fairies, I have been all over the earth to find my mother's dove chain, and I need your assistance."

"I should be ashamed of my subjects if they did not help you," replied the king. "Every fairykin must hold up a hand in token of willingness to aid Snowdrop."

Each now held up a tiny fan, and Queen Skimp raised hers with the first. Why not? She was willing to restore the chain, since her temper had been sweetened with the honey.

"Let bygones be bygones," she said. "If I was not the fourth wife I am the fifth."

She flew away on her gauzy wings, and returned in a trice, carrying the chain, which she gave to Snowdrop, and kissed her in the bargain.

Snowdrop left the fairies in the middle of wedding gossamer, thankful that they were so good and kind, and that she had had her first kiss from a fairy king when she least expected it.

Danger was over for the dove mother's little daughter. Soberly had she given her fairy kingdom when she least expected it.

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