



Chapter 6



The Magic Locket

“Where are we, father?” Sylvie whispered, with her arms twined closely around the old man’s neck, and with her rosy cheek lovingly pressed to his.

“In Elfland, darling. It’s one of the provinces of Fairyland.”

“But I thought Elfland was ever so far from Outland: and we’ve come such a tiny little way!”

“You came by the Royal Road, sweet one. Only those of royal blood can travel along it: but you’ve been royal ever since I was made King of Elfland that’s nearly a month ago. They sent two ambassadors, to make sure that their invitation to me, to be their new King, should reach me. One was a Prince; so he was able to come by the Royal Road, and to come invisibly to all but me: the other was a Baron; so he had to come by the common road, and I dare say he hasn’t even arrived yet.”

“Then how far have we come?” Sylvie enquired.

“Just a thousand miles, sweet one, since the Gardener unlocked that door for you.”

“A thousand miles!” Bruno repeated. “And may I eat one?”

“Eat a mile, little rogue?”

“No,” said Bruno. “I mean may I eat one of that fruits?”

“Yes, child,” said his father: “and then you’ll find out what Pleasure is like—the Pleasure we all seek so madly, and enjoy so mournfully!”

Bruno ran eagerly to the wall, and picked a fruit that was shaped something like a banana, but had the color of a strawberry.

He ate it with beaming looks, that became gradually more gloomy, and were very blank indeed by the time he had finished.

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“It hasn’t got no taste at all!” he complained. “I couldn’t feel nuffin in my mouf! It’s a—what’s that hard word, Sylvie?”

“It was a Phlizz,” Sylvie gravely replied. “Are they all like that, father?”

“They’re all like that to you, darling, because you don’t belong to Elfland—yet. But to me they are real.”

Bruno looked puzzled. “I’ll try anuvver kind of fruits!” he said, and jumped down off the King’s knee. “There’s some lovely striped ones, just like a rainbow!” And off he ran.

Meanwhile the Fairy-King and Sylvie were talking together, but in such low tones that I could not catch the words: so I followed Bruno, who was picking and eating other kinds of fruit, in the vain hope of finding some that had a taste. I tried to pick so me myself—but it was like grasping air, and I soon gave up the attempt and returned to Sylvie.

“Look well at it, my darling,” the old man was saying, “and tell me how you like it.”

“It’s just lovely,” cried Sylvie, delightedly. “Bruno, come and look!” And she held up, so that he might see the light through it, a heart-shaped Locket, apparently cut out of a single jewel, of a rich blue color, with a slender gold chain attached to it.

“It are welly pretty,” Bruno more soberly remarked: and he began spelling out some words inscribed on it. “All—will—love—Sylvie,” he made them out at last. “And so they doos!” he cried, clasping his arms round her neck. “Everybody loves Sylvie!”

“But we love her best, don’t we, Bruno?” said the old King, as he took possession of the Locket. “Now, Sylvie, look at this.” And he showed her, lying on the palm of his hand, a Locket of a deep crimson color, the same shape as the blue one and, like it, attached to a slender golden chain.

“Lovelier and lovelier!” exclaimed Sylvie, clasping her hands in ecstasy. “Look, Bruno!”

“And there’s words on this one, too,” said Bruno. “Sylvie—will—love—all.”

“Now you see the difference,” said the old man: “different colors and different words.”

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Choose one of them, darling. I'll give you which ever you like best."

Sylvie whispered the words, several times over, with thoughtful smile, and then made her decision. "It's very nice to be loved," she said: "but it's nicer to love other people! May I have the red one, Father?"

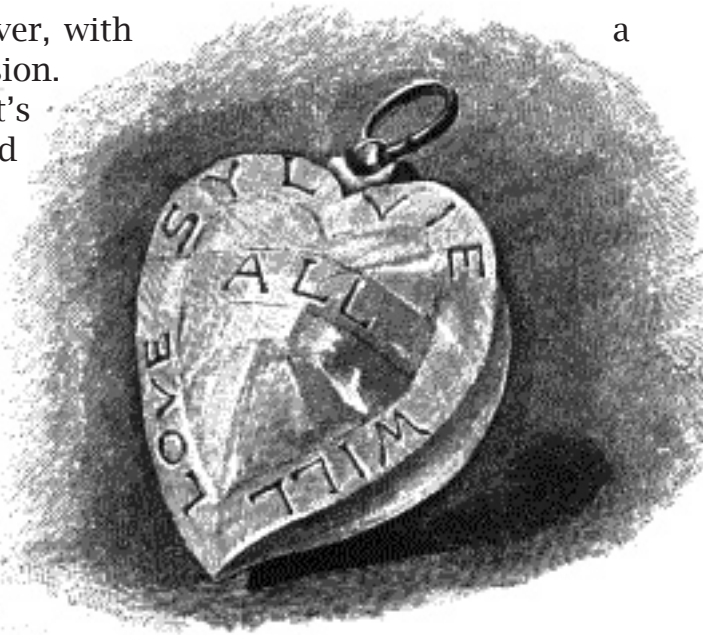
The old man said nothing: but I could see his eyes fill with tears, as he bent his head and pressed his lips to her forehead in a long loving kiss. Then he undid the chain, and showed her how to fasten it round her neck, and to hide it away under the edge of her frock. "It's for you to keep you know he said in a low voice, not for other people to see. You'll remember how to use it?"

Yes, I'll remember, said Sylvie.

"And now darlings it's time for you to go back or they'll be missing you and then that poor Gardener will get into trouble!"

Once more a feeling of wonder rose in my mind as to how in the world we were to get back again—since I took it for granted that wherever the children went I was to go—but no shadow of doubt seemed to cross their minds as they hugged and kissed him murmuring over and over again "Good-bye darling Father!" And then suddenly and swiftly the darkness of midnight seemed to close in upon us and through the darkness harshly rang a strange wild song:—

He thought he saw a Buffalo
Upon the chimney-piece:
He looked again, and found it was
His Sister's Husband's Niece.
'Unless you leave this house,' he said,
'I'll send for the Police!'



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“That was me!” he added, looking out at us, through the half-opened door, as we stood waiting in the road.’ “And that’s what I’d have done—as sure as potatoes aren’t radishes—if she hadn’t have tooken herself off! But I always loves my pay-rints like anything.”

“Who are oor pay-rints?” said Bruno.

“Them as pay rint for me, a course!” the Gardener replied. “You can come in now, if you like.”

He flung the door open as he spoke, and we got out, a little dazzled and stupefied (at least I felt so) at the sudden transition from the half-darkness of the railway-carriage to the brilliantly-lighted platform of Elveston Station.

A footman, in a handsome livery, came forwards and respectfully touched his hat. “The carriage is here, my Lady,” he said, taking from her the wraps and small articles she was carrying: and Lady Muriel, after shaking hands and bidding me “Good-night!” with a pleasant smile, followed him.



It was with a somewhat blank and lonely feeling that I betook myself to the van from which the luggage was being taken out: and, after giving directions to have my boxes sent after me, I made my way on foot to Arthur’s lodgings, and soon lost my lonely feeling in the hearty welcome my old friend gave me, and the cozy warmth and cheerful light of the little sitting-room into which he led me.

“Little, as you see, but quite enough for us two. Now, take the easy-chair, old fellow, and let’s have another look at you! Well, you do look a bit pulled down!” and he put on a solemn professional air. “I prescribe Ozone, quant. suff. Social dissipation, fiant pilulae quam plurimae: to be taken, feasting, three times a day!”

“But, Doctor!” I remonstrated. “Society doesn’t ‘receive’ three times a day!”

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“That’s all you know about it!” the young Doctor gaily replied. “At home, lawn-tennis, 3 P.M. At home, kettledrum, 5 P.M. At home, music (Elveston doesn’t give dinners), 8 P.M. Carriages at 10. There you are!”

It sounded very pleasant, I was obliged to admit. “And I know some of the lady-society already,” I added. “One of them came in the same carriage with me”

“What was she like? Then perhaps I can identify her.”

“The name was Lady Muriel Orme. As to what she was like—well, I thought her very beautiful. Do you know her?”

“Yes—I do know her.” And the grave Doctor colored slightly as he added “Yes, I agree with you. She is beautiful.”

“I quite lost my heart to her!” I went on mischievously. “We talked—”

“Have some supper!” Arthur interrupted with an air of relief, as the maid entered with the tray. And he steadily resisted all my attempts to return to the subject of Lady Muriel until the evening had almost worn itself away. Then, as we sat gazing into the fire, and conversation was lapsing into silence, he made a hurried confession.

“I hadn’t meant to tell you anything about her,” he said (naming no names, as if there were only one ‘she’ in the world!) “till you had seen more of her, and formed your own judgment of her: but somehow you surprised it out of me. And I’ve not breathed a word of it to any one else. But I can trust you with a secret, old friend! Yes! It’s true of me, what I suppose you said in jest.

“In the merest jest, believe me!” I said earnestly. “Why, man, I’m three times her age! But if she’s your choice, then I’m sure she’s all that is good and—”

“—and sweet,” Arthur went on, “and pure, and self-denying, and true-hearted, and—” he broke off hastily, as if he could not trust himself to say more on a subject so sacred and so precious. Silence followed: and I leaned back drowsily in my easy-chair, filled with bright and beautiful imaginings of Arthur and his lady-love, and of all the peace and happiness in store for them.

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I pictured them to myself walking together, lingeringly and lovingly, under arching trees, in a sweet garden of their own, and welcomed back by their faithful gardener, on their return from some brief excursion.

It seemed natural enough that the gardener should be filled with exuberant delight at the return of so gracious a master and mistress and how strangely childlike they looked! I could have taken them for Sylvie and Bruno less natural that he should show it by such wild dances, such crazy songs!

“He thought he saw a Rattlesnake
That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
The Middle of Next Week.
‘The one thing I regret,’ he said,
‘Is that it cannot speak!’”

—least natural of all that the Vice-Warden and ‘my Lady’ should be standing close beside me, discussing an open letter, which had just been handed to him by the Professor, who stood, meekly waiting, a few yards off.

“If it were not for those two brats,” I heard him mutter, glancing savagely at Sylvie and Bruno, who were courteously listening to the Gardener’s song, “there would be no difficulty whatever.”

“Let’s hear that bit of the letter again,” said my Lady. And the Vice-Warden read aloud:-

“—and we therefore entreat you graciously to accept the Kingship, to which you have been unanimously elected by the Council of Elfland: and that you will allow your son Bruno of whose goodness, cleverness, and beauty, reports have reached us—to be regarded as Heir-Apparent.”

“But what’s the difficulty?” said my Lady.

“Why, don’t you see? The Ambassador, that brought this, is waiting in the house: and he’s sure to see Sylvie and Bruno: and then, when he sees Uggug, and remembers all that about ‘goodness, cleverness, and beauty,’ why, he’s sure to—”

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“And where will you find a better boy than Uggug?” my Lady indignantly interrupted. “Or a wittier, or a lovelier?”

To all of which the Vice-Warden simply replied “Don’t you be a great blethering goose! Our only chance is to keep those two brats out of sight. If you can manage that, you may leave the rest to me. I’ll make him believe Uggug to be a model of cleverness and all that.”

“We must change his name to Bruno, of course?” said my Lady.

The Vice-Warden rubbed his chin. “Humph! No!” he said musingly. “Wouldn’t do. The boy’s such an utter idiot, he’d never learn to answer to it.”

“Idiot, indeed!” cried my Lady. “He’s no more an idiot than I am!”

“You’re right, my dear,” the Vice-Warden soothingly I replied. “He isn’t, indeed!”

My Lady was appeased. “Let’s go in and receive the Ambassador,” she said, and beckoned to the Professor. “Which room is he waiting in?” she inquired.

“In the Library, Madam.”

“And what did you say his name was?” said the Vice-Warden.

The Professor referred to a card he held in his hand. “His Adiposity the Baron Doppelgeist.”

“Why does he come with such a funny name?” said my Lady.

“He couldn’t well change it on the journey,” the Professor meekly replied, “because of the luggage.”

“You go and receive him,” my Lady said to the Vice-Warden, “and I’ll attend to the children.”