

One day, a little Princess was playing with her golden ball, in her father's garden. Sometimes she held the shining thing in her hands and watched the birds flying to and fro over the high garden wall.

"I wish I could fly and see the big world" she sighed. For she hardly ever went outside the Palace gates; the King and Queen thought she was happier and safer inside them.

At this particular moment it was very quiet in the sunny garden; the gardeners had gone home for their mid-day dinner; the King was in his study planning a new water-garden; the Queen was in the kitchen, learning how to make a cake, and the Princess's old nurse was upstairs mending.

Princess Annabel wandered off into a part of the garden she had never been in before. She ran along a little path which ended in bushes and trees, bounded by, not the stone wall, but a wooden fence. She peeped between the gaps and saw row upon row of little fir trees. She pushed her way along the fence until she could go no further, for a tree trunk lay across it, having broken it in its fall, in the last storm.

THE PRINCESS

AND

THE WOODCUTTER

BY

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Annabel climbed on to the rough trunk, walked a little shakily along it, jumped down, and there she was, outside the Palace garden, though she hardly knew it! Through the baby trees tripped our little Princess until she stepped on to a white road. She looked around her with wide-open eyes; at the yellow buttercups in the grass; at the pink wild roses starring the hedge; a low "moo-oo" coming from the other side of it! She starts to hurry along, a pretty little figure in her blue silk dress, and how her crown shines in the sun!

Clipperty-clop! Clipperty-clop! What is that? A horse and cart come in sight, carrying a farmer and his wife to market, with butter and eggs. As they draw near, they can hardly believe their eyes! Can it be the Princess alone on the road? The woman's sister works in the royal nurseries and often she tells of the Queen's little daughter. "We must take her home" whispers the farmer's wife, trying then and there to make a curtsy, which nearly made her fall out of the cart! "Your Royal Highness, will you have a ride with us, back to the Palace?" But Annabel is quite happy where she is and will not be



persuaded to get into the cart. "Then we must go quickly to the King and Queen" says the farmer, setting his horse to a fast trot with a flick of his whip.

Presently, the Princess turned down a leafy lane. Some way along she sat down; decorated her crown with daisies and looked sweeter than ever. A tapping sound made her get up, go to the end of the lane and into a wood. There amongst the trees, was a wood-cutter at work. The Princess stood watching him, swinging his shining axe. Silvery-white were his hair and beard, and round his neck he wore a red kerchief. He was lopping branches off a fallen tree. After a little while he put down his axe, mopped his brow and noticed the little blue clad figure watching him so intently. She wore no crown - more of that later.

"Wee lassie, all alone here?" questioned the old man. She remained silent. "I must be home for my dinner now, and you must too", he added. Then all of a sudden she began to cry, tears chasing each other down her cheeks. "There, there", comforted the wood-cutter. "You and I will have a bite together at home, and then you'll tell us where you belong". Annabel took his

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hand and the pair walked happily along the woodland path to his cottage. Standing at the door was his wife. "You're late to-day, old man" she called.

"Ah, but I've somebody nice with me" he replied.

After a bowl of soup the Princess fell fast asleep.

Now what was happening in the Palace? When the nurse could not find Annabel, everyone from the King to the cook began to search for her. Was she in the summer house? Was she in one of the gardeners' cottages? Or, worst of all, had she fallen into the lily pond? Happily, the farmer arrived with news of the Princess.

"Oh, my precious one" nearly sobbed the Queen; but the King said "The little scamp", and the farmer's wife was quite surprised to hear him say it!

The coach was ordered and the King and Queen set off in it to catch up with the Princess. Of course, they could not find her on the road.

"Let us try the lane" called out the King to his coachman Samuel. (He was usually called Sam)

"Very good, your Majesty, but we may stick". And stick they did,

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because the coach was heavy and the ground was soft after the recent rain.

"Now, what are we going to do?" said the King.

"Please" said Sam, "allow me, your Majesty, to go on on foot to look for our dear Princess; the horses will be alright on a slack rein, cropping the grass".

The King leant back and took off his crown and the Queen listened to his plans for the water garden.

Just before Sam reached the wood, something glittering in the grass caught his eye. He looked closer and there lay a little circlet of gold, a robin perched jauntily upon it. "Why, here's the little love's crown" cried the coachman, picking it up carefully.

He soon came to the scene of the wood-cutter's felling, but seeing no one, sat down against the fallen tree, hoping a wood-cutter, of whom he could ask news, would appear very soon. He ate an apple which his wife had slipped into his pocket when he was harnessing the horses, and enjoyed the peace.

Now I am sure he did not mean to, but Samuel fell fast asleep. But it was not for long, for the wood-cutter returned; his blows soon awoke Sam.

He sprang up, saying "Have you seen

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a little girl, a Princess she is?"

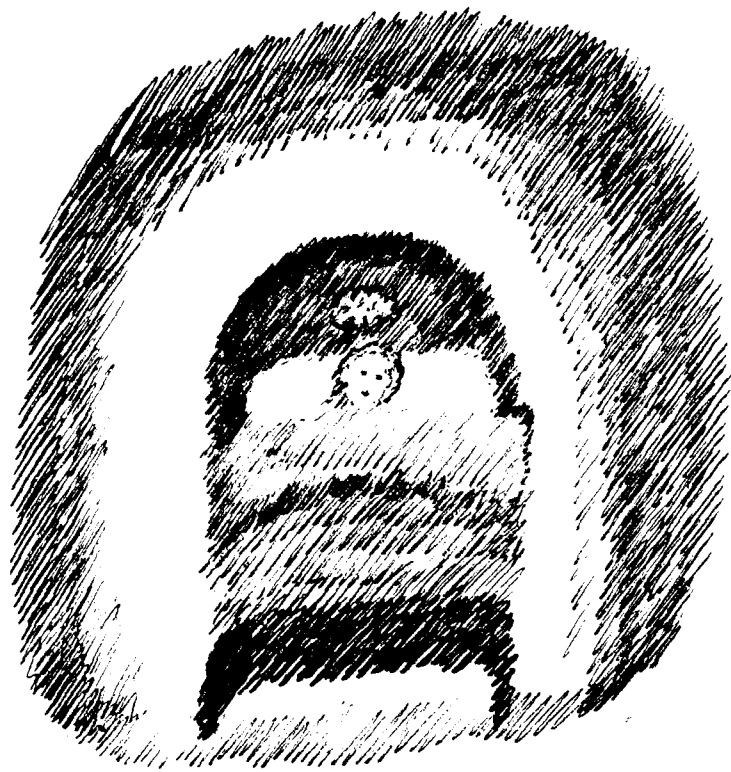
"O, ho," answered the wood-cutter, his blue eyes twinkling, "the little maid, asleep in our humble cottage is most likely your Princess, well I never".


It took little time for the coachman to take the old man's story to the King and Queen, who by now were impatient for news. The coach was back on the road again, for the farmer returning from market, had espied it in the lane, had fetched ropes and horses to pull it out. He was just leaving the King when Samuel arrived at a run, so he could show them the way by road to the wood cutter's cottage, whom he knew. O, how glad they all were to hear the Princess was safe and sound. Very soon, the wood-cutter's wife was opening her door to the King and Queen, just as the Princess was waking up. The Royal parents kissed her many times. They thanked the good woman for her kindness and promised her a reward, but she said it had been a great pleasure to shelter such a sweet Princess and she really did not want anything.

Back to the Palace they went, and how pleased the nurse and everyone was to see the Princess again.

That evening when Annabel was in bed and none the worse for her adventure,

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the Queen said, "Husband, have we not kept Annabel too much from the outside world? When she was very small it was good for her but now she wants to spread her wings a little".

"Yes, yes", replied the King. "You are right. I know what we will give her, a little pony carriage in which she can drive round the countryside and visit her friends".

"An excellent idea" smiled the Queen.

A few days later, a little yellow carriage, drawn by a white pony, drew up at the Palace door. Golden bells shone on the harness.

"O", cried the Princess, "how lovely. I'll go and visit the wood-cutter and his wife".

In she jumped beside Samuel and away they went, the bells jingling merrily.

All the same, a gardener found the broken part of the fence and the King ordered it to be mended.

