

THE IMPOSSIBLE ENCHANTMENT¹

There was once a king much loved by his subjects, and who loved them very much for his own part. That prince had an infinite repugnance for marriage, and what is even more astonishing, amour had never made the slightest impression on his heart. His subjects represented to him with so much insistence the necessity of giving himself a successor that the good king consented to their demand. But as all the women he had seen until then had not inspired the feeblest desire, he resolved to go and seek in other lands what his own had not been able to present to him; and, in spite of the bitter and piquant pleasantries of the beautiful and ugly women of his homeland, he undertook voyages, after having given a form as tranquil as it was solid to the government of his Estates. He only wanted to be accompanied by a single squire, a man of abundant common sense, but who did not have much brilliance in his intelligence. That sort of companion is not the worst on journeys.

The king traveled several countries in vain, despite making every effort to fall in love, but his time had not yet come. After two years of absence and fatigue he resumed the road to his Estates, and came back with the same indifference that he had taken away. At any rate, while traversing a forest he heard a frightful mewling of cats. The good squire did not know what to think about the commencement of such an adventure. All the stories of witches that he had heard told returned to his mind. As for the king, he was quite firm; courage and curiosity engaged him to wait and see what was making a noise as strange as it was disagreeable.

Eventually, when the racket drew closer to the place where they were, they saw a hundred Spanish cats going by, which traversed the forest before their eyes. Someone had covered them with a cloak, so that they were very excited, and they were getting carried away. They were supported by two of the largest monkeys that have ever been seen. They were wearing long coats, amaranth in color; their boots were the prettiest in the world and the best made. They were mounted on two superb English bulldogs, and spurring them on while blowing into little fairground trumpets.

The king, surprised by such a spectacle, was looking at them attentively when he saw twenty little dwarfs appear, some mounted on lynxes and leading relays, others on foot, leading unmatched couples of cats. They were dressed in amaranth like the huntsmen; that color was the livery of the equipage.

A moment later he perceived a young woman, charming for her beauty and the proud air with which she was mounted on a huge tiger, whose gait was admirable. She passed in front of the king, going at full tilt, without stopping and without even saluting him, but although she had scarcely darted a glance at him, he was enchanted by her, and his liberty disappeared in a flash.

In the disturbance that seized him then, he saw a dwarf separate from the equipage and remain behind the others. It was to him that he addressed himself, with the warmth that the curiosity of amour gives to the questions of whoever is touched by it. The dwarf told him that the person he had just seen was Princess Mutine, the daughter of King Prudent, in whose Estates he found himself. He also told him that the princess was very fond of hunting and that he had just seen her rabbit equipage pass by.

The king only sought further information as to the road he ought to take in order to render to the court. The dwarf indicated it to him, and spurred his mount in order to rejoin the hunt. The king, by virtue of an impatience that always accompanies a nascent amour, spurred his own, and found himself within two hours in the capital of King Prudent's Estates. He had himself presented to the king and queen, who received him with open arms, all the better when he declared his name and that of his Estates.

The beautiful Mutine returned from hunting some time after that presentation. Having learned that she had forced two rabbits that day, he tried to compliment her on such a fortunate hunt, but the princess did not reply to him with a single word. He was a little surprised by that silence, but he was even more so when he saw that during supper she did not say any more. He only perceived that there were moments when it seemed that she wanted to say something; but he noticed that King Prudent, or the queen, his

¹ A previous English version of this story appeared in Andrew Lang's *Grey Fairy Book* (1900) as "An Impossible Enchantment."

wife—who were never drinking at the same time—immediately started speaking. That silence did not prevent his amour for Mutine augmenting.

The king retired to the beautiful apartment that had been destined for him, and it was there that the worthy squire did not seem unenthusiastic regarding the joy of seeing his master in love. He did not hide from the king that he was annoyed by it.

“Why that chagrin?” the king replied. “The princess is beautiful she’s assuredly all that I could desire.”

“She’s beautiful,” said the god squire, “but in order to be happy, something more than beauty is required in amour. Look at her, Sire,” he added, “she has something harsh in her physiognomy.”

“It’s pride,” exclaimed the king, “and nothing suits a beautiful young woman more.”

“Pride, harshness,” the squire went on, “call it what you like; but the choice she’s made for her pleasures of so many maleficent animals is, in my opinion, a convincing proof of her natural ferocity. Furthermore, the attention with which they prevent her from speaking seems very suspect to me. Her father the king isn’t named Prudent for nothing; I even suspect that name Mutine; it can only be a blunting or a diminutive of impressions that she has given; for, you know as well as I do that it’s all too customary to flatter the faults of persons of her rank.”²

The reflections of the worthy squire were sensate, but, as all difficulties only augment amour in the hearts of all men, especially those of kings, who do not like to be contradicted, the latter asked for the hand of the princess in marriage the next day. As everyone had been informed of the king’s indifference, the triumph of Mutine’s charms was complete. The princess was granted to him on two conditions; the first was that the marriage should take place the following day, the second that he should not speak to the princess until she was his wife. The pretext given for the condition of silence was a vow, the first excuse that came to mind, and that vow was assumed by the king to be proof of a truly religious heart.

Those great precautions were a further occasion for long speeches made by the squire, but they made no greater impression than those which had preceded them. The king ended up, after having listened to them, saying to him: “I’ve had so much trouble falling in love; now I have; what the devil do you want? I’m sticking to it.”

The rest of the day was spent, like the following one, in balls and feasts. The princess was in attendance at them all, without saying a word, and the first word that she was heard to pronounce was the fatal “yes” that attached her to him for life.

As soon as she was married, she no longer constrained herself, and the first day did not pass without her making a distribution of loud insults and offensive remarks to her maids of honor. In sum, the mildest words with which she accompanied the most difficult service in the world had no other character than ill humor and abruptness. Her husband the king was no more exempt from those fashions of speaking than anyone else, but as he was in love, and a good man besides, he suffered everything patiently.

A few days after their marriage, the newlyweds took the road to their realm, and Mutine was not regretted in her father’s Estates. The welcome that Prudent had always given to strangers had had no other motive than the hope of an amour similar to the one his daughter had just inspired and that of a passion forceful enough to pass over the knowledge of mind and character.

The good squire had been all too reasonable in his remonstrations, but the king perceived that too late. All the time that the new queen was on the road, she made her entire retinue experience despair, dolor and impatience, but once she had arrived in his kingdom, her ill humor and malevolence redoubled.

After a month of residence in his Estates, her reputation was perfect; there was no longer any but a single voice to regard her as the nastiest queen in the world.

One day, when she mounted a horse and went for a ride in a wood near her palace, she perceived an old woman on foot, who was following the highway. She was simply dressed. The good woman, after having curtsied as best she could, continued on her way, but the queen, who was only looking for an opportunity to exhale her ill humor, sent one of her pages running after her in order to bring her back.

² *Mutine* means refractory or insubordinate.

When she was in her presence she said to her: "I find you very impertinent not to have made me a more profound reverence. Don't you know that I'm the queen? It wouldn't take much for me to have you given a hundred lashes with a stirrup-leather."

"Madame," said the old lady, "I have never known very well the measure of reverences; it's apparent that I didn't want to offend you."

"What!" said the queen. "She dares to respond!! Attach her right away to the tail of my horse; I'll take her at a rapid pace to the best dancing-master in the city, to show her how to make me a reverence"

The queen's order was carried out. The old woman cried for mercy when she was attached, but it was in vain that she boasted of the protection of the fays; the queen took no more account of those last words than the others.

"I'm no more afraid of them than of you," she said, "And even if you were a fay, I'd act as I am doing."

The old woman allowed herself to be attached, patiently, to the tail of the horse, but when the queen wanted to give it a thrust of the spur, it remained motionless. She redoubled the thrust of her heel in vain; it had become a horse of bronze. The cords attaching the old woman changed in an instant into garlands of flowers, and the old woman herself suddenly appeared eight feet tall. Then looking at Mutine with proud and disdainful eyes, she said to her: "Wicked woman, unworthy of the name of queen that you bear, I wanted to judge for myself whether you merited the bad reputation that you are given in the world. I'm convinced of it; you shall judge whether the fays are as scantily redoubtable as you have just said."

Immediately, the fay Paisible—for it was her—whistled between the two fingers of her hand, and a chariot was seen to appear drawn by six ostriches, and on the chariot the fay Grave was recognized, even graver than her name. She was then the doyenne of the fays, and presided over affairs regarding the Corporations of Faerie. Her escort was composed of a dozen other fays mounted on short-tailed dragons.

In spite of the astonishment caused to her by the arrival of the fays, Queen Mutine lost nothing of the proud and malevolent air that was natural to her. When that brilliant company had dismounted, the fay Paisible recounted her entire adventure. The fay Grave, who carried out her responsibilities with a great deal of severity, approved the conduct of Paisible. Then she opined that the queen should be transformed into the same metal as her horse; but the fay Paisible was not of that opinion, by virtue of a unparalleled kindness. She softened all the rigorous voices that tended to the punishment of the queen.

Finally, Mutine was only condemned to become Paisible's slave until she had given birth—for I've forgotten to tell you that she was at the beginning of a pregnancy. The same sentence, which was rendered in the middle of a field, ordered that the child she brought into the world would be the slave of the fay in her place, who would be free after her childbirth to return to her husband, the king. The fays had the politeness to notify the king of the sentence that had just been passed. He was obliged to consent to it, but even if he had opposed it, what could the good prince have done?

After that justice, the fays all returned to their affairs, and Paisible waited momentarily for her chariot, for which she had sent. It was a small jet chariot in several colors drawn by six hinds as white as snow, ornamented with green satin cloths embroidered with gold. With a tap of her wand, the queen's garments were turned into those of a slave. In that attire she was made to mount a coughing mule, and it was at a rapid trot that she followed the fay's chariot.

After an hour of trotting, the queen arrived at Paisible's house. She was, as one might imagine, in a great affliction, but her pride prevented her from shedding a single tear. The fay sent her to the kitchen to work there, after having given her the name of Furieuse, that of Mutine being too delicate for the wickedness to which she was borne.

"Furieuse," the fay Paisible said to her, "I've saved your life, and perhaps my conscience will be burdened by that. I don't want to overwhelm you with toil because of the child with which you're pregnant, and who, as you know, is to be my slave. I'm taking you out of the kitchen and putting you in charge of sweeping my apartment and that of not leaving a single flea on my little dog, Christine."

Furieuse understood easily that there was no point in appealing such an ordinance. She therefore made the wise decision to carry out exactly what she had been charged with doing during the time of her pregnancy. When that time was over, she gave birth very fortunately to a princess as beautiful as the

daylight, and when she had recovered her health, the fay gave her a long sermon on her past life, made her promise to behave better in the future, and sent her back to her husband, the king.

One can judge by the generosity that the fay Paisible had shown to such a wicked queen all the attentions she had for the young princess who was to remain in her hands. She came to the point of loving her madly; that was what engaged her to have her endowed by two other fays. She took a long time over the choice of those two godmothers, as to whom she could have confidence, for she feared that the resentment they had always had against her mother might extend as far as the daughter. Finally, she thought that the fays Divertissante and Eveillée did not have as much ill humor in their nature as the others.

As soon as she had alerted them, they arrived in a berline of Italian flowers drawn by six gray hacks, whose manes were the most beautiful flame-color. Eveillée was clad in parrot feathers and coiffed like a mad dog. As for the fay Divertissante, she had a chameleon-skin dress that made her appear all the colors imaginable. Paisible received them both marvelously, and in order to engage them to do, I am assured that she put into the good soup that she gave them a little wine flavoring.

After such sage precautions she had the beautiful child brought to them. She was in a rock crystal crib; her swaddling clothes were scarlet embroidered with gold, but her beauty was a hundred times more brilliant than her attire. The little princess smiled at the fays and made them little caresses, which rendered her so agreeable that they resolved to shield her, as best they could, against the anger of their Elders.

They began by giving her the name Galantine. The fay Paisible said to them then: "You know that the punishments that we ordinarily employ among ourselves and are most in usage consist of changing beauty into ugliness, intelligence into imbecility, and most often of all having recourse to metamorphosis. As it is not possible for each of us to endow with more than one gift the person that we want to oblige, my opinion is that one of us should give the child beauty, another intelligence and that I endow her with the inability ever to change form."

That opinion was agreed and executed immediately. When Galantine had been endowed the other two fays returned home and Paisible employed all her cares henceforth in the education of the little princess. No cares had ever been employed more successfully, for at four years old her grace and beauty were already causing abundant rumor in the world.

There was too much of it; for, the affair having been reported to the Council of Fays, one day Paisible saw the fay Grave arriving in the courtyard of her palace mounted on a lion. She was wearing a long and very ample dress, with a great many pleats, sky blue in color. She was coiffed in a square bonnet of gold brocade. Paisible recognized her with as much anxiety as chagrin, for her costume and mount were those she employed when she wanted to render some sentence. When she perceived that the fay Reveuse was following her, mounted on a unicorn, that she was dressed in black leather lined with varying taffeta and similarly coiffed in a square bonnet, she could no longer doubt that the visit had a very serious motive.

In fact, the fay Grave made a speech, and said to her: "I am very surprised by the conduct you adopted with regard to Mutine; it is in the name of the entire Corps of Fays that she offended, and I've come to make reproaches to you. You can pardon your particular offenses, but you don't have the same right over those that regard the entire Corps. However, you treated her mildly and with generosity throughout the time she was in your house; thus, I have come to execute an equitable order and to punish an innocent girl for the wrongdoing of her culpable mother.

"You have wanted her to be beautiful and intelligent, and on the other hand, you have put an obstacle to metamorphoses. I can still prevent her from enjoying throughout her life the advantages with which you have ornamented, and which I cannot take away. She will only be able to emerge from an enchanted prison that I will construct for her when she has rendered to the desires of a beloved lover. It is my concern to prevent that from ever being possible."

The place of enchantment consisted of a very high and broad tower constructed of seashells of all colors, in the middle of the sea. On the ground floor there was a large room for bathing, into which water could be made to enter at will. That room was surrounded by steps and platforms on which one could

walk with dry feet. The first floor composed the princess's apartment, and was veritably magnificent. The second was divided into several rooms. In one of them there was a beautiful library, in another a wardrobe full of superb garments and underwear, for all ages, all as magnificent as one another. Another room was destined for music; another was filled with the most agreeable wines and liqueurs. Finally, the largest of them all only presented to the eye all kinds of dry and liquid preserves, candy, and all the pastries imaginable, which by the force of enchantment, would always remain as hot as they had emerged from the oven.

The extremity of the tower was terminated by a platform on which there was a flower-bed in which the most agreeable flowers were renewed and succeeded one another incessantly. In the same garden there was a fruit tree of every species, on which, every time a fruit was picked, another immediately came to take its place. That beautiful place was ornamented with arbors, which the shade and odorous bushes rendered delightful; and those charms were further increased by the songs of a thousand enchanted birds.

When the fays had taken Galantine into the tower, with a governess named Bonnette, they climbed back in to their whale and, drawing away from the great edifice to a certain distance, the fay Grave summoned two thousand of the most malevolent sharks in the sea with a flick of her wand, and ordered them to mount a most exact guard—in sum, not to allow any man to approach the tower and to tear to pieces all those bold enough to make the attempt. As ships do not fear sharks very much, however, she summoned a sufficient number of remoras,³ which she ordered to station themselves in advance and stop all the vessels that hazard or will be guided toward the tower.

The fay Grave was so fatigued by having to do so many things in such a short space of time that she asked Reveuse to fly up to the height of the tower and to enchant it in the direction of the air with so much exactitude that even a bird could not approach it. The fay obeyed, but as she was infinitely distracted, she bungled her ceremonies slightly, and could not help making a few mistakes. If the enchantment of the sea had been no more flawless than that, Galantine's honor, with which they were so preoccupied, would have been poorly assured by the sea.

The worthy governess was only occupied with the care of bring Galantine up well, and although she regarded all the talents that the princess might have as always bound to be unknown, she neglected nothing to give her a good education and to ornament all the imaginable talents.

³ The literal referent of the word remora, which exists in both English and French, is a kind of sucking-fish that attaches itself to others—including sharks—but the word is also used figuratively in French to refer to an impediment or obstacle of any sort.