

PRINCESS WHITE FLAME

By

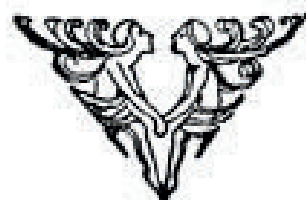
CERTRUDE CROWNFIELD





PRINCESS WHITE FLAME

BY
GERTRUDE CROWNFIELD



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ANNE MERRIMAN PECK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK

PRINCESS WHITE FLAME

BY
GERTRUDE·CROWNFIELD



ILLUSTRATIONS·BY·
ANNE·MERRIMAN·PECK·

E·P·DUTTON·&·COMPANY
NEW YORK

Copyright, 1920,
By E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
All Rights Reserved



Printed in the United States of America

TO
MY DEAR SISTER
KATHARINE

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I
CHAPTER II
CHAPTER III
CHAPTER IV
CHAPTER V
CHAPTER VI
CHAPTER VII
CHAPTER VIII
CHAPTER IX
CHAPTER X
CHAPTER XI
CHAPTER XII
CHAPTER XIII
CHAPTER XIV
CHAPTER XV

PROLOGUE

OF all the fairy countries in the world none is more wonderful or beautiful than the country where the Fire Fairies live. Into that land no fairies of the earth, or air, or water dare venture. They would be seared, or changed to ash or vapor.

Many are the doors that open into the Fire Kingdom—thousands, and hundreds of thousands in number. Wherever you see the firelight flicker, wherever you see flames leaping and dancing, wherever you hear the snap of the burning logs, there you may be sure is an open door. Then if you choose to creep close to it, and peer in, you may perhaps see wonderful things; fairy forms that flit and vanish, and reappear, and vanish again among the leaping flames, and smoldering embers. Perhaps, also, you may see the shining domes and glittering turrets of the fairy palaces.

But when the fire burns down, and the hearth grows dark the door is closed—there is no more to be seen of that wonderland.

In the very heart of the Fire Country stands the palace of King Red Flame, the gleaming flame-colored palace, the Palace of Burning Coals. Round it lies a wonderful garden, where paths wind away among great fields of fire lilies, and flame roses lift their heads, and the tall shining trees rustle in the wind with a sound like the whispering of the fire on the hearth. Here in this glowing country the good and happy fairies work and play, and serve their king as all good fairies should.

But not all fairies in this land are good and happy. Beyond the glow of the roses and the lilies, beyond all sight of the glimmering trees, there lies another part of the country where live the evil fairies of that land. Here are great Plains of Ash, and huge Caverns of Soot, and stretches of gloom where comes and goes the Shadow Witch. Here Imps of Darkness lurk, here Dragons crouch, and Wizards dwell. Perhaps sometimes when you have looked into the Fireplace you have seen those dismal plains and darksome valleys. They lie away from the heart of the Fire, at the side of the Hearth, and between the flames and the heaps of ashes.

And now listen, and I will tell you of Prince Radiance, and Princess White Flame who lived in the Fire Country and of many strange and wonderful adventures through which they journeyed on to reach at last a never-ending happiness.

CHAPTER I

ONCE upon a time a wicked Earth Fairy went forth to see what mischief she could do. She flitted on and on until she came to a House Door. She had come to one of the homes where the good and useful House Fairies dwell. The Door was open, and she crept up to it slyly, and peered in. There she saw a great room, in perfect order, for the House Fairies had put everything to rights before they went away to their tasks upstairs. The floor was swept, the pictures hung trim and straight upon the walls, the chairs were dusted and set about invitingly, and on the Hearth the Fire burned warm and clear.

"Hhm!" muttered the Earth Fairy. "Here is the very chance I've been looking for!"

She slipped inside the Door and set to work at once. She sprinkled ashes on the clean-swept floor, and set the chairs askew. She pulled the pictures crooked, and turned their faces to the wall. Into every corner of the room she went, making mischief, and leaving disorder behind her. No one came to interrupt her, so that she kept on and on with her malicious task until the room was in complete confusion. Wearied with the mischief she had done, she paused and looked about her for a place to rest. On the Hearth lay a great bank of warm ashes, soft as a feather-bed. She went to it at once, and threw herself down upon it, thinking to rest only a moment before she journeyed on. Now this was a very dangerous thing for an Earth Fairy to do, because none but Fire Fairies can safely rest so close to Fire and Flame. But this the Earth Fairy did not know, so she sank down, meaning to rest but for a short time, but she was so weary that before she knew it she had fallen off into a deep sleep, and while she slept the Fire stole from her all her Earth magic, and her Earth powers.

Since the Fire was burning, that Door to the Fire Country was of course wide open, so that King Red Flame riding out that morning on his flame-colored horse caught a glimpse of the Earth Fairy's yellow hair as she lay in the ashes. He drew near to see who was slumbering there. At the first glance he knew that she was not a Fire Fairy. It was plain, too, that she was not a House Fairy. Whoever she was, he knew that she was in great danger, and that she must be rescued at once.

He called to her, but she neither answered nor stirred. He alighted from his horse, and bending over her shook her gently, but she gave no sign of life. He shook her more roughly, and called louder, but quite in vain.

"I shall have to take her to the palace," murmured King Red Flame to himself. "Here I can do nothing. Queen Glow and I must consult together over the matter."

He lifted the Earth Fairy in his arms, and laid her across his horse. Then mounting again, he rode away with her in the direction of the Palace of Burning Coals, satisfied that there, in counsel with his queen, he could bring succor to the stranger in her great need.

Queen Glow was a very beautiful fairy, and as wise and good as she was beautiful. Always her thought was how she could help and comfort those who were in trouble or distress. As soon as King Red Flame arrived at the palace, Queen Glow had the insensible Earth Fairy

carried to her own room, and laid upon her royal bed. Here she bent over her, chafing her hands, and trying in every way to revive her.

There was deep silence in the room, except for the suppressed whispering of a little group of Fire Fairies gathered about the door. One by one other fairies that belonged to the palace came to join them, and among the rest came Grey Smoke, old and wise, she who had nursed Queen Glow as a child.

As soon as Grey Smoke saw the Earth Fairy, she said, "She has rested too long on the Hearth. She has rested too long in the heat. Never again can she return to her own life. There is only one thing left for us to do. We must change her into a Fire Fairy. In this way only can she again be wakened into life. Then she can live happily among us, and fill her uses in the Fire Kingdom."

"How is so great a change as that to be wrought?" asked King Red Flame. "Have you knowledge of such a spell as will accomplish this?"

Dame Grey Smoke shook her head. "No, Your Majesty, not I," she said. "But there is in the palace, greater knowledge than I possess. It was written long ago in the Book of Spells, that lies locked away in your treasury."

"True," cried the King. "Why had I not thought of that? Let the book be brought!"

The King and Queen waited in silence while a trusted messenger was dispatched to fetch it from the treasure chamber where it lay. When it was brought the King drew from his bosom a tiny key, which hung about his neck from a golden thread. As the King unlocked the book, a thin mist of magic floated out from its pages, and circled about his head for a moment before it disappeared. A thrill of awe passed through the watching fairies.

Slowly the King turned page after page, until at last he paused. "It is here," said he. He and the Queen stooped above the book, reading the strange and crabbed letters written so many ages ago by the masters of fairy magic. When they had read the charm through to the end, the King lifted his head: "None but those who work this charm may see it wrought," commanded he. Then one by one the fairies passed from the royal bedchamber, leaving the King and Queen alone.

All was silent in the room. The charm had been spoken—the spell had been wrought. The King and Queen stood watching the still motionless form of the Earth Fairy.

At last through her passed a thrill of wakening life. She turned upon her side. Her eyelids fluttered, then opened wide, and her eyes rested in bewilderment upon the two bending over her. From them her eyes wandered to the room about her. She raised herself upon her elbow. "Where am I?" she demanded in a trembling voice.

"You are in the Kingdom of the Fire Fairies," answered Queen Glow gently. "But do not be afraid. You are safe here, for we have changed you into a Fire Fairy, and there is now no more danger for you here from heat or flame than there is for our own royal selves."

The Earth Fairy's face grew black with anger. "A Fire Fairy!" she cried. "I, a Fire Fairy! That must never be. I am of the Earth. How dared you meddle with an Earth Fairy? Let me go instantly. I am going back to my own country—to my own kind."

“That cannot be,” answered the King. “There is no spell to transform you to what you were, and it was only by changing you into a Fire Fairy that we were able to awaken you from sleep. If we had not done this, you would have slept and slept yourself away into a film of ashes.”

Carefully then he explained to her where he had found her, and how every means had been tried to rouse her, but in vain, and only by the power of the Book of Spells had it been possible to save her. But nothing that the King or Queen could say—no words, however kind or wise, made the slightest difference to the Earth Fairy. She sprang from the bed, and stamped her foot. She wept, she stormed.

By and by, however, she became sulky, and sank into silence, and would not even answer what the King and Queen said to her. They were obliged to leave her alone, and though she ate the food that was presently sent to her, she would neither speak, nor look at the attendants who brought it.

But as time passed the Earth Fairy grew less sullen, and even seemed to be in some measure content with her new home, and her life in the palace, but Queen Glow felt sorry for her, and kept her near as her own personal attendant. If any difference was made by the Queen between her and the Fire Fairies, it was that she treated her with especial kindness and affection. But the new lady in waiting never forgot her old life, and although she was now a Fire Fairy, she always insisted upon being called Earth Fairy, and that was the name by which everyone knew her.

At last there came a time when she really seemed to respond to kindness, and to feel a certain love for the Queen. She sought to please her, and was always cheerful and complacent, and on their part the King and Queen trusted her more and more. There was nothing in the palace that they would not have given her, nor anything that they would not have granted to her, if she had asked; that is, nothing that was at all possible.

But as a matter of fact, all this affection and pleasantness was only seeming. The Earth Fairy hated both the King and Queen, and longed to be revenged upon them for the change they had wrought in her, even though it had been done to save her. Constantly her anger burned against them, and she only awaited a chance to wreak vengeance upon them. The Earth Fairy was crafty, and had the patience of craft. She was willing to wait and watch a long while if necessary, if only her chance would come in the end.

While waiting she watched and listened, learning such spells as she could from the fairies around her, and practicing them in secret. There was not a book of magic in the Palace of Burning Coals that she did not seek out and pore over; not a wand that she did not try. Only the King’s own Book of Spells was locked away from her, and one precious wand that had belonged to the mother of King Red Flame, and had been left by her in charge of the Fairy Grey Smoke, oldest and wisest of any save one in the Kingdom of the Fire Fairies. No one else, not even the King himself knew of this wand, for his mother had made Grey Smoke promise that she would never tell him of it, nor bring it from its secret hiding-place until some great need arose that called for a spell that nothing could possibly break.

If the Earth Fairy had known of this wand she would have spared no pains to get hold of it; but Grey Smoke was wise and faithful, and kept the trust that the King's mother had reposed in her.

CHAPTER II

IT was a shining morning in Spring. King Red Flame put on his scarlet cloak and cap, kissed Queen Glow good-by, mounted his flame-colored horse, and rode away in the direction of the Dying Embers where he had been called upon important business.

The Earth Fairy, peeping from an upper window of the Palace of Burning Coals, watched him out of sight. Then she clapped her hands gleefully. "When you come back, King Red Flame—ah, yes—when you come back, I think perhaps you will find a surprise awaiting you." For at last the Earth Fairy saw a chance for the revenge for which she had long been watching, and if things but fell out as she hoped, there was no wand nor spell that could restore to the King the priceless treasure that she purposed to destroy.

That night all was still and tranquil in the Palace of Burning Coals, but the next morning a sudden stir arose. Sooner than the Queen had been led to expect it a very wonderful thing had happened in the palace, for very early, with the dawning, a tiny baby Princess came to be the daughter of King Red Flame, and Queen Glow.

All was tumult and rejoicing. The Queen lay proud and happy on the satin pillows of her great golden bed, and looked and looked at the beautiful little Princess in the golden cradle at her side. Everyone was delighted at the coming of this Princess, but none seemed more so than the Earth Fairy herself. She stayed close by the Queen's side, ready to anticipate her every want, and joined with the rest in her admiration of the baby Princess.

As soon as the child arrived, a messenger was sent in haste to recall King Red Flame to the palace, but before the man rode forth the Earth Fairy hastened down, and even as he was placing his foot in the stirrup, she told him that Queen Glow had decided not to send word to the King, as his business was too important to be interrupted. Instead the messenger was to ride off in exactly the opposite direction, and fetch back a golden cup which Queen Glow had ordered to be ready when she should send for it.

This was a false errand, but the Earth Fairy did not wish anyone to know that she had countermanded the Queen's order, and if he were seen to set out on a journey, all would suppose that he had gone in search of the King.

Soon after the messenger had departed, the Queen said to the Earth Fairy, who was sitting beside her, "Send everybody away except yourself. I wish to rest. You yourself are so quiet, dear Earth Fairy, you will not disturb me, and you can watch over my little daughter, and see that no harm comes to her while I sleep."

"I shall be only too happy, Your Highness, to do anything that pleases you," answered the Earth Fairy sweetly.

So it was that the Queen, and the Earth Fairy, and the baby Princess were presently left alone together, and as Queen Glow turned on her side and closed her eyes, the Earth Fairy seated herself beside the cradle with a piece of embroidery.

Before Queen Glow fell asleep, she murmured softly, "To-morrow, Earth Fairy, King Red Flame will be here. Only think how happy he will be to see his little daughter!"

"Ah, Your Highness; what happiness!" purred the Earth Fairy from her chair beside the cradle.

Now the room grew very still, and Queen Glow fell into a profound slumber. Then the Earth Fairy laid down her embroidery, and rose softly from her chair. She tiptoed to the bed, bent over the Queen, and listened intently to her breathing, till she was certain that her mistress slept. Then she crept from the room, and was gone for some little time. When she returned, she brought, concealed in the folds of her dress, a bundle of the most powerful wands that the palace contained. She stood a moment and listened. The Queen and the Princess slept as before.

The Earth Fairy locked the door quickly, and made haste to open the bundle of wands. She took out the one that she knew to be the most potent, and carried it to the bedside of the Queen. It was serpent-shaped and slender, and as the Earth Fairy waved it above the Queen long green tongues of flame darted from its tip.

"Sleep," whispered the Earth Fairy. "Sleep till I bid you waken." At these words the Queen sank into an even deeper slumber than before.

Then the Earth Fairy turned to the defenseless Princess. With one sweep of the glimmering wand, she bound the cradle within a magic circle, so that she might weave a spell that no power could break.

But at the very moment that the first word of her charm fell from her lips there came a sudden knock at the door. The Earth Fairy was startled. She thrust the wand behind her, stole swiftly to the door, and laid her ear to the keyhole.

"Who is there?" she demanded in a low voice.

"It is I—Grey Smoke," was the answer. "I bear a message to the Queen."

"Queen Glow has given orders that she is not to be disturbed," returned the Earth Fairy. "She sleeps, and I can awaken her for no one."

Satisfied with the answer that she had received, Grey Smoke took her departure, and the wicked Earth Fairy returned to the cradle of the Princess. She had no more than drawn a second time her circle of enchantment, had but once waved her wand above the little Princess, than there came another, and a louder knock.

Furious that her spell should again be interrupted, the Earth Fairy threw down her wand, and hurried to the door. "Who is it now who comes to disturb the Queen?" she demanded sharply. "Has not everyone been told that her Majesty wishes to sleep?"

"It is I—Spark—the page," was the reply. "My business is important. A golden necklace has just arrived for Her Highness the Princess, with orders to deliver it to the Queen at once."

"Her Majesty is not to be disturbed for any purpose," retorted the Earth Fairy. "Go away at once, and put it in a place of safety till she awakens."

The page was not satisfied. "Since the Queen cannot be disturbed," replied he, "you must yourself take it, and keep it until she awakens. Open the door, and I will give it to you."

Obliged to control her anger, lest Spark should become suspicious that mischief was on foot, the Earth Fairy opened the door the merest crack, and received a marvelous golden box from his hands. At any other time she certainly would have turned it over curiously, and if no one had been by she would have peeped within, but now she was only anxious to guard the entrance to the room as well as she could, and to shut the door quickly, before the sharp eyes of Spark should see too much.

Careful as she was, however, she did not succeed in preventing him from catching a glimpse of the bundle of wands lying upon the Queen's bed. The sight of them in this unexpected place excited his suspicions at once, but he was far too clever to say anything concerning them to the Earth Fairy. She would give him no satisfaction, he was sure. But he lost no time in going to Grey Smoke, who was his grandmother, and telling her what he had seen.

Grey Smoke looked very grave. She had never trusted Earth Fairy, and now a strange fear took possession of her. "I will go to the Queen at once," declared she. "I—her old nurse, must see to it that no harm comes to her in the King's absence."

But swiftly as Grey Smoke hastened to the side of her mistress, she was too late, for as soon as the page had departed, the Earth Fairy snatched up her wand and rushed to the cradle of the Princess. Quickly she drew once more her magic circle. Quickly she waved the flaming wand three times above the sleeping child. "Become invisible!" she hissed—"Become invisible!"

Instantly the little Princess vanished from before her eyes, leaving only the golden cradle standing empty beside the Queen's bed.

The Earth Fairy was filled with delight when she saw that she had accomplished what she had set out to do.

"Now I will awaken Queen Glow," said she triumphantly. "She shall see that she is not the only one who can work spells."

Though the form of the Princess had indeed vanished from the cradle, the Earth Fairy did not notice that a tender white flame was hovering above the place where the child had lain, for there was one thing that the wicked fairy, with all her knowledge of magic did not know: that is, that no Fire Fairy can ever be made entirely invisible. Though its form may vanish, its spirit is always seen as a fine flame.

The Earth Fairy, in her impatience to show the hapless Queen how she had revenged herself, had turned her back upon the cradle as soon as her spell was fully wrought, and was not aware of the presence of the tiny flame. She took up the wand with which to arouse the Queen. She leaned over her, and touched her with it.

"Awake!" she cried.

Immediately, as if she had only waited for the word, the Queen opened her eyes, and saw with astonishment and amaze the evil triumph written upon the face of the Earth Fairy. Instantly she started from her pillows, and glanced in the direction of the cradle. She saw

that it was empty, and saw the tiny white flame flickering where the little Princess had been. Then her eyes fell upon the bundle of wands, and she knew what had been done to her helpless child.

She gave a great cry that rang through the room. Grey Smoke, hurrying down the palace hall, heard it and hastened still faster. Without waiting to knock, without even trying the door, she wound herself like a thin gray thread through the keyhole, was on the other side of the door in a moment, and stood beside her mistress in her own shape.

The Queen lay back among her satin pillows, quite without life. Grief at that what had happened to her beloved child had broken her heart.

The Earth Fairy and her wands were nowhere to be seen, for as soon as the Queen had cried out, she had made haste to escape by another door that led to a distant part of the palace.

Grey Smoke was filled with horror at what she saw. At first she was unable to move, or even to think. But she recovered herself quickly. Something must be done. She rushed to the door, tore it open, and called aloud for help.

Spark, who was lingering in the hall, came at once, eager to learn what she had discovered, but his grandmother's face showed him that it was no time for questions.

"Go quickly, Spark," commanded she. "Bring every fairy in the palace. Something terrible has happened. Bring everyone, but especially the Earth Fairy; on no account must she be allowed to escape."

Away flashed Spark in hot haste, and did his errand so well, that presently the bedroom of the Queen was filled with anxious fairies. Under the direction of old Grey Smoke, everything known to fairy lore was done to revive Queen Glow, but nothing was of the least avail. Knowing but too well, by the flame hovering above the cradle, what had happened to the Princess, a band of the most trustworthy and faithful fairies set themselves as a guard about her, lest the one who had done this wicked deed might seek to approach and do further harm, if that were possible.

It was not until all the other fairies were gathered in the room that the Earth Fairy appeared, with Spark close at her side, guarding her lest she should try to escape. But the Earth Fairy made no attempt to do this. When she entered the room she seemed to be overwhelmed by surprise at what she saw, and to be the most grief-stricken of them all.

Grey Smoke pointed an accusing finger at her. "Wicked one," she cried, "It is you who have done this to our Queen, and to our little Princess. It is you who must pay the penalty when King Red Flame returns, and finds what you have done."

The Earth Fairy interrupted her indignantly, and declared with a storm of sobs and tears that she was absolutely innocent, and that when she had left the room to put away the wands the Queen had asked her to bring, that all had been well; the Queen had been sleeping quietly in her bed, and the child had been in the cradle by her side.

"Say no more," commanded Grey Smoke. "No one believes you for a moment. No one else would have wrought evil upon our dear Queen."

In spite of everything that the Earth Fairy said to try to prove her innocence, she was taken away under a close guard of Fire Fairies, to be given over to the keepers of the prison.

Around the cradle of the baby Princess a ceaseless watch was kept. The Fire Fairies who were appointed to guard it kept their eyes fixed upon the white and flickering flame, awaiting the return of King Red Flame.

CHAPTER III

NOW all this time King Red Flame knew nothing of the happiness and the misfortune that had come to his queen. He finished the business that had taken him forth as quickly as he could, and then, in haste, he turned his horse toward home. But it was by another road that he returned to the palace, and it was for this reason that he missed the messengers that Grey Smoke had sent to seek him.

Three days had passed since he had bade farewell to the Queen, and now he was soon to see her again. Light-heartedly he rode along, singing a snatch of a song that the Queen loved, and more than once he took from his pouch a beautiful flashing necklace that he was bringing as a present to his wife. As he held it up in the glowing light it shone and flashed as only magic can. He smiled with delight as he thought of the pleasure it would give her.

So full of joy was he that when he reached the palace gate he failed to notice the sad faces and tear-stained eyes of the fairies that came out to meet him, and take his horse. Only as he hurried up the palace stairs did he realize that the place seemed quieter than usual.

But presently, drawing still nearer to the chamber of Queen Glow, the sound of the wailing of many voices smote on his ears, and the nearer he drew to her chamber, the louder it became. Fear suddenly awoke in his heart, and drove his feet swiftly forward. He rushed to the Queen's door, flung it wide open, and stood for a moment looking in. Then he hurried to her bedside, the fairies shrinking away before him to right and left.

There upon the bed lay the Queen, as fair and white as some beautiful figure carved in ivory.

With a loud cry King Red Flame fell on his knees beside the bed, and clasping the lifeless hand of the Queen in his, he called to her, beseeching her to look at him, to wake, to speak. It seemed indeed as though he were unable to believe that she could no longer hear him.

At last, laying down her hand, he raised himself slowly to his feet. "Tell me," he cried, "how has this happened, and what has brought this terrible misfortune upon our land?"

For a moment all were still. Then Grey Smoke stepped forth from among the rest. "Your Majesty," said she, "it is the work of the Earth Fairy. It is she who has revenged herself thus." Then briefly she told him all that had happened since he had ridden away.

Silently the King listened, too stunned for word or thought. There was a pause, and then Grey Smoke laid a gentle hand upon his sleeve, and spoke again: "Your Highness," said she respectfully, "do not forget that the baby Princess needs you, and that she who has wrought all this evil is still free and unpunished."

At that King Red Flame turned his head, and looked at the golden cradle. There above it hovered the tiny white flame, the only visible form of the fairy Princess.

"Alas! Alas!" mourned Grey Smoke at his ear, "that this should be all that is left of the loveliest princess that the Land of the Fire Fairies has ever seen!"

The King aroused himself. "It is too late," he cried, "to bring my dear Queen back to life, but at least as far as the Princess is concerned the guilty one shall repair her mischief. Bring the Earth Fairy to me, and after she has restored my daughter, she shall receive the punishment she has deserved."

At once several fairies hastened away to seek for the Earth Fairy, and soon returned guarding her in their midst. She was weeping bitterly. As soon as her captors released her, she threw herself at the King's feet. "Alas! Alas!" she wailed, "the Queen is dead, and they accuse me of being the cause. Though why, I cannot understand."

"You know why they accuse you," answered the King sternly. "I am but too well assured that it is you who have brought this grief upon us all. Now it is for you to break the spell you have laid upon the Princess, and after that we will consider what punishment is fitting for such a one as you."

"The Princess!" cried the Earth Fairy, "I left her here in the cradle, but it appears that harm overtook her also."

"Enough!" cried the King. "Yours is the spell that has changed the Princess to a flame. Yours must be the spell to restore her to her shape."

"But I know nothing of spells," exclaimed the Earth Fairy desperately.

Grey Smoke started forward vehemently. "What then were you doing with the wands that Spark saw when you opened the door?" she demanded sharply.

The Earth Fairy flushed deeply, but answered without hesitation. "Before my mistress fell asleep, she bade me bring her a certain bundle of wands that she wished to look at. I brought them, as she bade me, and she looked at them, taking some in her hands, and putting others aside. After that she gave them back to me, and bade me return them. While I was still busy putting them away, these Fire Fairies came and seized me roughly, crying that the Queen was dead, and that I was to blame. But listen—who was it that accused me? It was Grey Smoke who forced her way into the chamber of the Queen in my absence—it is Grey Smoke who says these things about me. How do you know that it is not Grey Smoke herself who has done this deed? What more likely than, having done it, she should try to throw the blame upon another?"

"Do not dare to accuse my good Grey Smoke. There is none whom I trust more than I do her," retorted the King angrily. "Had we but chosen her as the Queen's attendant, this grief would not have come upon us. Nothing that you can say will ever make me believe that you are not guilty. But we are wasting time. You have been brought to break the spell."

Stubbornly, again and again, the Earth Fairy repeated that she knew nothing of spells, either to make them or break them.

"Take her away," commanded the King at last. "Let her be kept in a dungeon, away from everyone, until she consents to restore the Princess to her true form." In spite of the Earth Fairy's cries and struggles she was dragged away, to be kept securely under lock and key, until she was ready to obey the King's command.

This done, King Red Flame had a golden box brought that contained the very finest wands that he possessed, and tried with all the skill he knew to break the spell cast over his daughter; but it was quite in vain—the white flame still fluttered above the cradle, and the baby Princess still remained invisible. The King was filled with despair, for he knew of nothing more that he could do to break the Earth Fairy's spell. Overcome with grief he turned to leave the room.

And now a strange thing happened. The tiny white flame, leaving the cradle, followed after him very timidly, but very steadily, as if the fairy Princess knew him, and longed to be close by him, in the shelter of his love and protection.

"Look, look, Your Majesty," cried Grey Smoke, "the little Princess follows you!"

The King was touched to the heart. He commanded that the Princess's cradle should be brought to his own chamber, and there sitting beside it, he rested his head sadly upon his hand, and pondered deeply, while still the white flame hovered quivering and flashing softly above the cradle.

Suddenly there came a low knock at the door, and Grey Smoke's voice was heard, asking if she might enter.

"Come in, Grey Smoke," replied the King, and as the door opened, and the old nurse came in, he added, "Let us see whether you cannot suggest some way to help my poor little daughter. For me—I have no thought left." He sighed heavily as he spoke, and from the white flame above the cradle there seemed to float a faint answering sigh.

"Your Majesty, do not despair," counseled Grey Smoke. "It is true that the spell cast upon the Princess is a powerful one, but I am sure that in time everything will turn out well. I have been to see the Wise One, and he has told me that only the Veil of Disenchantment that lies hidden in his magic chest can break the spell that rests upon the Princess."

The King sprang to his feet eagerly. "There is, then, some magic thing that can break this enchantment?" he cried. "Let us go at once and fetch it."

"That is impossible," replied Grey Smoke. "Only the prince who will one day come—he who is fated to win the Princess as his bride, can see this Veil. Only in his hands is it potent to restore her."

King Red Flame shook his head in doubt. "My good nurse," he groaned, "what hope can there be that such a prince would ever love my poor daughter, who is nothing but a quivering flame?"

"Is there no charm that you can bestow upon her, so that even though she remains a flame it will win his heart, and make him long to set her free?" inquired Grey Smoke.

Again the King sank into deep thought, and as he sat there silently the soft cry of the flame again sounded in his ears.

"Her voice!" cried the King. "Though her form has been taken from her, her voice still remains! Could I but make it the most beautiful voice in the world, it might draw all hearts to her, even though she should indeed remain forever invisible. Had I but a wand that had

not already failed—but, as you know, I have already tried with every wand in the palace to restore the Princess to her true form, and as you also know, no wand that has once failed can be used the second time.”

“Your Majesty, the time has now come for me to tell you something that up to now has been known to no living soul except myself. When your mother died, she left in my care a wand more powerful than any other in the palace. This wand I was to keep until such desperate need arose as could be met by no other magic known to any of us. It is called the Wand of Good Enchantment. The time for you to use it has now come.” So saying Dame Grey Smoke drew from under her long cloak a faded silken case, and laid it in his hands.

Eagerly the King opened the case, and drew from it a slender wand, decked with snow-white feathers. The moment he touched it, the thrill that passed through his fingers told him that it was full of magic. His eyes gleamed with joy.

“Ah, Grey Smoke,” he cried, “might it not be possible that this wand has the power that none of the others possessed to break the spell, and give me back my daughter? Shall we not try to restore her at once?”

“Nay, nay, Your Majesty! Do not venture!” begged Grey Smoke anxiously. “Trust to what the Wise One has told me. As yet no power can restore the Princess. Do not destroy the magic of this wand in a useless attempt. Rather use it to bestow the gift that will win the heart of the prince who is to save her.”

“You are right,” agreed the King sadly. “The risk is too great. It shall be as you say.”

Taking the Wand of Good Enchantment, he rose, and stood looking down into the cradle of the little Princess. Waving it to and fro above the tiny flame, he said tenderly, “My daughter, by the magic of this wand, I bestow upon you a voice of such marvelous sweetness that all who hear it shall be drawn to you, and it shall in the end win for you the love of that prince who alone can save you.”

The words were no sooner uttered than forth from the flame came a gentle sound of exquisite music, stirring the heart.

Hearing it, tears of joy rose to the eyes of King Red Flame. His mother’s wand, left to him for his hour of need, had not failed him.

CHAPTER IV

DAY followed day, weeks and years slipped by, and the tiny dancing flame that was the spirit of the baby Princess grew larger and more brilliant year by year. The Fire Fairies called her Princess White Flame, and regarded her with the greatest respect and love, but pity and sympathy were always mingled with that respect.

The story of the magic Veil was known, and many princes had heard the voice of the Princess, and had seen her passing as a fine white flame. Many would gladly have won her as a bride; many had sought the Wise One—many had peered into his ancient chest, but none had been able to grasp, or even to see the wondrous Veil that alone could restore the Princess to her fairy form.

King Red Flame loved his daughter dearly, and was never so happy as when she fluttered gently from place to place with him, or hovered in the air by his side when he sat at rest; yet always he longed to see her face—to have her visible presence.

One evening as they were moving together in the garden, watching the red and yellow light that came and went among the fire-lilies that bordered the winding paths, the King asked her tenderly, "My child, have you not yet seen a prince whom you can love?"

White Flame laughed softly. "No, there is no one. Why do you ask, dear father?"

King Red Flame sighed. "Because it is only a prince who loves you, and whom you can love in return, who can free you from the spell."

White Flame stole closer to her father's side, and whispered in his ear, "I have not yet seen anyone, dear father, for whom I would wish to be more than the glancing flame that they see me now."

Again the King sighed. "Ah, well, my daughter, the time may come. But remember that until it does, your face is hidden from me also."

CHAPTER V

NOT far from the Land of the Fire Fairies there is another wonderland. It is called the Kingdom of Light. Here, though the people are fairies, their magic is different from the magic of the fairies of fire and flame. But it is not less marvelous and beautiful.

The ruler of this country had a son whose name was Prince Radiance. The Prince was tall and strong and handsome. His soft red suit of velvet, his scarlet cap with long red feather that tossed and floated above his yellow hair became him well. So very bright with hope and courage were his eyes, so very friendly was his smile, that wherever he appeared the fairies cried to one another, "Ah, here comes Prince Radiance, bringing happiness and cheer!"

The young Prince was now of an age to seek a bride, but the King was too fond of his son to wish him to marry anyone whom he did not love with all his heart. Many princesses and beautiful ladies would have been glad to be chosen by him, but the young Prince cared for none of them. And although the wise men of the country came often to their King to urge the Prince to take a wife, the old King always replied, "Not yet, not yet. My son must make his own choice, and in his own way."

So time passed, until one day Prince Radiance asked his father's permission to visit the Land of the Fire Fairies. He had heard of their strange magic, and wished to behold it with his own eyes.

The King gave him leave, and bidding his father farewell, the Prince set out, quite alone, as was his wish.

By traveling swiftly, he soon reached the boundary of his father's kingdom, and crossed into the Land of the Fire Fairies. Now the Fire Fairies have always been friendly to the Fairies of Light, so the Prince was made welcome wherever he went.

The magic of the Fire Fairies charmed and delighted him. He stood and watched them rear their shining palaces, saw them deck the walls with glittering jewels, or wreath them with flaming vines by the mere wave of a wand. He wandered from place to place, learning many new and wonderful things.

And all the time he drew nearer and nearer to the Palace of Burning Coals, but as yet he had heard nothing, had seen nothing of the Princess White Flame.

At last he came to a garden, whose open gate showed him bright trees rustling in the breeze and bushes thick-set with flame-colored blossoms, showed him paths that wound away into stretches of still greater loveliness and bloom. He had come to the garden of the Princess.

He entered, and stood a moment, to see if any would come to stop his progress; but all was still in the garden, and not a living creature was anywhere in sight. He chose the path of greatest beauty, but had not gone far upon it when he became aware of a voice singing in the distance, a voice that drew nearer and more near, until the air around him was filled

with its exquisite music. Entranced, rooted to the spot, Prince Radiance listened. Never had he heard so wondrous a voice. It was as though it drew his very heart from his breast to follow it.

So spellbound was he, that at first he thought only of the voice, but presently he was filled with an ardent desire to know from whom it came. But even as he looked eagerly about him for the singer, the voice began to recede from him, and to fade away among the tree-tops. Then it was, that glancing upward, he saw a pure and pearl-white flame, and from the flame came the magic voice that had so stirred his heart.

Awaking from his trance of wonder and delight, the Prince sought to follow it; even as he did so the flame was lost to sight. He pursued it in the direction in which he had seen it pass, but in vain.

Still the Prince went on in haste, seeking someone who could tell him where it might be found. The faint cracking of boughs struck on his ear, and going to the place from whence it came, he saw a Fire Fairy, pruning a glittering shrub.

"Tell me," he cried, "where shall I find the flame that was singing yonder, the flame with the wonderful voice?"

The fairy paused in his work, and regarded the Prince curiously. "Can it be," inquired he slowly, "that you have not heard of the Princess White Flame?"

"I saw no Princess," answered Radiance, "but I heard a voice of magical beauty that seemed to come from a pure white flame."

"Ah," replied the Fire Fairy, "that is indeed our dear Princess. A flame she is, and a flame she must remain, until that prince comes at last who alone can set her free." Then he told Prince Radiance the story of the spell that had been cast upon her in her cradle; told him of the wondrous Veil that lay hidden in the Wise One's ancient chest; told him also of the many princes who had vainly sought to see it, that they might deliver the Princess.

"I, too, must go," exclaimed Prince Radiance. "Who knows but I may be more fortunate than they. Tell me at once where this Wise One is to be found."

Filled with the hope that this at last might be the true prince, the fairy told him exactly how to find the Wise One's hut, and the Prince hurried away.

He had not gone far, however, when what was his joy to hear once more, soft and faint at first, but clearer and stronger as he proceeded, that voice that had so charmed him a little while before.

Eagerly, scarce daring to breathe, lest he should startle the Princess, and drive her from him, the Prince hastened toward her.

She was poised at the foot of a great fire-oak, her flame seeming to wax or wane as the music rose or fell.

So silently the Prince advanced that he stood beside her before she was aware.

"Princess! Princess White Flame!" he cried low, "Here am I, Prince Radiance, come to serve you. Say that you are willing that it should be so."

At the sound of his voice, the singing of the Princess ceased suddenly. Flashing and trembling at the unexpected appearance of this stranger, she seemed about to take flight.

"Nay, do not leave me," he besought her. "Tell me, rather, that I too may seek to deliver you from the cruel spell that binds you thus."

So did his face glow with the love that her voice had awakened in his heart, so did his own voice thrill with tenderness, that a soft and roseate flush passed over the whiteness of the flame, as if in answer. Yet she spoke no word.

"I know what I must do," pursued the Prince. "A fairy has told me. Even now I was on my way to seek the Wise One, and happily to bring forth the mystic Veil. Do you bid me go?" He paused, and waited for the Princess to speak.



"Here am I, Prince Radiance, come to serve you."

"Yes," she whispered softly, "go. But ah—if you should not see this Veil—what then?"

“Then—ah then,” he answered quickly, “I will return to you, and gaze upon your pure and beauteous flame, and listen to your magic voice, till love shall make keen the eyes that were too dull before. Say that you will await me here!”

Again a rosy flush overspread the whiteness of the Princess. “I promise you,” she said. “When you return, you will find me waiting.”

Overjoyed at so gracious an answer, Prince Radiance drew still nearer to the glowing flame. “Ah, my beloved Princess,” he cried, “something tells me that I shall not fail. I shall return indeed, and in my hand shall be the Veil that will set you free. Farewell, then, till I come again.”

Then he left her, a gleaming whiteness at the foot of the great fire-oak, and went his way as the fairy had directed him.

It was not long until he arrived at the house of the Wise One. A queer little scarlet hut, it was, set in the midst of a thicket of flaming bushes, with a bright red path that led straight to the door. The path was worn and hollowed out by many feet. From the pointed chimney, and the quaintly peaked roof, down all the walls to the very ground, the hut was covered with magic signs that no one but the Wise One himself understood.

Boldly the Prince approached the door, and knocked. A voice bade him enter. The Prince obeyed, and found himself in the presence of an old, old fairy, who was sitting before a table, poring over a great Book of Wisdom.

It was the Wise One. He wore a long white beard, that swept down his scarlet robe almost to his feet. A curious border of fairy letters ran about the hem of his robe, and as he rose slowly to greet his guest, they flashed and moved as if with life. A wave of magic flowed from them toward the Prince.

“Welcome, Prince Radiance,” said the Wise One, “I know your errand. Come, let us see if you will be able to succeed where others have failed.”

“Ah, that it may be so!” exclaimed the Prince, following the Wise One, who led him to a chest that stood in a corner of the hut. A very ancient chest it was, carved deeply with magic inscriptions that age had had no power to dim. Huge hinges held it firm; a huge lock fastened it.

The Prince looked down upon it with eager hope. He trembled a little as the Wise One drew from his breast a key, and fitted it in the lock. Slowly the key turned. Slowly the lid rose of itself.

“Look within,” commanded the Wise One, “and tell me what you see.”

In breathless suspense, Prince Radiance bent over the chest, hoping—fearing—so much hung upon his power to behold what lay therein. The light was dim, and the chest deep. For a moment he saw no more than what looked like a film of ash upon the bottom of the chest, and through his heart went a stab of pain and disappointment.

Then, suddenly, his sight seemed to clear. “The Veil! The mystic Veil!” he cried. “There! There it lies! I see it! Oh, I see!”

“Look again,” said the Wise One. “Do you see nothing more?” Again Prince Radiance bent above the chest; again he peered earnestly into its depths.

Dimly discerned beside the Veil lay a sword in its scabbard, and close beside it a soft grey pouch. “A sword is there, and a curious pouch,” he answered. “You have seen what none have seen before,” replied the Wise One. “The Veil is for the Princess, the Sword and the Pouch for you. Take them, for the time will come, before your task is done, when you will need them all. Take out the Veil.” Gently the Prince lifted the magic Veil from out the chest. As it rose, it floated out and out, and seemed to fill the hut, like a mist for fineness, like a web for strength.

The Wise One went to a cabinet, and drew from it a tiny golden casket. He returned to the Prince, and said, “Place the Veil inside.”

“How is that possible?” inquired Prince Radiance.

“You have but to press the corner of the Veil, and it will become small enough to fit into the tiniest box. You have but to lift it from the box, and shake it out, and it will become as you behold it now. Do as I have said, and you will see.”

The Prince obeyed, and presently the Veil lay in the golden casket. The Wise One handed him a golden key. “Lock it, and fasten it securely within your robe where none can rob you of it,” he told him. “On its safety all your hopes depend.”

Gravely Prince Radiance did as the ancient fairy bade him.

“Lift out the Sword,” directed the Wise One, “and draw it from its scabbard.”

Again the Prince obeyed. As he laid his hand upon the hilt it was as if the Sword answered to his touch, and leapt from its scabbard, a flashing flame of blue, that shed a dazzling light on all around it.

“It is the Sword of Flames,” the Wise One told him, “a powerful weapon—potent in your hands alone. It will serve you well. See that you do not lose it. See that you do not use it until its day comes.”

Prince Radiance looked at him in wonder. “How shall I know the day?” asked he.

“When the day comes you will need none to tell you,” was the answer. “And now take the Pouch—the third and last gift.”

The Prince replaced the Sword of Flames in its sheath, and bound it on. Then stooping he took out the Pouch.

“Open it,” said the Wise One.

Prince Radiance did so, and saw that it was divided within into two compartments.

“This is a magic pouch,” the Wise One instructed him. “Whatever you place in it will never fail of its supply. It will help you out of many a danger, out of many a difficulty.”

The Prince thought deeply. "What shall I place within it that will have such power?" he asked at last.

The Wise One smiled. "That is easy enough to choose," he answered. "In the one side place a burning coal; put in the other a handful of ash. Nothing else could possibly be so unfailingly useful wherever you may go."

Surprised at such an answer, Prince Radiance gazed at him without obeying.

"It is as I have told you," the ancient one assured him. "You will find it so."

Then the Prince stooped to the fire that was burning on the hearth, and filled the Pouch as he had been directed, and fastened it to his side, the Wise One watching him meanwhile with a kindly smile.

When Prince Radiance would have thanked him for the fairy gifts, he dismissed him with a wave of the hand. "Go," he said, "and all good fortune attend you. If you but do your part, the magic of the Veil will be potent to break the Earth Fairy's spell, and restore the Princess White Flame to her fairy form."

CHAPTER VI

FAR from the kingdom of King Red Flame, in the dismal country that lies along the Chimney Back are many dark and mischievous fairies, and the most mischievous of them all was Flying Soot.

He was a great traveler, and employed himself in flitting from place to place collecting news, and telling it again wherever he thought that it would do the most harm. Most of his time was spent in the Land of Evil Fairies where he had many friends who gave him welcome for the sake of what he had to tell. But now and again he crossed secretly into King Red Flame's dominions, in the hope that he might pick up some information that he could use. He always took great care, however, not to allow himself to be seen by any of the Fire Fairies.

Upon one of these excursions he overheard some Fire Fairies repeating the story of the enchantment of Princess White Flame, and learned at the same time about the Earth Fairy's imprisonment. After that he could not rest until he had found the way to the place where she was confined.

During all the years that the Earth Fairy had been locked in her prison, she had known nothing of what went on outside of it. She neither knew of the wondrous Veil in the Wise One's ancient chest, nor that it was expected that a Prince would some day come who would set the Princess free.

Because of her long imprisonment her hatred of King Red Flame burned all the more intensely, but deprived as she now was of every means of working magic, she could neither escape, nor wreak further vengeance upon her master.

One day, as she sat in a corner of her cell nursing her anger, she heard her fairy keeper come to her door and try it carefully to see that it was still securely fastened. Then his footsteps retreated, and she knew that he had gone away with his companions for a short rest under the trees as was his daily custom.

Hardly had the sound of his footsteps faded away when a faint rustle outside the door caught her ear, and a voice that was unknown to her softly called her name.

Making no noise she crept to the keyhole and peered through. A figure stood near it, wrapped in a long black mantle, with a black velvet cap pulled low over his forehead. From his face she knew that he was an evil fairy, but he was a stranger, and fearing that he might be an enemy she made no answer.

Her visitor was not discouraged. He called to her again, and told her that he was Flying Soot. Finding that she still made no reply, he assured her that he was a friend, and began at once to give her what news he could of King Red Flame and the Princess. At that the Earth Fairy answered him willingly, and harkened with eagerness to what he had to say. They talked for some time, but as soon as the keeper was heard returning, Flying Soot scurried off. After that he came from time to time to see her and bring the news, and the knowledge that the Princess was still but a flame, always filled the Earth Fairy with wicked satisfaction.

On the day that Prince Radiance found and talked with Princess White Flame in the palace garden, Flying Soot passed near them on his way to the Earth Fairy's prison.

Hearing their voices he drew near stealthily, and listened to them. As soon as Prince Radiance departed, away rushed the mischief-maker to the Earth Fairy. It was the hour when the keeper was absent, so that he flew straight to the door without pause.

"Earth Fairy! Earth Fairy!" he called, placing his lips to the keyhole. "Come close and listen; I have great news!"

The Earth Fairy sprang to the door at once. "What is it?" demanded she, "Tell me quickly."

"A Prince has come," he told her. "A Prince who swears to break the power of your spell."

From the Earth Fairy's lips burst a laugh of scorn. "Let him try as he may," she declared, "he will never succeed."

"Be not too sure of that," warned Flying Soot. "This Prince spoke with the Princess of a magic Veil, which he has but to cast over her to restore her at once to her true form."

For a moment the Earth Fairy was quite speechless with astonishment and dismay; then she cried aloud, "A Veil! A magic Veil that will set the Princess free!"

"Yes," replied her companion, "Already the Prince has gone to fetch it from where it lies hidden in the chest of the Wise One. Soon he will return to where the Princess awaits him in the garden, and presently, my dear Earth Fairy, the spell that you wrought with such care will be a thing of naught."

"No, no!" screamed the Earth Fairy, "Never, never shall this be! I must escape. You must help me to escape at once, and prevent it!"

Flying Soot shook his head doubtfully.

"How can I enable you to escape from a prison so strong, and so securely locked?"

"It takes but a key to open the strongest lock," insisted the Earth Fairy. "You must overpower the keeper. You must obtain the key—and let me out."

In the beginning Flying Soot was unwilling to try, but when the Earth Fairy presently spoke of rewarding him for his services, he agreed to do as she wished.

"First you must release me," commanded she. "Then you must hasten to the Palace of Burning Coals, and bring forth my bundle of wands from a hiding place that I will tell you of. When you have brought them to me, I will bestow one of them upon you as your reward."

Now Flying Soot knew well that a Soot Fairy can work no magic with the wand of a Fire Fairy unless he is taught its secret. "Promise that you will surely show me how to use it," said he, "and I will do as you ask."

"Yes, yes, of course," agreed the Earth Fairy impatiently. "Only be swift about your task, and the secret shall be yours."

Satisfied with her reply, Flying Soot went his way. In the darkness of her cell the Earth Fairy waited, scarcely able to breathe, so fearful was she that the Prince might return from the Wise One and disenchant the Princess before she had time to interfere.

It was but a little while, however, before she heard the stealthy footsteps of Flying Soot returning. It was but a moment more till she heard the great key turn in the lock, and saw the door flung wide open.

“Come out quickly,” whispered her deliverer. “Your keepers, blinded with soot, grope hither and thither utterly bewildered. Together we must contrive to shove them into your prison, and lock them up in your place. After that you will be able to go on your way in safety.”

Instantly, the Earth Fairy sprang to his help, and so skillfully did the two evil fairies jostle the keepers against one another and guide them to the prison door, that soon they were lodged in the Earth Fairy’s cell. Then the key was turned upon them, and they were left to grope clumsily about in the darkness, while the Earth Fairy and her companion hurried to the safe shelter of a thicket. There the Earth Fairy told Flying Soot where she had hidden her wands, and bade him haste to bring them to her. When he had departed upon his errand the Earth Fairy huddled low among the bushes to await his coming with what patience she might.

In spite of the years that had passed since the Earth Fairy had hidden her wands, none had discovered the place where they lay. So crafty a messenger was Flying Soot that he obtained them unseen, and without difficulty, and soon returned to where the Earth Fairy was concealed. He laid the bundle in her outstretched hand.

Trembling with anxiety, the Earth Fairy opened the case, and ran her fingers over the wands to test their power. The Green Wand shot forth emerald fire from its tip as she took it from among the rest. It was as full of magic as on that far-off day when with it she had so cruelly enchanted the baby Princess.

With covetous eyes Flying Soot looked upon it. “Ah!” cried he, “that is the wand of my desire. That shall be my well-earned reward.” He stretched his hand to take it from her, but the Earth Fairy waved him back with an imperious gesture.

“Touch not the Green Wand,” she commanded. “To do so is to destroy yourself.” She laid it back in its place and took out in its stead a small dark wand. This she extended to him saying, “Here is the one which is for you.” With indignant words he would have spurned it, but she checked his complaints abruptly. “It will serve you well, if you but know its secret,” she told him, “See—in this its magic dwells.” With a last envious look at the Green Wand, Flying Soot cast aside his anger, and watched her narrowly while she showed him how to use her gift. Still a little ungraciously he received it, and hid it in his mantle.

The Earth Fairy stopping for no farewell, gathered up her bundle of wands, and hurried to the spot where Flying Soot had told her the Princess awaited the coming of Prince Radiance. There at the foot of the great fire oak she saw her, flushing and paling with glorious light. She was thinking of the wonderful happiness that had come to her, but

suddenly she became aware that a stranger was approaching. Looking up she beheld the Earth Fairy.

Quickly the Earth Fairy advanced till she stood before the Princess, and without waiting to be addressed, announced her errand.

"Your Highness," she said, "I am a messenger from Prince Radiance. He cannot return to you as he had expected; but he has sent me to ask you to let me guide you to where he waits for you."

Princess White Flame regarded her doubtfully. "You are a stranger to me," she replied. "How may I know that you are in truth a messenger from the Prince?"

"Ah," cried the Earth Fairy, "will you not trust me? Alas! If you do not, the Prince can never disenchant you, for the Wise One has assured him that unless you come to where Prince Radiance now awaits you, the Veil will have no power over you."

For a moment the Princess regarded the face of the wicked one closely. It bore a kind and innocent look. Still she felt undecided.

"Hasten, Your Highness!" entreated the Earth Fairy. "Hasten, I beg of you, lest its magic be lost to you both."

The Princess White Flame hesitated no longer. "Lead on," she said, "and I will follow."

Rejoiced that she had been able to persuade the Princess so easily, the Earth Fairy passed at once out of the Garden, and away from the Palace of Burning Coals, and close beside her fluttered the white flame of the Princess.

Silently they traveled, and after a time the country through which they were passing began to look strange to the Princess. Yet, though they went on and on, she still saw no sign of Prince Radiance. At last she began to question the Earth Fairy, who always replied that they had but a short distance farther to go.

The lovely flame-colored and yellow trees of the Land of the Fire Fairies had been left far behind; the little birds that make a music in the Fire Kingdom like none elsewhere, were heard no more: the beautiful palaces, the shining gardens, where happy fairies worked and played, had vanished. On all sides rose dull red caves, huge heaps of ash, or high black walls of soot, ugly and forbidding.

Hideous creatures crept away into darkness as they drew near, or peered out upon them from hiding-places as they passed.

Princess White Flame shuddered, and her light grew pale and dim. "Whither are you leading me?" she cried faintly, "Answer truly, for I will go no further."

The Earth Fairy laughed mockingly. "Well may you ask," she replied. "Evil for you was the hour when you left your garden to follow me. Behold in me the Earth Fairy—your parents' enemy and yours."

A great trembling seized the unfortunate Princess. In this terrible land, helpless in the power of this wicked fairy, how could she hope ever again to see the Prince who had won

her heart? How could she hope ever again to return to her father in the Palace of Burning Coals?

Coldly and cruelly the voice of the Earth Fairy came to her in her despair.

"Many years was I a prisoner by King Red Flame's command, and dark and dreary was my cell. Now my turn for vengeance has come, and you may be well assured that in the place that I have chosen for you, neither the beauty of your voice, nor your flashing brightness shall avail you aught."

Before them yawned a black and narrow cave, its walls hung thick with soot. From under her cloak the Earth Fairy drew her Green Wand. She extended it over the Princess, and pointed to the cave. "By the power of my Green Wand I command you to enter," she cried.

From the wand streamed a magic so potent that the poor Princess had no power to resist it. With a low cry of anguish, she bowed herself, and disappeared into the darkness of the cave.

Calling all her evil magic to her aid, the Earth Fairy drew down the walls of the cave and sealed them. She listened to make sure that no sound could make its way from within. Then she returned her wand to its place, and flitted away over the desolate plain. As she went she murmured gleefully, "Ah! that was well done. Now I know for a certainty that nothing good can ever come to Princess White Flame."

CHAPTER VII

HARDLY had Princess White Flame departed with the Earth Fairy when Prince Radiance returned to the garden.

Great was his astonishment to find the Princess no longer there. Believing, however, that she had gone but for a moment he sat down beneath the flame-red tree to wait for her return.

Many moments passed, and she did not come, and at last the Prince rose to seek her through the garden, calling softly as he went, "Princess, dear Princess White Flame, where are you?"

But none answered him through the stillness, and again he cried, "White Flame, dear White Flame—it is I, Prince Radiance. Answer—ah answer me!" Yet up and down the blooming spaces of the garden he sought her, and called to her in vain. Presently he came to a wide avenue, and entering it found himself ere long before a great and shining palace. It was the Palace of Burning Coals, and through its open doors and windows he could see the Fire Fairies going to and fro about their appointed tasks. Hoping that here he might learn where to find the Princess, he ascended the steps to the bright door, and told his errand to the fairy who guarded it.

"In this palace dwells the Princess," answered the Fire Fairy. "She is King Red Flame's daughter."

"Take me to His Majesty then," commanded Prince Radiance, "for I would have speech with him."

So he was brought before King Red Flame without delay. In the great hall of the Palace sat the King. It was that time of evening when the Princess was wont to bear him company, but she had not yet come, and he was beginning to wonder why she tarried.

When Prince Radiance, guided by the Fire Fairy, was shown into the royal presence the King gave him hearty welcome. With transports of joy he learned how the Prince had heard and loved Princess White Flame in her garden, how he had gone to obtain the mystic Veil from the Wise One, and had been successful where countless who had come there before him had failed. Great was the King's surprise, however, when he learned that Prince Radiance had returned to the garden, only to find the Princess gone.

"It is not like my daughter to break a promise," he said, "especially one of such great moment. Why she has done so, I cannot even guess, but I will send for her at once, and she shall speak for herself."

A messenger was dispatched immediately to summon the Princess. He was gone for some time, but at length returned to say that nowhere in the palace had he been able to find her.

Then the King sent for Grey Smoke, for none knew so well as she where her young mistress was most likely to be found. Yet though Grey Smoke made a most thorough search in every nook and corner of the palace, though she went to the top of its highest tower, and looked

anxiously without in every direction, no where could she catch a glimpse of that pure white flame that was the spirit of the Princess, nor hear the music of her well-loved voice.

When she returned to her master to say that her quest also had been fruitless, the King became very much alarmed.

"Let the palace grounds be searched, once more," he commanded. "Let no spot be overlooked. Let none rest until my daughter has been found."

Anxiously the Fire Fairies one and all set forth to seek her. Yet more anxiously King Red Flame and Prince Radiance awaited their return.

Suddenly a tumult arose outside the palace walls, and immediately after the Earth Fairy's head-keeper, his eyes still half-blinded with soot, stumbled into the King's presence. Close behind him came a crowd of excited Fire Fairies. The head-keeper threw himself at King Red Flame's feet. "Your Majesty! Oh, Your Majesty!" he moaned. "In some strange manner the wicked Earth Fairy has escaped, while we, her keepers, blinded with soot have been imprisoned in her stead. Forgive us, oh forgive us we beg, that this should ever have come to pass."

"Escaped! The Earth Fairy escaped!" thundered King Red Flame, aghast at such evil tidings.

"Escaped. The Earth Fairy escaped!" shrieked all the fairies who were clustered in the palace hall. "Oh! Oh! That this should be!"

Old Grey Smoke bowed her head between her shoulders. "If this be true," mourned she, "then the Princess is indeed lost."

Filled with consternation the King looked down upon the head-keeper still crouched at his feet. "Speak," he commanded, "and tell me how this has come to pass."

"Surely Sire, it must have been the work of a spell," began the head-keeper, "Nothing else could have brought such calamity upon us." Then he went on to tell what had happened. As his tale proceeded the King listened intently, and all the Fire Fairies drew closer that they might not miss a word.

"And by what means have you now escaped?" demanded the King, as the head-keeper paused for breath.

"But a moment since, Your Majesty, one of our number contrived to wrench away the lock of the cell-door, and immediately I hastened here to warn you that the Earth Fairy is abroad, and that the Princess may be in danger."

"Alas!" groaned King Red Flame, "The Earth Fairy is doubtless already at work, for the Princess is nowhere to be found."

Hearing this, the head-keeper began to beat himself upon the breast. "The Princess lost! The Princess White Flame lost, and we the cause!"

"Ay!" replied his master sternly, "you, the Earth Fairy's careless keepers, were the cause. Had you not deserted your post, this great misfortune could never have fallen upon us." He turned to a trusted servant. "Take away this faithless keeper," he commanded, "and place

him and his companions under strict guard, there to remain until my daughter, Princess White Flame, is restored to me.”

So the keeper was taken away, still beating his breast, and crying aloud in vain remorse.

All about the palace hall stood the Fire Fairies weeping and lamenting, for the Princess was dearly loved.

Then the King turned to the old nurse. “Come, my good Grey Smoke,” said he, “give me of your wise counsel. How shall I best seek my beloved daughter?”

But before Grey Smoke could answer, Prince Radiance sprang to the King’s side, and laid his hand upon the monarch’s arm.

“Your Majesty,” he implored, “remember that I, also, love the Princess. I claim the right to seek her, for have I not the magic gifts of the Wise One, and shall not my love guide me to her rescue? Fear not. By the aid of these I will surely bring her back to the Palace of Burning Coals, not as you saw her last, indeed—but in her true form, freed forever from the Earth Fairy’s spell.”

Looking upon the ardent and hopeful face of the young Prince, hearing his earnest words, the heart of King Red Flame was deeply stirred, and strangely comforted. He stretched forth his arms, and drew him to his breast.

“Go, my son,” he said, tenderly. “Go, and all good fortune follow you. Bring back my beloved daughter to her home once more. So shall you gladden her father’s heart, and win happiness for yourself and her.”

CHAPTER VIII

BACK across the dismal land through which she had led the Princess, flitted the Earth Fairy. Freed though she now was from her long imprisonment, she yet hoped for even greater liberty. When Flying Soot had told her that the Veil had power to disenchant the Princess, she felt sure that it would have a like magic influence over herself; that if she could but obtain it, and cast it about her that she should once more become a true Earth Fairy. Should this come to pass, she would flee forever from the Land of Fire which she so hated, to her own people and her own home.

Therefore she determined to go in search of the Prince, and by means of her wands wrest from him the coveted Veil. She knew that it would soon be discovered that Princess White Flame was no longer in her father's kingdom, and she believed that Prince Radiance would then come to seek the Princess in the Land of the Evil Fairies. She herself would be in wait for him near the boundary and would endeavor to overpower him there.

So rapidly did she journey that she soon reached the borders of the Land of the Fire Fairies, and began to watch for the coming of the Prince.

Some time had passed before she beheld a scarlet cloaked figure approaching, looking eagerly on all sides, as if in search of someone. From what Flying Soot had told her she knew that it was Prince Radiance. She crept to meet him, concealing herself cleverly from sight as she went.

When she was but a short distance from him she stopped and opened her bundle of wands. She had taken out the Green Wand, and was about to use it, when she paused. Well did she know that she had none other so powerful, none other that could so fully work her will. By this she held the Princess completely under her sway. Upon the Prince she was unwilling to risk it unless all else failed. She laid it back among the rest and took up another that she had always trusted. Waving it toward the Prince she murmured the words of a spell so potent that she expected to see him fall instantly to the ground unable to speak or to move. But it was as though the spell had never been uttered. The Prince continued on his way as before, and the Earth Fairy knew by this that all power had departed from her wand. She cast it away, and selecting another without hesitation, she followed close after him, repeating the words of her spell. This time also, the spell was of no avail; the second wand became as useless as the first, and was discarded in its turn.

"Truly there must be magic in this that will overpower him," she muttered, taking out the third. "Never before has this one failed me." Yet the third wand had no more power than the rest. One by one, she tried them all, until there was none left but the Green Wand. She looked at it longingly, but dared not risk it. Should it too be useless before this mysterious influence that protected the Prince she would have nothing at all by which to work her will.

She ceased to follow Prince Radiance, and sat down to think of what she should do in order to carry out her purpose.

Pondering deeply, she did not know that someone had approached her from behind, and was standing close beside her. It was Flying Soot. He waited a few moments but finding that the Earth Fairy was too much engaged to be aware of his presence, he tapped her upon the arm. "Well, my good friend," he began, "how have your affairs prospered since you left me so abruptly in the palace gardens?"

The Earth Fairy looked up with a start. No one had been further from her thoughts than Flying Soot.

"Do not disturb me," she answered impatiently, "I am thinking over an important matter in which you can be of no use to me."

"Do not be too certain of that," the Soot Fairy replied. "Remember that you are now in a land where I have many and powerful friends."

The Earth Fairy had not realized that. At his words, she suddenly began to wonder if some of these wicked fairies of which he spoke, might be able to help her to obtain what she so desired. Instantly she changed her tone.

"Hark you," she said, "I believe you told me of a magic Veil that the Prince was to obtain from the Wise One. I have decided that I want this Veil for myself. I have tried all my wands upon the Prince in an effort to take it from him, but they have failed. One alone I have not tried. It is the Green Wand which rules the Princess White Flame. This I am unwilling to risk—for the present at least. Have you, perhaps, among your friends, any who is sufficiently powerful to overcome Prince Radiance, so that I can take from him this Veil?"

Flying Soot threw back his black mantle from his shoulder with a confident gesture. "To be sure I have," he assured her, "and if the first should not succeed there are many others who would be willing to try."

"There is one difficulty," the Earth Fairy warned him, "I can offer no reward."

"Do not let that trouble you," was the reply. "The friends whom I shall ask to assist you are too proud to receive rewards. They are sufficiently pleased when they have succeeded in accomplishing the mischief they set out to perform."

This was good news to the Earth Fairy. Her face shone with satisfaction.

"There is one thing that you must do, however," continued Flying Soot. "You must contrive to lure the Prince to my friends, for they are far too haughty to seek him, even to do him harm. Is there any plan by which you can do this?"

For a time the Earth Fairy sat plunged in thought. Then she sprang up clapping her hands in delight. "Ay," cried she, "that I can. I will compel the Princess herself to lure him on. Well has my Green Wand proved its power over her, and she it is who shall lead him to his destruction."

"How shall this be done?" inquired her companion.

"That is simple enough," replied the Earth Fairy. "You have but to tell me whither I must bring the Prince. Then while you have gone to enlist the services of this friend whom you

have chosen, I will release the Princess, will seek out the Prince, and bring him by her influence to the appointed place."

He gave her most careful instructions as to where she would find him. "And now," said he, when he had made everything clear, "I go to engage my friend the Giant of the Wide Grey Plain to assist you. You need have no fear. He will agree to do so. As soon as you arrive with your Prince you will find him ready." He rose from his seat, shook out his black mantle, and quickly vanished in the distance.

The Earth Fairy on her part, hastened to the cave where the Princess White Flame was imprisoned. Carefully she unwove the spell which sealed its walls, and in a loud voice she commanded the Princess to come forth. Out of the yawning entrance glimmered the flame, pale and faint, but still of a pure and beautiful whiteness.

The Earth Fairy drew out her Green Wand, and held it aloft. "Go where I bid you," she cried, "and delay not."

Unable to resist the spell of the Green Wand, the Princess without word or sound, flitted rapidly away with her enchantress to seek the Prince.

Meanwhile Prince Radiance, knowing nothing of the attempt that the Earth Fairy had already made to destroy him, proceeded on his quest. All across the Wide Grey Plain where he now was, are scattered hills and mounds of ash in great number, and so much alike in size and shape are they, that the traveler often becomes confused and knows not which way to direct his steps. Thus it was with Prince Radiance, and at last quite bewildered he stood still, and looked about him, seeking for something to guide him. It was while he did so, that suddenly he saw gleaming in the distance a flame so pure and lovely that he could not doubt that it was the spirit of his Princess. In an ecstasy of joy he threw out his arms to it. "White Flame! Ah my beloved White Flame," he cried, "can it be that I have in truth found you so much sooner than I had dared to hope?"

Quickly he hastened toward her, drawing nearer and yet nearer until he was sure that she could hear his voice.

"Princess," he called to her. "Wait, ah, wait until I reach you. See, it is I, Prince Radiance, who follow. I bring with me the Veil that is to set you free." He expected her to pause; but it was not so. Slowly, yet steadily she retreated from him, and as she went her well-loved voice floated back to him, not singing sweetly, as when he had heard it in her garden, but weeping, and in anguish.

"Ah me, ah me, dear Radiance!" she sobbed, "the Earth Fairy has cast a second and more cruel spell upon me, that causes me to flee as you draw near."

So overwhelmed with grief was the Prince by the news of this fresh misfortune that at first he was stricken dumb, but presently hope and courage sprang afresh within his breast.

Across the distance that widened between them his answer rang tender and undismayed.

"Go where you must, my Princess, I will surely follow. No power, however strong, no spell, however potent, can suffice to daunt my love. Believe always that I will surely overtake and save you in the end."

Princess White Flame heard him, and took comfort. The Earth Fairy heard him, and rejoiced, for now she knew that without doubt she could lead him where she would. Keeping herself out of sight, she drove the Princess away and away in the direction that Flying Soot had gone, and unswervingly Prince Radiance pursued the ever brightening flame.

CHAPTER IX

AWAY went Flying Soot at full speed until he came to the Seven Hills of Ash. There in a great hollow between them crouched the Giant of the Wide Grey Plain. He was grumbling and grumbling to himself, for no one had invited him to join them in any evil magic for a long while. So he was having a terribly stupid time of it, and wished with all his heart that something would happen that would give him a chance to show his power.

Flying Soot stole up to him unseen, and softly touched his elbow.

The Giant turned with so tremendous a start that masses of ash were shaken loose from the Seven Hills, and fell in clouds into the hollow. "So it is you, Flying Soot!" he cried joyfully. "That means there is good prospect of mischief afoot."

"Ay," replied Flying Soot, "that there is." He found a seat on a soft bank close to the Giant, who at once prepared himself to hear interesting news.

Flying Soot began forthwith to tell him about the Earth Fairy, who he said had sent him to ask the Giant's aid against a young Prince who would soon be traveling that way. "He will be preceded by a flame, who is the enchanted Princess whom he loves," said he. "She it is, who, under the Earth Fairy's spell, leads him on to danger. We wish you to destroy the Prince if you can. At any rate you must completely overpower him, in order that the Earth Fairy may take from him a Veil which he carries, and which she greatly covets."

"Surely this Veil must be endowed with marvelous power," exclaimed the Giant, "if the Earth Fairy is so anxious to secure it."

"True," Flying Soot made haste to answer; "but it possesses this power only in the hands of the Prince, or of the Earth Fairy. To you or to others it would be of no use whatever."

"Well, well," growled the Giant, "she may have it and welcome for all I care. Why should I wish for a wretched Veil so long as I have my Cloak with which to work my will."

"Why should you, indeed?" agreed the Soot Fairy. "What is a trifle like a Veil, compared to a Cloak so wonderful as yours?"

Flattered by the words of Flying Soot, the Giant was now ready to exert himself to the utmost, and could hardly wait for the arrival of the Prince.

"Be sure that you do no harm to the Princess," Flying Soot warned him. "The Earth Fairy herself will see to her. It is the Prince alone upon whom you are to exercise your power."

"I shall remember," replied the Giant. "Say no more, but come and watch for them with me. Through this opening between the Seven Hills we can surely see them as they approach." Flying Soot did as the Giant bade him and together they watched and waited for some time.

At last, in the distance, they beheld a flashing brightness coming steadily toward the place where they lay in wait, and close behind it followed a figure well known to Flying Soot.

"See!" he whispered, gripping the Giant's arm. "The Princess comes, and the Prince hastens after. There also is my friend the Earth Fairy."

“Ay,” answered the Giant with a malicious chuckle. “They are coming fast. Go farther from me, Flying Soot, that I may have room to use my Cloak.” Flying Soot obeyed, and the Giant began to make ready.

He loosed his huge grey Cloak from his neck, dragged it from his shoulders, and gathered its collar firmly in his hand. Then he crouched down once more behind the hill nearest to the approaching travelers. So like to the ashes in color was the Giant’s great body that he was almost indistinguishable, as with eyes glued to the opening in the side of the hill, he awaited the moment when the Prince should arrive.

Prince Radiance gave heed only to the Princess. With his gaze fixed upon her flashing light, he followed its guidance across the Wide Grey Plain. As he sped on and on, he kept ever before him the hope that by some means he might be able to bridge the distance between them. So, before he realized it, he had reached the Seven Hills of Ash, and the danger that lurked behind them.

The Giant’s time had come. Silently, swiftly he rose, and towered above the hills that had sheltered him. With a sweep of his mighty arm he flung out his cloak and cast it like a grey wall between the Prince and the Princess. Deftly he caught Prince Radiance in its folds, and before the Prince could make the least effort to free himself, the Giant raised his Cloak high in air, and set it spinning about his head like an enormous revolving cloud. Larger it grew, flying faster and faster the while, and at every turn its stifling folds settled closer about the captive Prince.

The hoarse laughter of the Giant roared in his ears like thunder. Half choked, the Prince beat back the Cloak from his face, and struggled violently to escape. But round and round spun the Cloak as the Giant whirled his powerful arm, and Prince Radiance only exhausted himself against its tightening clasp, in vain.

The Giant’s dull eyes began to glitter for he knew that none could resist his evil Cloak for very long. Safe hidden within the hollow between the Hills of Ash, Flying Soot peered out upon them, and near him hovered the cruel Earth Fairy, ready to dart out and seize the treasure that she coveted as soon as the Giant’s victory was gained. Princess White Flame, stricken with grief and dismay at the sudden disappearance of the Prince, quivered alone and helpless where the Earth Fairy held her in thrall.

Gladly the Prince would have drawn his sword to slash his way through the Giant’s great Cloak, but he could not free his arms sufficiently to do so. Thus he seemed entirely without a weapon that he could use in his own defense, and he was about to give himself up for lost, when suddenly he remembered the Grey Pouch at his side. He remembered also the words of the giver, “It will help you out of many a danger—out of many a difficulty.”

“May it not be that it will help me now?” murmured the Prince faintly, “Ah, if it does not, then all hope of escape is gone.”

By a great effort he slipped his hand down to his side. With shaking fingers he undid the clasp of his Pouch and reached for the glowing coal that lay within. He drew it forth, and felt, as he did so that it was on fire with magic. He pressed it against the Giant’s Cloak. Immediately a hole appeared in its folds, which widened rapidly. The air rushed in, reviving

the Prince with its freshness and giving him zeal and new courage. So well did he use his weapon then, that presently he had before him a great opening in the thick folds through which he could pass with ease.

The Cloak in the Giant's hands was still whirling at tremendous speed. Prince Radiance, looking out through the opening saw the Seven Hills of Ash and the Wide Grey Plain spinning dizzily round and round far beneath him. Yet he was not afraid. He prepared himself to leap from the opening that he had made, when suddenly the Giant hurled his Cloak violently forward. Instantly the Prince was thrown through the air with such force that he was driven far out of reach or sight of his enemies. His scarlet mantle spread itself about him like great wings that bore him swiftly on and on, until at last it settled slowly and allowed him to alight in a place of safety.

The Giant, unaware that Prince Radiance was no longer in his power, gave his huge Cloak an abrupt twist. Immediately it shrunk to its former size, and he threw it down into the hollow between the Seven Hills. Then he turned to the Earth Fairy triumphantly.



Suddenly the Giant hurled his Cloak violently forward

“Come now, and take what you desire,” he roared, “for this miserable Prince is without doubt completely destroyed.”

Forth rushed the wicked Earth Fairy in a tremor of delight, sure that she was about to possess the Veil. With greedy hands she flung aside the folds of the Giant’s Cloak; with

greedy hands she searched within its folds; but search as she would, she could find nothing. Unable to believe in such ill-fortune she tore the Cloak to right and left, but at last she knew for a certainty that the Prince was not there.

In a rage she turned upon the Giant. "Miserable creature, see what you have done!" she screamed. "With the Prince completely in your grasp as he was, you have been so stupid as to allow him to escape."

The Giant could not believe it possible. He stooped over the Cloak, and himself examined each one of its great folds, but at last he was convinced that the Earth Fairy was right. The Prince was indeed gone, and the great hole burned in the Cloak showed plainly the manner of his escape. Vexed as he was, his vexation changed quickly to anger as the Earth Fairy continued to pour contempt upon him for his failure, and to upbraid Flying Soot for having brought her to so worthless an ally.

Springing up in uncontrollable fury at her insolence, the Giant shouted threats at her at the top of his lungs.

Flying Soot saw that he must interfere at once. He bent down and whispered quickly to the Earth Fairy, "Do not tarry here an instant longer. You have made an enemy of the Giant. In another moment he will destroy us all. Come, let us go in quest of the Prince, for I have other friends who may serve you better than the Giant."

The crafty Earth Fairy perceived that he was right, and yielded herself at once to his advice. Away she fled with Flying Soot across the Wide Grey Plain, taking with her the sorrowing Princess, and soon the Giant and his rage, and the Seven Hills of Ash lay far behind them.

At last Flying Soot checked the Earth Fairy's flight. "Let us stop here while I tell you what I mean to do," he said.

The Earth Fairy was willing. She rested her Green Wand, and Princess White Flame ceased to go forward, but her captor made sure that the Princess was not near enough to herself and Flying Soot to overhear anything that might be said.

"The Prince as you know, has escaped by the work of a magic coal," began Flying Soot. "Against such a fairy weapon the Giant's wondrous Cloak is powerless. But come—I will take you to one who will be proof against this—one whose weapons are such that the Prince cannot even approach him to injure him. This powerful friend of whom I speak is the Great Black Dragon, and his haunt is yonder in the Gloomy Vale. From here, as you see, it is not far distant. I will go at once to bespeak his aid. Go you, on your part, and find the Prince, and when you have brought him to the Dragon, you may be sure that you will find him ready to serve you. Then shall you discover also that I have not boasted of the Dragon's power in vain."

Glad was the Earth Fairy to consent to what promised so well for her purpose, and presently they parted, each to go upon the errand set.

CHAPTER X

IN the Gloomy Vale the Great Black Dragon lay asleep with his head between his paws. Around him, on all sides, stretched the black hillsides, with apparently no living creature but the Dragon to be seen.

Yet as Flying Soot entered the valley on his mission for the Earth Fairy, dull-hued toads hopped away from his feet, and strange animals of hideous shapes left the nooks where they had lain sleeping to creep away and drowse again in a more distant spot. Occasionally he saw fierce eyes glare out upon him from a dim thicket, or beheld the sharp claw or lashing tail of some evil creature whisking itself away from his view.

Flying Soot knew them all, and feared them not. He passed unmolested on his way, and stopped within a yard of the Dragon, but so profound was the monster's sleep that he did not stir.

"Awake, Sir Dragon!" cried Flying Soot, drawing nearer, "Awake!"

The Dragon moved one claw a little in his slumber, but gave no other heed.

Flying Soot drew nearer still. "Awake, Sir Dragon! Awake!" he shouted in his very ear.

Then the Dragon gave a great yawn, and his eyelids slowly rose.

"Ah, it is you, Flying Soot," he grunted. "What is it that brings you here to disturb my rest?"

"I come on an errand of importance," answered the Soot Fairy. "One in which none can give such valuable aid as the Great Black Dragon of the Gloomy Vale."

His words pleased the Dragon. He moistened his lips and cheeks with his great tongue, and sat erect upon his haunches. "Let me hear your errand," commanded he.

So Flying Soot made haste to explain why he had come, and the Dragon immediately agreed to help the Earth Fairy.

"Ho, ho!" he cried. "I shall vanquish this Prince quickly, you shall see, for when I choose to use them I have weapons of such power that none can stand out against them. Have no fear, Flying Soot. Trust all to me, and I assure you that you and your friend the Earth Fairy, shall not be disappointed."

Looking upon the monster's huge form, his terrible claws, his fiercely lashing tail, Flying Soot knew that the Great Black Dragon had good cause to boast.

"I leave the matter entirely to you," said he. "There is one thing more, however, that you must promise me. You must on no account harm, or even touch the fairy Veil of which I have told you. Least of all must you attempt to take it for yourself. I assure you that it is of no value to any but the Prince or the Earth Fairy. For others it will work no charm."

The Dragon laughed loud and scornfully. "That matters naught to me," he cried. "By the weapons that I carry always with me I am able to accomplish what things I please. Why then should I wish for a trifle like this Veil?"

His mind entirely at rest upon that score, Flying Soot now sat himself down upon a black hillock close to the Dragon, and sought to entertain him as they waited by giving him such bits of news as he had collected in his travels. The Dragon well pleased to have him do so, listened hungrily to every word.

Meanwhile Prince Radiance, alone in a strange land, and still weary from his struggle with the Giant, sunk down upon a heap of ash and bowed his head. He wished to ponder well his course, before he again set out. Behind him lay that part of the Wide Grey Plain where the Giant dwelt who had so lately tried to destroy him. Before him, and at his left stretched a plain of ash. To his right a black country opened with low lying hills and valleys wherein might lurk unseen dangers for them both.

As he sat there in indecision, the Earth Fairy coming in search of him, espied him from afar.

Princess White Flame saw him also, and uttered a cry of joy. She needed not the spur of the Earth Fairy's wand to drive her to him. Swiftly across the desolate waste she flitted until he was within sound of her voice.

"Radiance, dear Radiance!" she called to him, "What happiness is mine that I have found you once more!"

Hearing that well-loved voice the Prince raised his head quickly and saw the Princess, not fleeing from him, but advancing toward him. Instantly he leaped to his feet, with arms outstretched, crying in rapture, "Nay my Princess, what happiness is mine that you have returned to me once more!"

He ran to her at full-speed and had well-nigh reached her, when suddenly Princess White Flame was again made sensible of the restraining wand of the Earth Fairy. Cruelly, inexorably, it drew her steadily away from the Prince into the black country at his right.

Seeing the distance widening between them the Prince cried aloud with grief and disappointment. Sore as was his own heart, Prince Radiance nevertheless called to her tenderly, hoping to support and comfort her. "Fear not, dearest White Flame," he exclaimed. "Whither you go, there will I go also, and in the end my love shall conquer every spell."

At his words the courage of the Princess rose again, and with it came hope, even though she shivered as they presently entered that dark valley where the Dragon dwelt. At first it appeared to them quite deserted, for so close the monster lay to the black ground that he looked to be but a part of the vale itself. Thus White Flame passed over him and beyond him without suspecting his presence, and Prince Radiance in his turn had advanced almost to the Dragon's feet before he saw what lay in wait to bar his way.

Aghast at the sudden appearance of this new foe, Prince Radiance fell back a pace to place himself on guard, scarce knowing how to defend himself against an enemy so ferocious.

Then up rose the Dragon, black and terrible, a creature to strike terror to one less valiant than the Prince. "Yield you, Sir Prince," he bellowed hoarsely, raising his bared claw in menace, "Yield to the Master of the Gloomy Vale."

"I yield to none," retorted Prince Radiance, fearlessly, "for I follow the Princess White Flame, and to her I must pass."

"None passes where the Great Black Dragon bars the way," roared his enemy, "and none defies him but learns to rue his folly." He crouched to spring; his hard and glittering eyes were fixed angrily upon the Prince, his tail lashed furiously from side to side.

The Prince knew that he must defend himself without delay if he would escape destruction. Quickly he slipped his hand beneath his mantle to his good Grey Pouch, opened it, and drew forth a brimming handful of the fairy ash that lay within. Thus was he armed against his foe.

It was none too soon, for with a roar that shook the black hillsides the Dragon sprang toward him with outstretched claws. The magic ash of the Wise One flew from the hand of Prince Radiance, and met him half-way. It fell full upon the bulging eye-balls of the Great Dragon, and smote him with instant blindness. A howl of astonishment and rage burst from him, but he was undismayed. Although he could no longer see to direct his weapons, he struck out boldly with his claw. Again the ashes met him and at their touch the Dragon's terrible claw withered and fell powerless at his side. One by one his remaining claws met with the same fate. And now no weapon remained to him but his powerful tail—that great tail with which he had thought to beat the Prince to finest dust.

But blinded as he was, he could strike only at random—could only lash it aimlessly from side to side. Thus, the Dragon's last weapon was soon rendered powerless also. Before the magic of the fairy ash it shriveled at the very root, and presently it trailed limp and useless along the ground.

The Earth Fairy, watching the battle, saw that the Dragon had also failed, and anger rose hot within her. Flying Soot was quick to perceive this, and hastened to conciliate her. He tapped her gently, upon the arm saying: "My good Earth Fairy, to my great surprise I find that the Great Black Dragon is no match for the Prince after all. But do not let that discourage you. I have yet another friend to whom I will take you, who is much more powerful than he."

The Earth Fairy cut him short in wrath. "Were you not certain that the Giant could help me?" said she. "Were you not equally certain that this wonderful Dragon was invincible? Speak not to me of this third friend of yours, I have no faith in him."

"Ah," answered Flying Soot, "but how should I know that the Prince possessed the fairy ash of the Wise One? This alone it is that has enabled him to overcome the Black Dragon. Neither this, nor the magic coal with which he burned the Giant's cloak will avail him however against the great magician, Curling Smoke, to whom I now propose to take you."

"Nevertheless," replied the Earth Fairy, "he wears a sword. Do you not see it? Who knows what fairy virtue may dwell therein?"

Flying Soot laughed her to scorn. "Think you that if it possessed such fairy virtue that he would not long since have drawn this sword to cleave the Giant's cloak, or to attack the Great Dragon? Nay, fear it not. 'Tis but a useless toy that he well knows will serve him not at all away from his father's kingdom."

The Earth Fairy glanced to where the flame of the Princess trembled between hope and fear for the Prince. She looked to where the Dragon groaning dismally lay close along the ground, his head buried between his paws. She knew that here all chance of help for herself was completely gone. She had no plan of her own that promised more than this of Flying Soot. She had almost decided to consent to his proposal, when he caught at her sleeve. "Look quickly!" he cried, under his breath. "Do you not behold him there in the distance, my friend, Curling Smoke. See—there he rises in the plain beyond that dark hill. He is a marvelous magician. I am certain that he will not fail you. Do not be foolish, Earth Fairy. Permit me to go to him in your behalf. I assure you, you will not regret it."

Urged thus, the Earth Fairy gave her consent, and Flying Soot flew off in a twinkling upon his errand of evil.

With the Dragon now fully vanquished Prince Radiance saw that he could at last pass on his way in safety. Leaving his enemy behind him he stepped boldly into the country beyond. There he discerned the flame of his Princess flickering pure and pale against a gloomy hillside. Swiftly he hastened toward her, and presently he found himself so near that he believed he could cast the Veil upon her from where he now stood. Trembling with eagerness he felt for the golden box in which the wondrous Veil lay hid—found it, and pressed upon the clasp.

Alas for his hopes! The keen eyes of the Earth Fairy saw what he was about to do. Before he could draw out the Veil or even undo the clasp, the Green Wand was lifted, and by its dread power the Princess was once more compelled to take her flight from him who would fain have delivered her.

With a sinking heart Prince Radiance beheld her receding down the dark valley, but with fresh rallying of his courage he called to her, "Princess, dear Princess, go if you must, but remember always that I follow—follow to the end."

CHAPTER XI

WHERE the Gloomy Vale borders the plain beyond, rises the low-walled dwelling of the Ash Goblin.

So low it lies that only those familiar with that land know of its presence. Only those with eyes accustomed to the grey stretches can see the Ash Goblin himself. Very small he is, and grey of face and eyes and hair. Grey, too, are his garments, soft and grey as the ashes that surround him.

So he moves about, concealed from the view of all but his friends. Not less eager than the rest of the Evil Fairies is he to join in any mischief, but because he is so small and weak, his help is less often sought than is that of the more powerful fairies of the land.

Flying Soot had no intention of asking him to join in the affairs of the Earth Fairy. He had not even thought of him. On many former occasions as he had passed through the Land of the Evil Fairies he had stopped to chat with the Ash Goblin, and give him the news, but to-day he had not time for so much as a glance at the grey walls of his dwelling.

The Ash Goblin seated beside his door saw him as he approached, and saw too that he intended to pass without speaking. Astonished and displeased he determined not to permit it. He sprang to his feet in haste, and caught at the fluttering mantle of the Soot Fairy to drag him back.

"Ho there," he cried. "On what errand of mischief are you bound, that you do not even give me good-day?"

"Pray let me go at once," answered Flying Soot impatiently, with a jerk of his mantle, "I have business of importance that must not be delayed."

"But it is of this important business that I wish to hear," insisted the Ash Goblin, clutching his raiment only the more firmly.

Flying Soot knew well that one so insignificant as the Ash Goblin could do little to further the wishes of the Earth Fairy. So he put him off. "It is an adventure," said he, "in which you cannot be of the smallest use to me. Let me go then to where I can get the help that I need."

At this the Ash Goblin became exceedingly affronted, and was at no pains to conceal it. "If it is a matter in which you require assistance you do ill to despise mine," he declared, drawing himself up haughtily.

But Flying Soot did not tarry to argue the matter. He wrenched free his mantle, and hurried away to seek Curling Smoke, leaving the Ash Goblin to nurse his wrath at his leisure.

Wavering and swaying in the plain beyond the dark hill where Flying Soot had first beheld him, hung Curling Smoke, the grey magician. In all the Land of the Evil Fairies there were few who possessed such power as he, or were so ready to wield it.

Even at this moment he was watching craftily for a chance to work ill upon whoever might come his way, now crouching low to peer between the hills, now rising to the full spire of his height to overlook the black valleys, and ashy plains.

Thus he caught sight of Flying Soot from afar, and waited for him, for well he knew that mischief was afoot wherever that black mantle flew.

Flying Soot came fast, calling to him as he drew near. "Curling Smoke, Curling Smoke, do not depart! I have urgent business with you." Nothing that he could have said would have been more pleasing to Curling Smoke, and when the Soot Fairy reached him he waved him to a seat, settled himself down beside him and gave him an attentive ear.

Glad to find his wicked friend so ready to listen, Flying Soot began. "A Prince is traveling through this land—a stranger. He pursues a flame, who is an enchanted Princess whom he hopes to win as a bride by delivering her from the spell that binds her. This he expects to do by means of a magic Veil which he carries. My friend the Earth Fairy, who is not far distant, purposes to prevent this, for she has good cause to desire vengeance upon the Princess because of injuries that she herself has suffered from the parents of this Princess. Moreover, the Earth Fairy wishes the Veil for herself. It is for you, greatest magician in all this land, to vanquish this presumptuous Prince so that the Earth Fairy may take from him this Veil. You must give your word, however, that no matter what means you may employ to conquer him, that you will neither injure the Veil itself, nor seek to deprive the Earth Fairy of it. Indeed, in case you should attempt it, you would find that it would have no virtue in your hands."

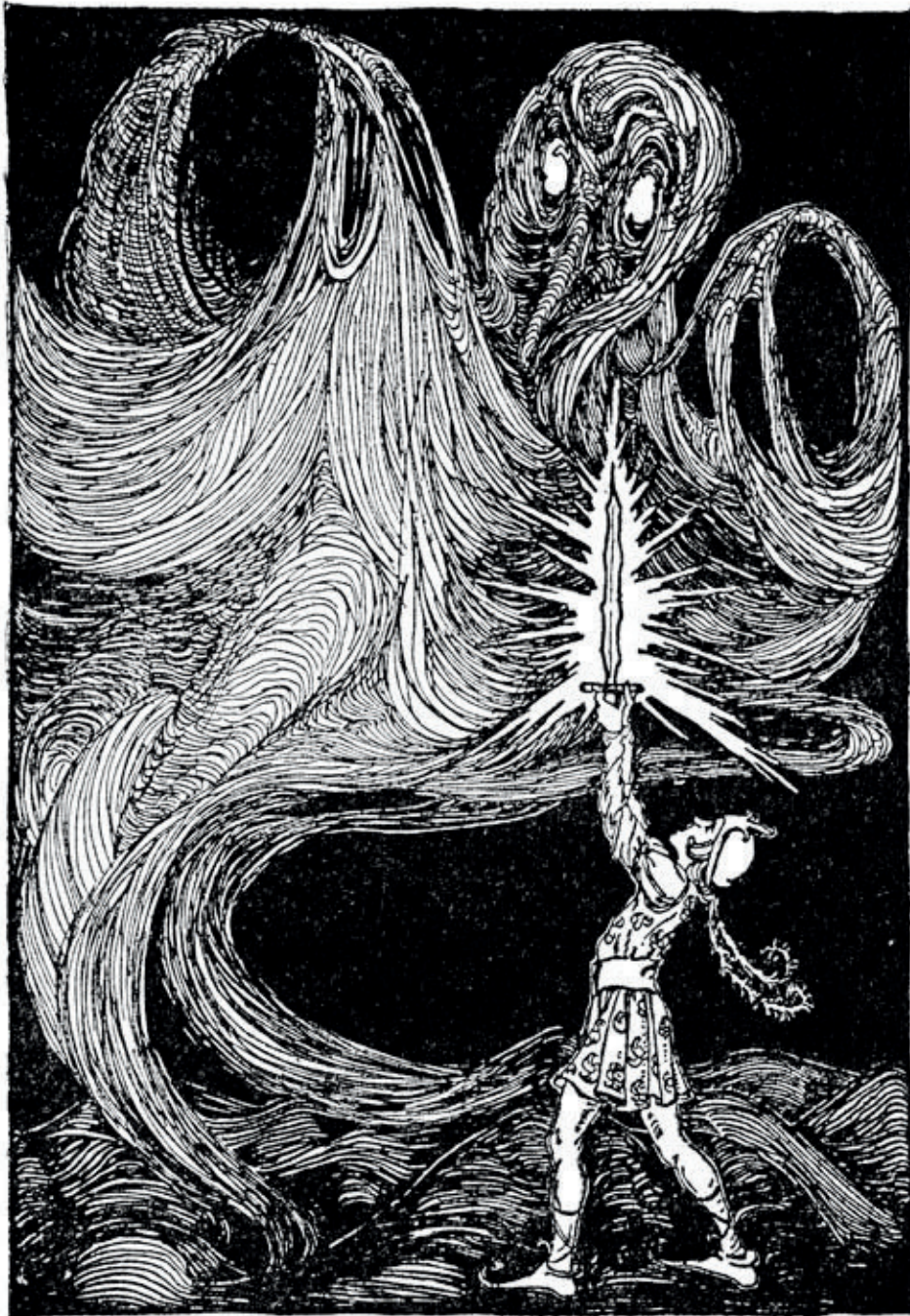
In proud disdain Curling Smoke made answer: "Bring hither your Prince, and when I have conquered him the Earth Fairy may take from him his Veil and go where she wishes. What care I for such a miserable trifle as this Prince carries? Have I not my Veil that Blinds? Have I not also my Veil that Chokes? With these two I am able to work what magic I will."

"That I can well believe," spoke Flying Soot in flattering tones. "As to the Prince—I need not go to fetch him. The Princess herself, driven by the Earth Fairy's spell, leads him on. See you—even now they approach us. A moment more, and they will be here."

It was as he said. Straight toward them came the beautiful flame of the Princess, and behind her sped Prince Radiance still cherishing the hope that the fortunate moment would soon arrive when he should be able to overtake her. Hidden from the eyes of the Prince, but clearly visible to Curling Smoke and Flying Soot came the wicked Earth Fairy, eager to test the power of her new ally. Within the shelter of a black crag Curling Smoke sank down and lay concealed until the Princess had flitted by, but when Prince Radiance would have done likewise, the tall grey form of the magician stole from his hiding-place and filled the path. Twisted about his arm and trailing from it were the smoke veils in which his power dwelt. Delaying not he unloosed the Veil that Blinds. "Yield you to Curling Smoke, to Curling Smoke, Magician of Veils," he cried.

Tall and powerful as was the unexpected enemy who now beset him, Prince Radiance did not quail. Quickly he laid his hand upon his scabbard and his voice rang clear, "Magician though you be, I fear you not. Neither do I obey. Stand back then from my path, for I follow the Princess White Flame, and yield to none."

Curling Smoke gave no word in answer but flung his veil of smoke instead full in the Prince's face. He thought to see it sting his eyes to instant blindness, but it was not so. Before it could come near him to do him harm the Sword of Flames answering its master's hand had leapt from its scabbard, and was raised on high. Back from its splendor the Veil that Blinds drifted—drifted—till it settled limp across the magician's arm. By the mere lifting of that fairy sword its power had been scattered, and its magic spent. Curling Smoke beheld it with astonishment and anger. Yet he did not hesitate. Grimly he snatched from his arm the Veil that Chokes, and flung it in its turn toward the Prince. He looked to have it take from Prince Radiance his very breath, so great was its pungent stifling power. But this also failed for the Sword of Flames met and clove it, and striking to right and left rent it in pieces. It fell in a thousand fragments about the magician's feet.



The Sword of Flames leapt from its scabbard and was raised on high.

Then Curling Smoke in a frenzy of wrath sprang upon the Prince to clutch him with his arms and bear him down.

Swiftly did Prince Radiance meet his onset, and right valiantly did he wield his Sword of Flames. Though Curling Smoke put forth all his craft, though he writhed now here, now there, seeking to ensnare the Prince, though he towered above him at one instant or in the next curled about his knees to drag him to the earth, yet everywhere the shining Sword sharp and invincible met him. Everywhere its violet splendor flashed; around him and through him, until at last the magician's very form was scattered and driven away in floating wisps of smoke.

Prince Radiance sheathed his Sword of Flames. Before him lay the open path, and not far away hovered the Princess. Across the space between them came her exquisite voice, calling tremulously her joy at his new deliverance from peril, and the fear for him that had been hers.

"Nay, then, my White Flame," he answered, "fear not for me ever. But one grief have I—that I have not yet overtaken you; but one fear is mine—that I may lose you in my journeyings. Over both of these, hope, like a star, shines always. Happiness awaits us in the end. Doubt it not."

The Earth Fairy berating Flying Soot over the utter failure of Curling Smoke, was arrested by the words of the Prince.

They but made her the more determined to achieve her end. Already the Prince was advancing toward the Princess. Should he overtake her all was lost to herself. Quickly she lifted her Green Wand and drove Princess White Flame onward. Quickly she turned to Flying Soot who had been making a new offer. "Go then," she cried, "and seek this Wizard of the Cave of Darkness, of whom you have spoken. Obtain his assistance for me. We shall not be far behind you, so lose no time. Let us hope that this last plan of yours will be of more value to me than the others that you have suggested."

Flying Soot needed no second bidding, but took himself off in the direction of the Wizard's Cave. More slowly the Earth Fairy proceeded along the same way, keeping the Prince and the Princess ever before her.

They had scarcely left the spot where Curling Smoke had been vanquished, when a small grey figure stole out from a crevice in a rock near by and looked cautiously after them. It was the Ash Goblin. He shook his fist at them in menace, muttering, "We shall see, Flying Soot, we shall see, Earth Fairy, whether you can afford to scorn the help of one so small even as an Ash Goblin." He sat down upon a low rock to watch the floating remnants that had once been Curling Smoke. Patiently he waited, for knowing this crafty magician, he knew also what would come to pass. Slowly, slowly these remnants came closer and closer. Slowly they gathered themselves bit by bit into one mass, and at length before the Ash Goblin's eyes Curling Smoke appeared once more in his own shape. He who had so lately boasted himself to be invincible, held himself haughtily, for anger burned within him at his humiliation and he was determined to be revenged. It pleased the Ash Goblin to see him thus, for it fell in with his own purposes. Fearful lest Curling Smoke should be about to depart he made haste to address him.

"Master Magician," he called from his lowly seat, "do you know what Flying Soot has said of you?"

“It is not Flying Soot who concerns me,” answered Curling Smoke, not deigning to look down at the speaker. “It is this Prince whom I mean to punish for what he has lately done.”

“Ay, but it was Flying Soot whom I heard telling the Earth Fairy that he might have guessed that you were no magician after all, but a mere boaster. He declared also that he had other friends who would help her, who were really more powerful, and whose word could be trusted. Many other things he said, that put shame and contempt upon you. It would take too long to repeat them all. Does not Flying Soot concern you, now that you know this, Master Magician?”

“So much does he concern me that I shall punish him as well,” replied Curling Smoke, in mounting rage. “Ay, and the Earth Fairy, also. Before their journey is done—in a moment when they look not for me, they shall one and all find that the power of Curling Smoke is not to be despised.”

The Ash Goblin clapped his hands in a burst of wicked glee. “Ah, Master Magician, that I can well believe—and I—the Ash Goblin—shall make it my business to be there to see it.”

CHAPTER XII

STRANGE though the lands had been across which Prince Radiance had journeyed since he left his father's kingdom, the one through which the flame now led him was the strangest of all. At one time he thought himself to be approaching a great palace, not brilliant and glittering like the Palace of Burning Coals, but looming dark and forbidding before his eyes. He wondered what manner of danger might await him there; yet when at last he stood before it, it dissolved from before his sight as though it had never been. And beyond him, hastening toward a gloomy forest the flame of his Princess still seemed to lead on.

He reached the forest, and it, too, vanished into thin air, while before him the pale flame steadily pursued its way.

A great black cave became visible in the distance. Soon the flame reached it and disappeared into its mouth, yet when the Prince arrived, no cave was there, and flitting on in silence went the unresting flame. Thus he was deceived again and again, for whatever he saw was found to be naught as soon as he reached it.

"Saw I never so curious a land!" murmured the Prince. "Surely but a moment since I seemed to see a strange grey woman close by my side; yet now she is gone." He turned to assure himself of it, and as he did so, a faint laugh echoed through the air.

"Ah! I was not mistaken after all," he whispered. "Someone laughed!"

Again, yet farther off, he heard the same echoing laugh, but though he looked sharply in the direction from whence it came, he still saw nothing. Paying no further heed to it Prince Radiance traveled onward with greater speed. Now at last he found that he was truly overtaking the flame. At times it stood still, then went slowly on, but finally, as if it meant to go no further it burned steadily in one spot.

"She waits!" exclaimed Radiance. "My Princess waits!" He ran to her, his heart filled with dread lest she should again take flight. He reached her, and opened his box in haste. He took the magic Veil from its shelter, and shook its transparent folds over the waiting flame. Instantly the flame vanished, and Radiance watched with eager eyes for the appearance of his Princess in her true form.

But moment followed moment, the Veil drooped limp from his hand, and though the flame was gone, the Princess did not become visible.

Perceiving that he had been deceived once more, Prince Radiance cried aloud in his grief, "Alas! This also is nothing! I have followed a false flame!"

Overcome with pain and discouragement, he dropped the Veil unheeded to the ground, and buried his face in his hands.

A long grey shadow crept toward him from the gloom, and once more a faint laugh broke the stillness. It was so near that it startled the Prince, plunged though he was in distress. He took his hands quickly from his eyes, and saw the creeping shadow, saw that with long

arms outstretched it sought to reach and steal the mystic Veil that lay unprotected at his feet. Swiftly he bent, and snatched the Veil to himself. He restored it to the golden box, and fastened the box safely beneath his cloak.

"Ah!" breathed a voice from the shadow, "you were too quick for me. I so much longed to see closely this wonderful Veil that Flying Soot tells of."

Prince Radiance, looking, saw the creeping shadow rise up and up until it became a tall woman, young and beautiful, dressed in long grey robes that swept in trailing webs from her arms and shoulders to her feet. Her black hair fell straight to her knees; her eyes were very dark, and looked as though they never smiled, although even now, the Prince heard that strange laughter floating from her lips that had echoed in his ears as he had pursued the flame that he had believed to be his Princess.

He turned indignant eyes upon her. "Who are you that mock me thus?" he demanded, wondering as he spoke whether this could be the Earth Fairy in disguise.

The woman did not answer, but looked at him intently.

"Speak," commanded the Prince. "Are you the wicked Earth Fairy, that you laugh so heartlessly?"

"No Earth Fairy am I," replied the grey woman. "I am the Shadow Witch, and with me are all my servants." She waved her arms, and out of the gloom, as she herself had done, sprang a host of pale grey figures who stood behind her murmuring, "Yes, we are her servants—her servants the Shadows, who come and go at her behest."

"And you it is, then, who have so cruelly deceived me, and lured me by your false flame from following my Princess," cried Prince Radiance to the Shadow Witch.

"True enough," she declared, "and why should I not?" She tossed her black hair from her face, and continued. "I grow so weary in this Land of Shadows, with none but my creeping servants about me, naught but my own grey magic to fill my hours. Seldom does a stranger cross through my land; more seldom have I a chance to look upon the magic of others. All the tricks of my brother, the Wizard of the Cave, I know by heart. I am tired of watching him play them day after day. Why should I not lure you from your path if it gives me an hour of pleasure?"

"Surely you are the friend of the Earth Fairy," exclaimed the Prince, "and you have led me here to steal my fairy Veil if you can, but be assured you will never obtain it in spite of all your craft."

The Shadow Witch, who had bent her eyes upon the ground, raised them now, and turned upon the Prince an earnest gaze as though she rejoiced to look upon him. "I am no friend of the Earth Fairy," she answered quietly. "She is nothing to me. I will tell you fully if you wish to know, why it is that I have brought you here. Of late as I sat unobserved in a corner of the Wizard's Cave, where my brother dwells, I saw Flying Soot come in, and heard him say that he had work for my brother to do, if he was willing. What could that mean but mischief? I crept close, yet taking care lest I should be seen, and listened keenly that I might lose

nothing. Thus I learned all that Flying Soot had to tell him concerning yourself and Princess White Flame, and about the Veil that the Earth Fairy claims that you have stolen from her.”

“Nay,” interrupted the Prince indignantly. “If she says that she tells a wicked falsehood. The magic Veil is a gift to me from the Wise One. The Earth Fairy has never even beheld it.”

“However that may be,” answered the Shadow Witch, shaking out her grey sleeves, “she means to wrest it from you, and my brother has promised to help her. You may take my word for it that his help is not to be despised. I heard Flying Soot suggest also that he should get me to assist in the matter, but the Wizard replied, ‘Nay, you need not trouble yourself to ask her. She can do nothing that is really worth while.’ When he said that, I determined to cheat them both, and as you see, I have done so.”

“Alas, that you should have succeeded,” cried Prince Radiance. “It may be that even now my Princess is in the hands of your wicked brother.”

“Is then this Princess so dear to you?” asked the Shadow Witch softly.

“Ah, yes. So dear that no witchcraft of yours shall be able to keep me from her,” exclaimed the Prince.

“Yet she is no more than a flame, and a voice,” murmured the Shadow Witch.

“But such a voice as none have ever heard before, and such a flame, so pure, so white, that I wonder how I could have been deceived by the false flame of your contriving that has lured me here.”

The lips of the Shadow Witch curled in a smile. “I have much skill with magic,” she said. “Beautiful may be the flame of your Princess, of wondrous sweetness may be her voice, yet if you would consent to remain in my land, I think I should be able to make you forget them both.”

“Nay,” replied Prince Radiance firmly, “that would never be.” Turning from her, he sought to depart, but the Shadow Witch would not have it so. She waved her long arms to her servants, and instantly they surrounded him in so dense a barrier that he could not pass.

“You must hear me yet further,” cried the Shadow Witch. “I am not so cruel, perhaps, as you think. It was not alone that I desired to cheat my brother and Flying Soot, for when I saw your face so full of hope and courage it cheered me as none had ever done before. Because of this I would have saved you from his evil power. Well did I know that he had promised not to harm the Princess, but I feared that you might not escape in safety, and therefore I led you here. And then—besides—I am so lonely in my kingdom.” She drew nearer, and held out her hands beseechingly. Her pleading voice spoke on. “Oh if you would but stay with me. I long for brightness, for light, for cheer. These you can give me. Stay, ah stay with me, Prince Radiance. In my land you shall be prince and ruler. Stay, and teach me to forget my witch’s tricks; stay, and help me to learn nobler ways.”

Prince Radiance looked into the face of the Shadow Witch, and saw that her eyes overflowed with tears. Gently he took her hand, gently he answered her. “Though you have drawn me away from my beloved Princess, I bear you no malice. Yet I cannot stay with you, for my heart follows the Princess White Flame. I have sworn to deliver her, and to my vow I

give my life. You tell me that you are not cruel. Prove it then. Lead me back to my Princess quickly; show me where to find this Cave where your brother dwells.”

The Shadow Witch sighed bitterly and drew her hand away. “If I let you go, you will never come again.” Silent she stood, wavering in indecision, but at length she spoke quickly, “Yes—yes—I will let you go. I will even do as you ask, and take you to the Cave myself, for in this Land of Shadows you would wander long, and never find your way.” Turning to her band of servants, she waved them back. “Go,” she exclaimed. “Go, till I summon you again.”

With a flutter of grey garments they dissolved like mist at her command. Then the Shadow Witch stretched her hand to Prince Radiance. “Come,” she said. “Follow where I lead you, and you shall learn that I spoke truly when I said that in this land there is one at least who is not altogether unkind.”

Gratefully the Prince obeyed her, and before he could have believed it possible, they stood together at the spot where he had begun to pursue the false flame. A high black cliff rose before them. The Shadow Witch pointed to it and said, “My brother’s Cave lies yonder. Enter that wide opening in the cliff-side. Pursue the narrow way that leads from it, and ere long you will reach the Cave Hall where he sits. Gladly would I give you some weapon to use against him, but there is only one that he fears, and alas, I do not possess it.”

“What weapon may that be?” inquired the Prince.

“It is the Sword of Flames,” she answered. “He has never seen it, but its fame has reached him, and he knows well that before it his power would be shattered.”

Prince Radiance smiled, and laid his hand upon his scabbard. “Then am I well assured of victory,” he told her, “for the Sword of Flames is here.”

“The Sword of Flames? You have the Sword of Flames?” exclaimed she. “Ah, now you may meet him safely. And yet——” she warned him, “he is clever, very clever. Beware lest he steal your strength from you and overpower you before you are aware.”

“I will be watchful,” he promised.

“Farewell then,” she murmured, “and forget not the Shadow Witch.”

“Always will I remember you and be grateful,” replied the Prince. With a wave of his hand he left her. Rapidly he mounted the cliff, and found himself at the entrance to the Wizard’s Cave.

The Shadow Witch, who had remained below, watched him sadly until she saw him disappear in the Cave’s mouth. Then she turned away to go back to the Land of Shadows. But suddenly she changed her mind. Silently she, too, climbed the cliff wall, trailing her long grey robes behind her, and entered the Cave.

“My brother is so clever,” she muttered to herself, “and none know his tricks so well as I. He shall not harm this Prince, no—nor the Princess that he loves. I will go to make sure of it.”

CHAPTER XIII

WHILE Prince Radiance, deceived by the Shadow Witch had gone away into the Land of Shadows, the Earth Fairy on her part had proceeded straight to the Cave of Darkness where the Wizard dwelt.

A figure that she believed to be the Prince followed the Princess steadily, so that she suspected nothing wrong.

The Cave was black and forbidding; its walls of charcoal were full of gaping crevices; and a very little way from the entrance it became pitch dark. Because of this great darkness it was the duty of many Imps, the servants of the Wizard, to run back and forth with glimmering lanterns, to light the way of those who came to see their master.

Flying Soot, who had arrived some time before, had told his story to the Wizard and had easily gained his consent to assist the Earth Fairy. So when the Earth Fairy with her companions reached the entrance to the Cave she found the Imps waiting there to conduct her to the Wizard. The Princess was first to enter, and so brilliant was the light of her pure flame that the lanterns of the Imps were quite dimmed by it. The Imps themselves stared at her in the utmost astonishment. Never before had they seen a light so gloriously beautiful. Scurrying in front to lead the way, they turned back every few moments to behold her. Behind the Princess came the supposed prince, and after him came the Earth Fairy, holding her cloak closely about her as she went, lest she should become blackened by the walls of the Cave.

Far down in a wider portion of the Cave called the Cave Hall, sat the Wizard in a great black armchair pushed close against the wall. He was very ancient and grim. His long dingy white hair and beard fell down over a loose black robe and mantle thickly powdered with finest charcoal. At his least movement little clouds of black dust flew from his garments and floated round about the Cave. His jet black eyes sparkled so sharply in his head that one saw immediately that he was not a person with whom one could trifle. Flying Soot, perched at a respectful distance on a lump of charcoal, waited for the coming of the Earth Fairy. He was quite sure that this time he had obtained for her the help of one who could not fail. He kept his eyes fixed on the dark passage before them, and at last he cried softly, "They come, Sir Wizard, they come, for I behold the flame of the Princess!"

Instantly the Wizard beckoned to one of the many Imps who clustered about. "Bring hither the Urn of Vapors," commanded he, "and make no delay."

Away rushed the Imp accompanied by a dozen or more of his companions to do the Wizard's bidding, and presently a low rumbling was heard. It was the Imps returning, all pushing and shoving a huge black urn. A ponderous cover sealed it tightly, and when the Imps had succeeded in placing it beside their master, Flying Soot saw that it was so tall that it reached almost to the Wizard's shoulders. Its sides were covered with inscriptions of evil magic. The Wizard scrutinized it closely, and satisfied himself that it was the one that he desired. Then he waved back his servants and turned to Flying Soot. "When I lift this cover," he said, "the Earth Fairy has but to rush forward and take what she desires, for in the

instant that the Prince is met by my magic vapor he will fall to the Earth unable to offer her the slightest resistance.”

Flying Soot had no time to answer, for at that moment Princess White Flame, driven by the Earth Fairy, fluttered terror-stricken into the Cave Hall, and came to rest in a corner at some distance from the Wizard. Soon after he whom the Earth Fairy believed to be Prince Radiance appeared also, but before he could advance into the Cave Hall the Wizard stretched forth his hand quickly to the urn. Uttering mystic words he lifted the cover and forthwith a stream of vapor rushed from it directly toward the Prince.

It had no sooner reached him than the Wizard’s prophecy was fulfilled; he fell to the ground in a heap, apparently without life.

The Princess seeing this uttered a piercing cry, but held by the spell of her enchantress she could not stir from her place.

The Wizard replaced the lid of the urn, and the Earth Fairy rushed forward to pounce upon the helpless Prince. Her eyes glittered with joy to see him in her power at last.

She tore back his cloak, sure that the Veil of Disenchantment was hidden beneath it, but as soon as her fingers touched the prostrate form it vanished. Where it had been, she saw only the charcoal floor of the Cave. Puzzled and astonished she struggled to her feet, and stood dazed, peering down at the spot where the figure had lain as though she could scarcely believe her senses. When at last she could no longer doubt that the Prince had indeed disappeared, she rushed to the Wizard, shrieking in fury, “What evil magic is this that you have wrought upon me, wicked one that you are? You have ruined everything by your miserable enchantments. You have destroyed the Veil as well as the Prince.”

The Wizard interrupted her angrily. “How dare you speak to me in this manner,” he thundered, bringing his fist down upon the top of the urn. “You, who have deceived me by pretending to bring a Prince before me? But I will show you that you cannot trifle with the Wizard of the Cave.”

He waved to his Imps. They understood him without a word, and bounded forward with ropes of darkness in their hands to bind the Earth Fairy. It would have gone hard with her then if it had not been for Flying Soot. He jumped down with all speed from his lump of charcoal, and ran to cast himself at the Wizard’s feet. He threw his arms about them, and tried to soothe him. “Sir Wizard, Sir Wizard,” he pleaded, “listen but a moment. There has certainly been some strange mistake. I assure you that we are not to blame. This creature that has so suddenly vanished could never have been the Prince. Someone—I know not who, has tricked us all. I pray you, do nothing rash to the Earth Fairy. She is not to blame.”

The Imps who surrounded the Earth Fairy, hearing this, stood swinging the ropes of darkness in their hands, waiting to see what their master would say, before they ventured to bind her fast. White Flame, weeping and trembling in her corner, checked her sobs and listened breathlessly for the Wizard’s reply.

The Wizard thought for a time in silence. Then at last he spoke. “Since you yourselves have played no tricks upon me, there is but one way in which to explain this matter. My sister,

the Shadow Witch, has been at work. She it is who has caused us to see a prince where no prince was. The real prince she has without doubt lured away into the Land of Shadows."

At these words Flying Soot rose to his feet and turned to the Earth Fairy. "Then we must go to seek him there," he declared.

The Earth Fairy was but too anxious to set forth. At a signal from their master, the Imps drew back, leaving her free to go as she would, but as she was about to depart from the Wizard's presence with her companions, an Imp came rushing down the long dark corridor from the Cave entrance, and into the Cave Hall. "Sir Wizard—Sir Wizard!" he panted. "A second prince approaches! Even now he is within the entrance to the Cave."

Certain that this could be no other than Prince Radiance himself, the Earth Fairy and Flying Soot paused instantly.

The Wizard, seeing this, was not unwilling to prove his skill upon the true prince. He spoke in a friendly manner to the Earth Fairy, and prepared himself once more to lift the cover of his Urn of Vapors. The Imps, flinging their ropes of darkness into a corner, retreated so close against the Cave Wall that they could scarcely be seen. In her corner quivered Princess White Flame, her longing to see her beloved Radiance once more overborne by her fear of what might befall him at the hands of his foes.

Each in his own place peered eagerly down the dusky corridor, awaiting in silence the coming of the Prince.

But one accompanied the Prince whom they did not expect. It was the Shadow Witch.

Although by her grey magic she had sent a shadow prince to deceive her brother, she had never for a moment lost sight of Prince Radiance, and now that he was drawing near to the Wizard, she knew that the time for her further good offices had arrived. If she could prevent him from being seen by her brother until the Prince was near enough to use his Sword of Flames, she knew that all would be well.

Prince Radiance was so near to the Cave Hall that one short turn would bring him into the Wizard's view. The Shadow Witch knew that her time to help him had come. She waved her long arms and instantly a thick curtain of shadow fell directly in front of the Prince. He could not see a yard before him, and stood still at once, fearing that some trap had been laid for him.

"Do not be afraid," whispered a voice at his ear. "Go forward. It is I, the Shadow Witch, who have come to help you."

Prince Radiance knew her voice, yet he hesitated.

"Fear nothing," insisted the Shadow Witch. "Go forward, and no harm shall come to you."

Trusting her then, the Prince trod boldly on, and before him went the curtain of the Shadow Witch like a covering shield. Beyond it the Wizard and his companions watched and waited, but saw only the corridor of the Cave stretching before them darker than ever, and filled with shadows so deep that their eyes could not penetrate them.

Nearer and nearer came the Prince, and presently the voice of the Shadow Witch was heard again at his ear. "Have out your Sword of Flames," she whispered. "The time has come."

Radiance laid his hand upon the hilt. At that moment the shadow curtain dissolved, and he beheld the Wizard little more than a yard away. So suddenly had the Prince appeared that the Wizard started with astonishment, but he recovered himself immediately, and shot forth his hand to lift the cover of his urn.

"Now, now," urged the Shadow Witch, at the Prince's ear. "Now, or it will be too late!"

Out flashed the Sword of Flames. It filled the Cave with blinding light. The cover of the urn settled back to its place with a harsh clang, as the Wizard leaped to his feet, shielding his eyes with his hands.

"The Sword of Flames! The Sword of Flames!" he shrieked. "Away! Away!"

He tried to flee, but fell prostrate across the Urn of Vapors instead. From every corner of the Cave sprang a crowd of Imps in answer to their master's cry. Seeing the dread weapon that flashed in the hand of Prince Radiance they turned their backs upon it in terror, and screaming wildly surrounded the urn in a huddled mass. Throwing themselves upon it, they hurried it away into a dim passage, with their master still lying senseless across its top. As they disappeared into the pitch dark opening, a heavy door of charcoal fell shut behind them, closing the entrance to the place to which they fled.

Overjoyed at his victory, Radiance lifted his eyes to where but a moment since he had seen Princess White Flame trembling against the Cave wall, but the Princess, the Earth Fairy, and Flying Soot were nowhere to be seen. Except for the Shadow Witch he was entirely alone in the Cave of Darkness.

With a gesture of despair the Prince let the Sword of Flames drop back into its sheath.

"What has it availed me to overcome this miserable Wizard," he groaned, "since it has brought me no nearer to my dear White Flame? Again she has vanished, and I know not where to seek her; whether in some dusky portion of this hateful Cave, or in the open country without."

The voice of the Shadow Witch answered him. "Have courage, good Prince. All is not lost. Leave the Cave of Darkness with me, and seek her in the light."

Prince Radiance hesitated, but the Shadow Witch insisted. "She is not here," she told him. "Trust yourself fully to my guidance, and I will lead you safely out." Then the Prince yielded, and together they left the Wizard's Hall. Down the dark corridor they passed swiftly and soon arrived at the Cave's mouth. There they parted, the Shadow Witch stealing away with drooped head to her Land of Shadows, the Prince standing for a moment gazing with eager eyes across the plain, hoping that not far away he might behold the flame of his Princess.

CHAPTER XIV

NO sooner had the Earth Fairy beheld the sudden downfall of the Wizard than she immediately fled from the Cave of Darkness taking Princess White Flame with her.

Flying Soot, much crestfallen over the way in which matters had turned out, kept a little way behind them, for he was not anxious to speak with the Earth Fairy until her anger had had time to cool. When they were well outside the Cave, however, he drew nearer, and began as usual to make excuses and suggest new plans.

The Earth Fairy listened to him most ungraciously. "Speak no more of these friends of yours," she exclaimed, "for I have lost all faith in them."

"As you will," said Flying Soot, with a shrug of his black shoulders, "but you make a grave mistake if you do not try the Wind in the Chimney."

"I have no reason to believe that he will do any better than those others of whom you boasted so loudly," retorted the Earth Fairy.

But Flying Soot was not to be discouraged. He continued to sing the Wind's praises, until finally the Earth Fairy consented to give him a trial.

"You have but to wait here in concealment near the mouth of the Cave until the Prince comes forth," directed Flying Soot, before he took his leave of her. "Then cause the Princess to lead him to the Chimney yonder, and you will soon see that the Wind is one whose magic is not to be despised."

He gathered his black mantle about him and departed, and the Earth Fairy hid herself and Princess White Flame in a deep cleft close by, from whence she should be able to see Prince Radiance the moment that he issued from the Cave.

With her keen eyes fixed steadily in that direction the Earth Fairy did not let her gaze wander elsewhere, and hence she did not see a tall form creeping stealthily from dark cliff to dark cliff as though seeking someone; she did not see a small grey figure following closely at his heels. They were Curling Smoke and the Ash Goblin in quest of the Prince and Flying Soot.

At last the Earth Fairy's watching was rewarded. She saw Prince Radiance come from the Cave's mouth in company with the Shadow Witch, saw him bid her farewell, and saw the Shadow Witch steal away from him to her own land.

Then quickly the Earth Fairy came forth and drove the Princess to where Prince Radiance could not fail to behold her when he should set out in quest of her.

It happened as the Earth Fairy expected; the Prince searching the plain with his eyes instantly descried the Princess. He had not even had time to call to her, when suddenly the huge grey form of Curling Smoke wound upon him from behind, gathered the Prince, the Princess and the Earth Fairy, one and all, into a dense cloud of smoke, in which none could see the other, and hurried them away toward the Chimney.

The Ash Goblin beholding, danced for joy, for he had seen Flying Soot vanish into the Chimney not long since, and believed that now his time of punishment was come.

Flying Soot had indeed reached the great Chimney where the Wind dwelt, and was even now awaiting the coming of the Earth Fairy and those that she should bring with her. The Chimney was wide and dark, with great rough boundaries, and the Wind's voice was so strong and boisterous that it could be heard from the Chimney Mouth to the Chimney Top. Over the entire Chimney the Wind ruled, and none dared to intrude upon him there without first asking his permission.

It was true that Curling Smoke had the right of way to the Chimney Top, but it was well understood that the Wind was at liberty to deny him entrance to the Chimney at any time that he chose.

When Flying Soot had arrived at the Chimney Mouth, the Wind had howled a welcome to him, and bade him enter. This Flying Soot had made haste to do, and finding a seat beside the Wind had told his errand without loss of time.

"Ah!" whistled the Wind, "what you say interests me greatly, and I am perfectly willing to do as you ask and help the Earth Fairy. You may give yourself no anxiety about the Veil. I care nothing whatever for it. Of one thing you must assure me, however, and that is that she has had no dealings with Curling Smoke in this matter, for I am on bad terms with him at present, and refuse to take part in anything in which he has at any time been concerned."

Flying Soot rolled up his eyes and swore to the Wind in the Chimney that neither he nor the Earth Fairy had had anything to do with Curling Smoke, nor would they think of approaching him. So the Wind was satisfied and declared that he would exert all his powers in the Earth Fairy's behalf.

The Soot Fairy was just about to thank him for the promise of his good offices, when suddenly the Wind leaned from his seat, and peered down toward the Chimney Mouth. Flying Soot looked also. Up the Chimney rose a dense cloud of smoke, and in it, so enveloped by it that they could not see each other, though they were plainly visible to the eyes of the Wind and Flying Soot, were the Earth Fairy, Princess White Flame, and Prince Radiance. Behind them loomed an immense grey shape. It was Curling Smoke on his way to the Chimney Top, driving his enemies before him.

The Wind started from his seat in a towering rage. "So this is the way you and your Earth Fairy have deceived me," he howled, turning upon Flying Soot. "This is the way in which she has had nothing to do with Curling Smoke. But you, her messenger, shall learn what happens when you trifle with the Wind. Up, out of my Chimney, to the punishment that you well deserve."

With one blast he drove the Soot Fairy up and away through the great black spaces of the Chimney, and hurled him out into the Great World Beyond. Well did the Wind know that from thence he could not return.

Then with so mighty a rush that nothing could stand before it he pounced upon Curling Smoke and those whom he had in his power. "How dare you come into my presence unbidden?" he shrieked. "Out of my kingdom all of you! Out, out into the Borderland."

Away they were driven by the fury of the Wind like leaves before a storm, down through the black Chimney and out of its mouth, into the Borderland near to the Kingdom of Earth.

There the Wind scattered Curling Smoke far and wide in thin pale streamers that slowly floated back at last to the great plain from whence he had come.

As for the wicked Earth Fairy, the Wind in the Chimney drove her away and away into the Land of Desolate Places there to remain forever a prisoner.

In the Borderland he cast down Prince Radiance, and roughly tossed the flame of the Princess upon a pile of scattered ash, and blackened coals.

Then with his anger satisfied, the Wind rushed back to his Chimney, shrieking and howling with glee at the punishment that he had dealt out to those who had offended him.

Princess White Flame, so pale that she could scarcely be discerned, quivered and flickered where the Wind had rudely thrown her. Too weak to cry out, she only sighed faintly, and sank still lower upon the ashes.

She knew not that by her entrance into the Borderland the cruel spell had been broken by which the Earth Fairy had so long compelled her to flee from Prince Radiance. She only knew that she felt helpless, and almost without life. And indeed the Princess was now in great danger, for away from the Fire, no Fire Fairy can live for long.

Over Prince Radiance the Borderland possessed no evil power. He arose unharmed from the stones and looked anxiously about him for his Princess. So almost extinguished was her fairy flame that at first he did not see her, and his heart was rent by fear lest the Wind had carried her away from him forever.

But presently he descried her lying there, as if unable to proceed further, and hope rose again in his breast. In haste he took forth the Veil of Disenchantment—in haste he ran to her holding it securely in his hand. He reached her, he bent above her, and she did not stir.

“At last my White Flame,” he cried, in an outburst of joy, “at last you flee from me no more.”

He cast the mystic Veil over the flame of the Princess. Like a web of gossamer it settled slowly upon her, and the Prince, scarce daring to breathe as he watched it, saw the Wise One’s promise instantly fulfilled.

At his feet, visible in her true form, lay a creature so beautiful, so charming as none had ever seen the like before. The Veil of Disenchantment, in touching her, had changed to a marvelous robe, soft and silvery, that swept in shining folds from her head to her feet. Over her shoulders and down to her knees streamed the silken splendor of her hair; pale gold it was, and finer than the finest floss. Her delicate red lips were closed, her eyes fast shut.

Prince Radiance fell on his knees before her and touched her gently. “White Flame,” he whispered, “dear White Flame, awake and speak.”

The Princess lay there pale and still, giving no sign that she had heard. The Prince laid his hand on hers, but felt no glow of life.

In wild alarm he cried aloud, “White Flame! White Flame! Awake—awake!”

Still the Princess made no answer, and though he tried by every means he knew to revive her, his efforts were all in vain.

At length, choked with grief he bowed his head upon her breast. If he had reached her, and freed her, only to lose her thus, he had no wish left except to die by her side.

A fierce tug at his arm aroused him. "Do you not know that a Fire Fairy cannot exist in the Borderland?" demanded an indignant voice. "Take her back to the Fire at once, and warm her back to life."



Prince Radiance fell on his knees before her.

The Prince raised his head, and saw at his elbow a fuzzy little creature, who clutched and shook him with a pudgy hand. It was an Elf of the Borderland.

"Come, come," cried the Elf, "bestir yourself, or it will be too late."

Quickly the Prince bent over Princess White Flame to raise her in his arms, but before he could do so the Elf had laid a fuzzy ear to the heart of the unconscious Princess.

"Ah, me," he murmured, lifting his head, and regarding the Prince mournfully, "I fear she can never live to reach there. She should have warmth at this very moment."

Hardly had the Elf spoken, when Prince Radiance remembered his good Grey Pouch. He tore it open, took out a glowing coal quickly, and laid it over the heart of the Princess. What was his joy to see an exquisite roseate glow steal into her face, to feel her hand grow warm under its fairy touch. Then as it lay there warm against her heart, the eyes of the Princess opened slowly to behold Prince Radiance bending above her; her ears awoke to his voice calling tenderly, "White Flame, my own White Flame!"

For a moment she gazed up at him lovingly, too overcome with joy to speak; then fear crept into her face, and she clung to him whispering, "The Earth Fairy!—where is she?"

"Gone, gone forever," the Prince assured her, drawing her closer to his breast. "Her wicked spells are broken. Fear her no more."

The Princess, beholding her hands, her figure, her shining garments, knew that it was indeed true, and gave a low cry of rapture.

Prince Radiance raised her gently to her feet. "Come," said he, "let me lead you home to your father, King Red Flame, as I have promised. He waits and yearns for you in his Palace of Burning Coals."

"Yes, let us go to him quickly, dear Radiance," she answered. "Had it not been for you he must have waited always in vain."

So they set out, and the Elf of the Borderland went before them, and guided them to the boundary of the Land of Fire, by the nearest way.

CHAPTER XV

FAR away in the Land of the Fire Fairies, King Red Flame mourned daily the loss of his dear daughter. As day followed day and no news of her reached him he became more and more fearful that he should never again look upon her exquisite flame, or hear her voice speaking to him in tenderness and love.

The old nurse, Grey Smoke, did all that she could to hearten him, and as for herself, she never lost the hope and belief that at no distant day her beloved mistress would come safely home.

The Fire Fairies spoke of her always in hushed voices, and when they repeated her story to one another as they worked or played, they would sigh, and whisper, "Ah, she was beautiful, our Princess White Flame—beautiful and good as none else." But they spoke of her always as one who would never come again.

At last one day King Red Flame could bear his anxious thoughts no longer. He left the Palace of Burning Coals, and took his way to the hut of the Wise One. There he hoped to find encouragement and counsel. Arrived at the low red door he knocked, and presently he heard the Wise One's voice bidding him enter.

The King did so, and talked to him long and despondently, but the Wise One enjoined upon him not to give up hope. "There will be difficulties to be met and conquered," he told him, "and that takes time. But something assures me that the Princess is alive and well. As for Prince Radiance, you may trust him entirely. Take courage; at any time they may return in triumph."

While the Wise One spoke thus to the King, Grey Smoke stood in the high tower of the Palace of Burning Coals and gazed earnestly out across the country, as she did many times each day, in order that she might be the first to catch a glimpse of the Princess when she should return.

Grey Smoke was old, but her eyes were still keen. On this day, as she looked, she saw in the distance two travelers approaching hand in hand. One of these travelers appeared to her to be Prince Radiance. She waited a few moments to make sure of it; but soon she could no longer doubt. It was he in very truth. The other, her eyes told her for a certainty, was her beloved young mistress. The heart of old Grey Smoke leaped for joy. As rapidly as her age would permit she descended the steps of the tower, calling out with trembling voice, "The Princess comes! The Princess White Flame comes!"

The palace fairies at their tasks heard it. Knowing that Grey Smoke was one who made no mistakes, they seized upon the glad news, and rushed from one end of the palace to the other shouting it: "The Princess comes! The Princess comes!"

The garden fairies were not slow to hear it, and they too took up the excited cry, "The Princess White Flame comes! The Princess White Flame comes!"

Grey Smoke, anxious to be the first to bring the glad tidings to her master, went in search of him, and after her the fairies one and all came trooping, trooping from everywhere. In this manner they drew near to the little red hut in the shrubbery. King Red Flame heard the tumult and caught the words of their cry. He hurried forth, followed by the Wise One. "Where is the Princess White Flame?" exclaimed the King, "Tell me quickly."

There was no need of any answer, for in that instant he saw her coming down the shining way—his dear lost daughter—lovelier by far than he had ever dreamed she might be. He heard the music of her voice calling to him, sweeter even than he had so fondly remembered it.

Hand in hand with her came Prince Radiance leading her safely to her journey's end.

King Red Flame opened his arms to her crying in ecstasy, "Ah that I should at last behold you, my White Flame, my own dear child!"

And Princess White Flame ran to him, and nestled at his breast, weeping and laughing all in a breath for pure happiness.

For a little he held her thus in silence; but presently, thirsting to hear of all that had transpired during her long absence from him, he begged the Prince to relate the story of their wanderings.

Briefly the tale was told, and as the King listened intently, the eager fairies clustered close about him meanwhile, that they also might lose no syllable concerning the perils that had been safely passed. The Wise One, hearing, stroked his beard with satisfaction that all had turned out so triumphantly and well.

When the last words had been spoken, King Red Flame led his beloved child to Prince Radiance, and placed her hand in his. "Noble Prince," he exclaimed, with deep emotion, "take my daughter, with her father's love and gratitude, for valiantly have you won your bride."

Then King Red Flame turned to the thronging fairies, and raising his voice so as to be heard by all, he cried, "Hasten, one and all, to the Palace of Burning Coals. Prepare all things for the wedding. Let swift messengers speed to the Kingdom of Light, to bid its ruler to the marriage of his son. And you, my good Grey Smoke, who know so well how to carry out my desires, see to it that never fairy wedding in the Land of Fire has equaled this of my beloved daughter Princess White Flame, and my dear son Prince Radiance."

Thus, amid tumults of rejoicing, did Princess White Flame and Prince Radiance enter upon their life of never-ending happiness.

