

THE STORY

OF

LITTLE WHITE MOUSE

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OR THE

OVERTHROW OF THE TYRANT KING.



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LITTLE WHITE MOUSE.

ANCIENT history furnishes an example of a king and queen so tenderly attached to each other, that nothing was wanting to make their felicity complete. Their wishes and their sentiments corresponded exactly on all subjects; they went frequently to hunt, killing various sorts of game, and the stag often became the object of their amusement, or the victim of their exertions; they visited the rivers for the diversion of fishing; and, in short, whatever gratified the one, became a source of real delight to the other. Their subjects followed so amiable an example, and thus the happiness of all the nation consisted in mutual exertions to make others happy.

The king of an adjoining state, whose manners and dispositions were directly contrary, conceived a deadly hatred against the king of the Land of Pleasure; for so the country was called, on account of the tranquillity and joy that constantly prevailed there. He was a declared enemy to pleasure;

he sought for nothing but wounds and bruises; his air was stern and forbidding, with a long beard and hollow eyes. He was lean and withered; always dressed in black; his bristly locks were dirty and uncombed; there was no way so secure to obtain his favour, but by committing the most atrocious murders or assassinations: he took upon himself the office of public executioner, because he delighted in the pangs of those who suffered. This kingdom was therefore called the Land of Tears.

This wicked wretch, unworthy to possess a throne, raised an immense army, and determined with it to spread through the territory of this happy neighbour that desolation which was his greatest delight.

When all was ready he began his march; but the news of his intention reached the king of the Land of Pleasure long before the invading army, who put every thing in the best possible state of defence, and waited the attack with firmness and resolution. But the timid disposition of the queen suggested a thousand fears: "Sire," said she, "let us fly; let us take the wealth we possess, and seek that safety in another quarter of the world which we cannot now find here." "It is my duty, madam," said the king, "to remain and protect my subjects. I am determined, therefore, to share their fate."

He then assembled his forces, took a tender leave of the queen, and marched out to meet the enemy.

As soon as he was departed, the queen gave way to the excess of her sorrow, and clasping her hands together, "Alas!" exclaimed she, "if the king, my husband, should fall in battle, I shall be left a widow, in the power of a cruel monster, and my unborn child will be doomed to slavery." This idea redoubled her affliction. The king wrote to her every day; but one morning, when she was watching for the usual messenger, with fear pictured in his countenance, he dismounted immediately, and entering her presence, "Oh! madam," said he, "all is lost; the king is slain, the army defeated, and the ferocious conquerer almost at our backs."

The poor queen fell senseless; her attendants carried her to bed, and all her women stood weeping round; they tore their hair in the bitterness of their affliction, and no scene in the world could have been more affecting. But their sobs and lamentations were soon drowned by the cries that every where spread through the palace of the cruel manner in which the victorious army was desolating the city. The wicked king, at the head of his savage troops, was incessantly employed in exciting them to acts of cruelty

and plunder: and, thus directed, they slew, without discrimination, every person they met. He entered the palace, and penetrated without ceremony into the most retired apartments, where he found the queen overwhelmed with sorrow and despair. He beheld her distresses unmoved, and by his ferocious manner and brutal threats; added terror to the pangs she felt before. Thus, too much intimidated to answer a word, this monster of a king, supposed her silence to proceed from sullenness and ill humour; he seized her rudely by the hair, which the negligence of grief had suffered to fall loosely on her shoulders, and then dragging her from the bed on which she lay, he through her across his shoulders, and carried her away without remorse; he then mounted with her on his steed, and rode off. She besought him, with tears and supplications, to have pity on her sufferings; but he mocked her cries, and said to her, "Weep on; your complaints are a source of pleasure and diversion to me."

He carried her towards his own capital, and, during the time that he was on the road, he took the most dreadful oaths that he would hang her as soon as he reached it; but he was soon informed, on his arrival, that the queen was pregnant. When the wicked king knew this, a

thought struck him, if she was delivered of a daughter he could marry her to his son, and to ascertain whether it was a daughter that she should have, he sent for a fairy who lived on the frontiers of his dominions. When she arrived, he entertained her with much more hospitality than he showed to his most intimate friends, and then led her to a tower, in the highest room of which the poor queen was confined. Nothing could equal the misery of the poor queen, and the unpleasantness of her apartment. The broken casements admitted both the wind and the rain, the flooring was broken in several places, and the damps that ran down the walls were dangerous, especially to a person of so weak a constitution as the queen; the bed was composed of nothing but an old mattress, worse than is found in the habitations of the poorest class of people. In this miserable condition, the queen passed both day and night, weeping bitterly at the thoughts of her own situation, and for the death of the king her husband.

The fairy's heart was touched with pity at so deplorable a sight; she embraced the queen, and, at the same time, she whispered in her ear the following words: "Take courage, madam, your misfortunes will soon be at an end; I hope soon to contribute to your happiness." The queen was a little

consoled by these words, and earnestly entreated her to have pity on a poor unhappy princess, who had once enjoyed the greatest favours of fortune; instead of which, she could now boast of nothing but suffering the greatest misery.

They were thus talking together, when the wicked king, growing impatient, "Come, come," said he, "let us not have so many compliments; I brought you here to inform me whether the queen will have a daughter or son?" "She is pregnant of a daughter," replied the fairy, "who will be the most beautiful and most accomplished princess that has ever been seen, and the queen will wish to see her placed in the highest possible situation of rank and honour." "If she is not very beautiful and accomplished," said the king, "I will hang her mother to a tree, with the child at her neck, and nothing shall prevent it." Having said this, he left the place with the fairy, and took no notice of the unfortunate queen, who wept bitterly,--- thus lamenting her unhappy fate: "Alas! what shall I do? If I have a beautiful little girl, he will give her to his reptile of a son; and if she is ugly, he will hang us both. To what an extremity am I reduced! Cannot I conceal it from him somewhere, so that he can never see it?"

The time approached when the little prin-

cess was to come into the world, and the distress of the queen augmented daily; the gaoler who guarded her gave her nothing but three boiled peas and a small bit of black bread for her food during the day; by which she was reduced so thin as to become little else than skin and bone.

One evening while she was employed in spinning, (for the wicked king was so avaricious as to make even his prisoners labour for him) she saw, entering at a small hole, a pretty little mouse as white as snow. "Ah! pretty creature," exclaimed the queen, "what do you come here to seek? I have but three peas to last me all day; begone, if you wish not to fast."---The little mouse ran about here and there, and danced and skipped like a little monkey: the queen was so pleased with it, that she gave it the only pea that remained for her supper. "Here," said she, "here, poor little thing, eat this: I have got no more; but I give it thee willingly." The instant she had done this, to her great surprise there appeared upon the table two partridges, cooked most wonderfully well, and two pots of preserves. "Really," exclaimed she, "a good turn is never lost." She ate a little; but, with fasting so long, her appetite was almost gone. She threw down some to the mouse, which, having

nibbled them away, began to leap about with more glee than before.

The next morning very early the gaoler brought the queen three peas, which he had put as usual in a large dish, to mock her sufferings; the little white mouse came softly and ate them all three, as well as the bread. When the queen wished to dine, she found nothing there; at which she was very angry with the mouse. "What a wicked little beast," cried the queen; "if it continues thus, I shall die with hunger." As she was going to cover the plate which the mouse had left empty, she found it full of all sorts of things good for to eat: she was very glad and ate of them; but while she was eating, a thought came into her head, that in a few days the king would perhaps kill her child, and she quitted the table to weep. "Ah!" ejaculated the disconsolate queen, "is there no way of saving it?" At the same time that she pronounced these words she perceived the mouse playing with some straws; she took some of them and began to work, saying, "If I have enough of straw, I will make a covered basket to put my little daughter in, and give it out of the window to the first charitable person who will take care of it."

She then began to work very diligently; and she never wanted straw, for the mouse

always brought some into the chamber; and as at usual meal-time the queen always gave it the three peas, she found in exchange a number of dishes of the most delicate meats.

One day the queen was looking out of the window, to see how long she should make the cord to tie the basket to, when she should let it down, and she perceived an old woman below, leaning upon a stick, who spoke to her thus:—"I know your trouble, and if you wish it, I will serve you."—"Alas! my dear friend," replied the queen, "you will very much oblige me, if you will come every evening to the bottom of the tower, to receive my child, whom I will let down to you: you must feed and nurse it, and if ever I am rich I will repay you well."—"I care for no pecuniary reward," answered the old woman; "but I am very nice in my eating, and wish for nothing so much as a fat plump mouse. If you find such a one in your prison, kill it and throw it to me; your infant will be the better for it."

When the queen heard this, she began to weep without answering; and the old woman, after having waited a little, asked her why she cried:—"Because," replied the queen, "there only comes into my chamber one little mouse, so pretty and so engaging, that I cannot find in my heart to kill it."—"How," replied the old woman, with great anger "do

you like a little rogue of a mouse, which steals and eats every thing, better than your own child? Very well, madam, you are not much to be pitied; remain in the good company you have chosen; I can have plenty of mice without you; so I care but little about it;" and, scolding in this manner, she hobbled away.

Although the queen had a good repast before her, the mouse played about as usual; she never raised her eyes from the ground where she had fixed them, and tears ran down her cheeks.

On this same night the little princess came into the world, and her beauty surpassed all the queen had ever beheld: instead of crying at her birth, as other children do, she smiled on her affectionate parent, and extended her little hands, as if she had already a good understanding. The queen carressed and kissed her fondly, at the same time sorrowfully reflecting; "Alas! my dear child, if you fall into the hands of the wicked king, it will cost you your life;" she shut it up in the basket, with a paper attached to the clothes, on which was written

O! you, whose steps the fav'ring pow'rs direct
 To these lone scenes, your generous aid I claim;
 My hapless child, in infant years, protect
 From sorrow's grasp—and Juliet be her name.

And having turned away for a moment, she

looked again, and found the infant dressed in the finest linens and laces: she then kissed it, and shed a torrent of tears, not knowing how to part with her treasure.

At this moment in came the little mouse, and jumped into the basket. “Ah! little creature,” said the queen, “how much it costs me to save your life! I shall perhaps lose my dear Juliet. Any other than me would have killed you for the dainty old woman; but I could not consent to it.” “You will not repent it, madam,” replied the mouse; “I am not so unworthy of your friendship as you suppose.” The queen was like one thunder-struck, when she perceived its little visage change to that of a woman, and the paws become hands and feet. At length the queen, hardly daring to look up, discovered the figure to be the fairy that had visited her before, and who had promised to put an end to her misfortunes and sufferings. “I wished to try the goodness of your heart,” said the fairy; “I know now that you are virtuous and worthy of my friendship. Fairies like me, who possess treasures and riches more than I can relate, do not seek so much for the luxuries of life as for friendship, and we seldom find it.” “Is it possible, great fairy,” exclaimed the queen, “that you, who are so powerful and wealthy, find it such a great trouble to gain a friend?” “Yes,” replied

she, "because persons seldom love us but for interest; but when you loved me as a little mouse, it seemed from a disinterested motive, and I wished to put you to a still greater trial: I took the figure of an old woman, and it was I who spoke to you at the bottom of the tower; you have always answered my best expectation." At these words she embraced the queen, then she kissed the little vermilion mouth of the infant princess, and said, "My pretty little girl, you shall henceforth be your mother's consolation; you shall be richer than your father; you shall live an hundred years without illness, wrinkles, or old age." The enraptured queen returned thanks, and begged that the fairy would take Juliet away, and be careful of her, adding at the same time, "I give her to be your daughter."

The fairy accepted the offer, and thanked her: she then put the little one into the basket, which she let down to the bottom of the tower, and having again taken the form of a mouse, she descended by the cord; but when she got down, she could not find the child any where, and remounting in a fright, "All is lost," cried she to the queen, "my enemy Cancelline has just carried away the princess. You must know that she is a cruel fairy, who hates me, and, unhappily, she is older than I am, and has more power. I

know not by what means to get the child out of her wicked hands."

When the queen heard this melancholy account, she almost died with grief; she wept bitterly, and beseeched her good friend to save her child, at whatever price it might be done.

When the gaoler entered the chamber of the queen, he perceived that she had been delivered, and he went and told the king of it, who came in a great passion to ask for the child; but she told him that a fairy, whose name she knew not, had entered the prison, and carried it away by force. At this the wicked king stamped and bit his lips, with every expression of the most violent rage. "I promised to hang thee," said he to the unfortunate queen, "and now I will keep my word. He then dragged her by the hair from the place of her confinement to a neighbouring wood, mounted a high tree, and was just going to hang her, when the fairy, having rendered herself invisible, pushed him rudely down, and four of his teeth were struck out by the fall. Before he had time to recover himself, she carried away his intended victim to a secure retreat in her magnificent palace. She was there treated with every attention and kindness, and if it had not been for the thoughts of her little daughter, she had once more been happy; but she was

unable to procure any intelligence of the infant, though the little white mouse made every exertion in her power for that purpose.

At length, by the progress of time, the queen's grief abated, and fifteen years passed away without any change in her situation. --- At this period there was great talk all over the kingdom, that the son of the wicked monarch had fallen in love with the keeper of the poultry; and that the young woman refused to accept of him for a husband. This extraordinary refusal surprised every one; however, the nuptial dresses were prepared, and the marriage ceremony was soon expected to take place. The little white mouse determined to see this extraordinary damsel, who had resolution enough to refuse the son of a king, and immediately transported herself to the capital. She entered into the poultry-yard, and found her there, dressed in a coarse woollen gown, with her feet bare, and a cap of goat's skin on her head; lying by her side were magnificent dresses, embroidered with gold and silver, and ornamented with a number of precious stones; the turkeys and other fowls that surrounded her trampled on and spoiled them.

Thus habited, and thus careless of the splendour that awaited her, the keeper of the poultry sat on a large stone in the middle of

the yard, when the king's son arrived: he was crooked and hump-backed, and marked with every kind of deformity. "If you persist in refusing me," said he, "I will order you to be put to death instantly." She answered him with disdain, "I will never marry you; you are too ugly and too wicked. I prefer poverty, with my turkeys and pullets, to all the honours you have power to bestow."

The little white mouse observed her with wonder and admiration; for, though in so a humble dress, she appeared to possess an incomparable beauty. As soon therefore as the prince retired, the fairy assumed the figure of an old shepherdess. "Good day, fair damsel," said she, "the fowls do credit to your care of them."---The young woman raised her eyes, and looked at her with a countenance full of sweetness: "they wish," answered she, "to persuade me to quit my present employment, for a crown which I do not want, and for a husband whom I should despise; pray, good mother, what is your advice?" "My child," returned the fairy, "a crown is a dazzling object; but you cannot imagine the care and trouble it is to those who wear it." "But suppose I do know all this," quickly answered the keeper of the king's poultry, "still I would refuse to accept it, though I am without friend or re-

lation, and know not even the name of those who gave me birth." "You have both beauty and virtue, my child," returned the wise and benovelent fairy, "which are worth more than a thousand kingdoms; tell me then who placed you here, since you are without parents and without friends?" "A fairy, named Cancaline, is the cause that I have been placed here," replied the young woman: "she beat me till she almost killed me, without the least provocation. Tired of my sufferings, one day I ran away from her, and, not knowing where to go, I stopped to rest myself in a wood, where the son of the wicked king came by chance to walk: he asked if I would enter his service. I consented, and was placed to take care of his poultry; where he came constantly to see them, and always took great notice of them. Alas! he soon conceived a violent love for me; and has ever since so teased me with expressions of it, that I have no comfort left in the world."

This recital made the fairy suspect she had at last met with the princess Juliet, and she therefore asked to know her name. "I am called Juliet," added she, modestly; "but who gave me that name I never knew." The doubts of the fairy were thus instantly removed; she threw herself on the neck of the princess, exclaiming, "Juliet, I have known

you long; I am delighted to find you so sensible and so lovely; but I wish you were better dressed; take the clothes that are before you, and put them on." The princess obeyed immediately, and taking from her head the cap of goat's skin, her beautiful golden hair fell in curls upon her shoulders; then, taking some water from a fountain that ran through the yard, she washed her hands and face, and discovered a complexion more bright and transparent than the choicest pearls of India; roses seemed to bloom fresh on her cheeks; coral seemed to form her beautiful mouth; and her eyes shone like the most brilliant diamonds. When she had finished dressing herself, the gracefulness of her form appeared equal to the beauty of her countenance, and the fairy gazed on her with wonder and delight.

"Pray, who do you suppose yourself to be now, my dear child?" asked the fairy. "Really," answered she, "I could fancy myself to be the daughter of some great king." "Should you be glad of it?" demanded the fairy. "Yes, certainly, my good mother," replied the princess, "for it would give me the power of assisting many that are in distress." "Be happy then," exclaimed the fairy, "for you are born of royal parents: to-morrow you shall know more."

The fairy returned immediately to her

palace, where she had left the queen. "I bring you, madam," cried she, "the happiest tidings." "Alas!" answered the queen, "what tidings of joy can come to me, who have lost both my husband and my child?" "It is always right to hope," replied the little white mouse, for the fairy had again taken that figure; "I have seen the princess your daughter, and she is more beautiful than the blushes of the dawning day." She then related the whole of her discovery, at which the queen wept with joy. "Who would have thought," said she, "in the days of my prosperity, that I should ever bear a daughter to become the keeper of hens and turkeys!" "It is the cruel Cancellorine," said the fairy, "who, knowing how I love you, has brought this misery on your child, purposely to vex me; but she shall come gloriously out of it, or I will burn my books." "I am determined," said the queen, "that she shall not marry the prince; pray go and seek her immediately, and bring her to me."

The son of the wicked king left Juliet in a great rage at her obstinate refusal, and went into the gardens of the palace to consider what he should do; here he cried and groaned so loud, that his father overheard him, and, leaning through the window, inquired the cause of his distress. "How can

"I be otherwise than afflicted," answered he, "to be thus set at defiance by a keeper of poultry?" "What, will not she love you?" said the king; "I am determined she shall love you, or be put to death." He then called his guards. "Go," said he, "and bring her here immediately; I will punish her so severely, that she shall soon repent of her obstinacy."

They went to the poultry-yard, and found Juliet there, magnificently dressed, as the fairy left her; they had never seen so lovely a figure, and, taking her for some princess, were afraid to speak to her. She said to them, in a sweet and condescending voice, "Pray whom do you seek here?" "Madam," said they, "we seek an unfortunate creature named Juliet." "I am the person you seek," replied she; "what do you want?" Hearing this, they seized her, and having tied her hands and feet with cords, lest she should escape, they carried her into the presence of the king. "Well, insolent wretch," said he, "and so you are determined not to love my son? He is a thousand times handsomer than you; love him therefore immediately, or I'll have you flayed alive." The princess, trembling like an affrighted dove, kneeled before him, and tried to inspire pity in a heart that never felt any; but she pleaded in vain, as the

prince insisted upon it, that his father should order her for immediate execution. However, they determined at last, as a punishment more severe than death, to shut her up for life in a tower, where she would never more see the light of the sun.

At this moment the fairy and the good queen arrived in a flying chariot, and the affectionate mother began to weep bitterly, on hearing the sad fate to which her long-lost daughter was just condemned. "Be of good comfort," said the fairy, "you shall in the end be made happy, and your enemies be amply punished." The princess was conveyed to the tower, and the king retired to bed; the fairy then resumed the form of the little white mouse, and got upon his pillow. Whenever he attempted to sleep she bit his ear; at which, being much disturbed, he turned the other side, and she bit at that also, without mercy: he cried out for assistance, and when his attendants came, they found his ears bleeding so fast, that they were unable to stop his wounds. While they were seeking about the apartment to find the mouse, she was gone into the prince's room to inflict the same vengeance upon him; he likewise called his attendants, and having shown his wounded ears, made them put a plaster on each. The little white mouse, in the mean time, returned to the king, and

she bit his nose and gnawed his face in several places: he put up his hands to defend his face, and she bit his fingers; he cried out, "Mercy! mercy! I am lost; and, while his mouth was thus open, the little white mouse entered it, and bit a piece off his tongue: his attendants came in once more; but he was now unable to speak to them, his tongue was so severely wounded; so he made signs that it was a mouse that had thus wounded him, and every corner of the room was immediately examined to find the offender, but in vain; she was gone to pay a visit to the prince, and to treat him much worse than she had treated his father. --- She ate out one of his eyes, which left him in total darkness; for he was blind of the other before. He leaped out of bed instantly, seized his sword, and ran to the apartment of his father, who also had taken his sword, storming and swearing that he would kill every one who came in his way till the mouse was found.

When he saw his son in such a passion, he scolded him, and the prince, whose ears were burning with pain, not knowing the voice of his father, attacked him furiously. The king exceedingly irritated, made a violent cut at him with his sword, and received a severe wound from his son at the same moment; so that they both fell to the

ground bleeding profusely. All their subjects, who hated them mortally, and who only served and submitted to them through fear, now dreading them no longer, tied cords to their feet, and dragged them into the river, saying they were happy thus to get rid of their tyrants.

Thus ended the days of the wicked king and his son. The good fairy, who had seen all that passed, went immediately to seek the queen, and they went together to the black tower, where the princess Juliet was confined under more than forty locks. The fairy struck three times with a little ring on the great door, which opened instantly, as did all the rest; they found the poor princess very thoughtful, and with scarcely spirits to speak a word. The queen ran to embrace her; "My dear child, I am thy mother, the queen of the Land of Pleasure!" exclaimed she, and then gave her an account of her birth. When Juliet heard these happy tidings, she was as near dying with joy as she had been near dying with grief: she threw herself at the feet of the queen, embraced her knees, and wet her hands with the tears she shed upon them. She likewise embraced the good fairy, who had conferred so many obligations on them both. The fairy said to them, "It is not time now to think of amusing ourselves; let us go to

the great hall of the castle and harangue the people."

She walked first, with a grave and majestic air, and dressed in splendid robes; next came the queen in robes suitable to her rank; the princess followed, decorated in a splendid habit, which the fairy had brought her for the occasion; but distinguished much more by her native modesty and the lustre of her beauty, which had never before been equalled. They bowed gracefully to every one they met by the way, whether rich or poor, and by this condescension attracted the notice of every one.

When the great hall was full, the good fairy said to the subjects of the deceased tyrant, that she would recommend them to choose for their sovereign the daughter of a neighbouring king, whom she then presented to them. "Under so amiable a queen," said she, "you cannot fail to live in a state of continual happiness and tranquillity." At these words the people cried out with one voice; "Yes! yes! we choose her for our queen, and we trust she will make us amends for the miseries we have so long endured." As soon as the intelligence was generally known, joy spread throughout the city, and every sort of business was laid aside, to give place to feasting and merriment.