

The Restless River

By Evelyn Sharp

THE land of Nonamia was once ruled by an extremely original Queen. Even her childhood had been exceptional, for, although the fairies had been invited as usual to her christening, not one of them had spoilt the fun by making unpleasant predictions, and not one of them had given her a single gift, that could be of any use to her afterwards. So the Queen of Nonamia had nothing to help her through life, except her own wits; she was not even beautiful, and her chief virtue was the patience she showed for the eternal stupidity of the Nonamiacs. There was a King of Nonamia, too, but no one knew anything about him, except that he was the husband of the Queen of Nonamia; and that, indeed, was the most distinctive thing that could be said about him. For the marriage of the Queen had been just as original as everything else about her. She employed none of the usual devices for obtaining an interesting husband, but merely sent into the next country for the eldest son of the reigning king.

“I decline to marry a tailor merely because he has killed a few giants, or outwitted a bear,” she declared to her guardians, when they naturally objected to such an obvious mode of selection. “He is a tailor, for all that; and the same may be said of the woodcutter’s

woodcutter's son, who has contrived to climb a beanstalk with success. I am the Queen of Nonamia, and I am going to marry a prince, and he shall not be a younger son. Younger sons are greatly overrated, just because they are clever enough to do things. Who wants to marry a man because he can do things?"

The King of Nonamia had not done very much before he married the Queen. But he came, when he was sent for; and, for the rest of his life, he only did what the Queen told him. And the Queen told him very little.

When they came to have a son, the King supposed they would have to select a fairy to be its godmother. His wife smiled upon him, leniently. She never realised the success of her marriage so much as when the King made suggestions she was able to contradict.

"That is so like you, dearest," she said. And the King was immensely pleased at being told he was like himself. But the Queen of Nonamia looked at the features of the baby Prince, as he lay in his cradle of rose leaves; and she saw that they were the features of his kingly father, her husband, and she nodded her head, thoughtfully. "That child will need bringing up," she said. "Why not a fairy godfather? I could manage a godfather, but a godmother would want to manage me, and I could not endure that for a moment."

So the little Prince of Nonamia had a fairy godfather.

The Nonamiacs had never heard of such a thing before; but the Queen of Nonamia did so many things that had never been heard of before, that one, more or less, made very little difference. And they were bound to acknowledge, that a fairy godfather was, in many ways, a great improvement. He arrived on foot, to begin with, and walked in at the front door, instead of coming
down

down with a bang, in a cloud of blue smoke, after keeping everybody waiting. And he caused no jealousy among the fairies, who had *not* been asked to be godmothers; and he talked just like every one else, only not quite so much. In fact, there was nothing to distinguish him from quite an ordinary person.

One or two people complained of the lack of excitement. "It is not in the least like a royal christening," they grumbled. "Surely, it is time something began to go wrong?"

But the least stupid of the Nonamiacs shook their heads. "You forget," they said, "that the usual things never happen to the Queen of Nonamia."

When the banquet was over, the fairy godfather was taken to the cradle of the royal infant. He looked at it for a long time, without speaking, which, again, was a feat that no fairy godmother had ever been known to accomplish; and he nervously declined the honour of taking the baby in his arms. "He is no godfather at all," complained the royal nurses, who disliked innovations; but, although he knew perfectly well what they were thinking, he did not trouble to bewitch them for it, and merely continued to look at the little Prince.

"Well," said the Queen of Nonamia. "Will my son be an exceptional prince?"

The fairy godfather shook his head.

"I see nothing exceptional," he said, slowly. "I see restlessness, and adventure, and love. The river that knows no rest will bring him his greatest happiness; it will call him, when the time comes, and neither your art, nor mine, will keep him from it. He will do everything that other princes do, especially when he is in love. And he will always be in love from the time he is sixteen."

The Queen of Nonamia looked again at the features of her tiny son, and she sighed.

"Then

"Then he will only be an ordinary prince, after all," she said.

"Not entirely," resumed the fairy godfather. "For it is with the Restless River itself, that he will be in love, and no one will be able to prevent it."

"That at least is original, if inconvenient," said the Queen.

"I see one more thing," continued the fairy godfather. "He will end in marrying the woodcutter's daughter."

"What?" exclaimed the Queen in dismay. "Just like all his ancestors! I will never allow such a thing. All the woodcutters' daughters shall be exterminated; all the woodcutters shall be exterminated! My son shall marry a princess. I have said it."

"Your son will marry the woodcutter's daughter," repeated the fairy godfather, grimly.

"But you said yourself that he would fall in love with the Restless River," protested the Queen. "To fall in love with a river is curious, but it is not the same thing as falling in love with a woodcutter's daughter. How do you explain the contradiction?"

"I cannot explain it," said the fairy godfather, simply. "I have told you all I know."

Which, of course, was an admission that a fairy godmother would never have made at all.

The courtiers grew discontented. Was the christening going to pass off, without even a present? It seemed as though the fairy godfather guessed their thoughts, for he turned to the Queen, with a smile.

"I shall not forget my godson," he said. "When he wants me, I shall be there. I have given him my gift."

And he bowed to every one present, and walked straight out of the

the

the palace, and disappeared among the crowd, as quietly as he had come. It was the dullest christening that had ever taken place in Nonamia. But it was distinctly original.

And what was the present or the fairy godfather ?

"There is no present at all. That is what comes of these new-fangled notions," said the royal nurses, contemptuously.

"A godmother," said the courtiers, "would have told all the world what *her* present was."

But the Queen made ready for action ; and, before sundown that day, the decree was issued throughout the length and breadth of Nonamia, that all woodcutters were to be gone from the country within twenty-four hours, and that all their daughters were to be brought to her for extermination, at noon next day. The Queen was nothing, if she was not thorough ; and she meant to see for herself that the usual devices were not practised, in order to preserve an impossible wife for her son.

So, at noon next day, the Queen of Nonamia sat in judgment, on the hill outside her palace. All around her, stretched the flat and uninteresting land of Nonamia ; not a mountain nor a river broke the monotony of the scene, nothing but the Sluggish Brook, that marked the boundary of her dominions. And by her side, in his cradle of rose leaves, the Prince of Nonamia slept peacefully. Nobody asked where the King of Nonamia was.

The Queen beckoned to her Prime Minister. "Have all the woodcutters been banished ?" she demanded.

The Prime Minister obviously trembled.

"Please your Majesty," he stammered, "there was but one to be found." A murmur of disappointment ran through the crowd of Nonamiacs ; they had certainly expected more excitement than this.

"Is all the wood in my kingdom cut down by one man ?" asked

asked the Queen scornfully. The Prime Minister put his hand to his head instinctively.

"Please your Majesty," he stammered afresh, "there is no wood at all in your kingdom."

A new sensation thrilled the crowd of Nonamiacs. It had never occurred to them before that this, indeed, was the case. The Queen glanced again over the land of Nonamia; and she saw not a tree, nor a bush, in the whole of it. The fact had never occurred to her, either; but she was too much of a Queen to confess that.

"Then, what is the use of a woodcutter at all?" she asked.

"Please your Majesty," said the unhappy Prime Minister, "it isn't any use. But he only came here yesterday, to see the christening; and he came across the Sluggish Brook, no one knows whence; and he is prepared to go back again now, if your Majesty so wills it."

"Certainly, I will it," said the Queen. "Why should we have a woodcutter, if there are no trees? The idea is ridiculous. Besides, that settles the whole matter at once. If there are no trees, there are no woodcutters; and if there are no woodcutters, there are no woodcutters' daughters; and so, my son shall marry a princess, as I said. The assembly is over."

"Please your Majesty," began the Prime Minister again, "there *is* a daughter, and she came with her father, yesterday; and I have put them both in your Majesty's dungeon, and——"

The Queen smiled, with the indulgence she always showed for the actions of her public ministers, and she waved him away with her hand.

"Bring them both here at once," she commanded. "And tell the Royal Executioner to sharpen his axe. She shall be beheaded; and after that, we can have lunch."

"Please

"Please your Majesty, there is very little to behead," said the Prime Minister; but the look in the Queen's eyes sent him flying off to the royal dungeon, without another word. The Queen yawned; and by her side, in his cradle of rose leaves, the tiny Prince slept soundly.

When the Prime Minister came back again, he was accompanied by the Royal Executioner with his axe upon his shoulder, and between them both walked the woodcutter. No one, at first, could see the woodcutter's daughter at all; but, as the little group stood before the throne, the tallest of the Nonamiacs were able to distinguish a small bundle, in a red shawl, that lay in the woodcutter's arms. And this was the woodcutter's daughter.

"There is certainly very little to behead," said the Queen, thoughtfully. The Royal Executioner looked immensely relieved. "But, for all that," continued the Queen, "she must be exterminated."

The woodcutter said nothing. But the little Prince stirred in his sleep, and held out his tiny arms, and cried. The Queen stamped her foot.

"There is no time to be lost," she said, sternly. "So, choose any death you please for her. She shall be exterminated, *now*."

The woodcutter remained indifferent. He looked over the length and breadth of Nonamia, and down at the little red bundle in his arms.

"I should like her to be drowned in the Sluggish Brook," he said. And the originality of the request so pleased the Queen, that she ordered the royal carriages, and proceeded to carry it out immediately. All day long, the royal procession wound its way across the Land of Nonamia, and just before sundown it arrived at the edge of the Sluggish Brook. The woodcutter stooped down with a smile, and laid the little red bundle on the calm water. And

suddenly, the Sluggish Brook became a swift, rushing torrent, that tossed the tiny bundle from side to side, and carried it swiftly out of sight ; and the water sighed and trembled, and grew into a wide and passionate river that swirled along, in the wake of the woodcutter's daughter. The woodcutter himself was no longer to be seen, but no one had noticed his departure, for the crowd of Nonamiacs were all stupefied at the change that had come over the Sluggish Brook. They had never seen anything like it before, and that in itself was quite enough to stupefy a Nonamiac.

The Queen, as usual, was the first to recover.

"That is done," she said, cheerfully. "And my son shall marry a princess."

But she knew, as well as every one present, that the Sluggish Brook had become the Restless River.

For sixteen years, the Prince of Nonamia was never allowed to go beyond the palace garden. And, as the whole court was forbidden, under pain of instant extermination, to mention the circumstances of his christening, there seemed very little probability of his ever discovering the fate that had been predicted for him. To make this still more certain, he was not even taught to read or write, and he grew up in a state of ignorance that would have shamed the poorest person in Nonamia. But the Prince of Nonamia did not know the meaning of shame, for he had never had any companions ; and the courtiers tolerated him, as ordinary people tolerate something that is strange and incomprehensible. For, to the Nonamiacs, there was something extremely weird in the grave and silent youth, who knew nothing of life and the world, and only cared for being in the open air. He would sit for hours, in the most secluded part of the garden, and dream the daylight away ; he never asked why the garden walls were so high, nor how the world contained so few people, nor whether
there

there was any more of it than he had seen already. He wondered, sometimes, why they put weapons in his hand, and told him to kill something, or taught him to fence with them. "Why should I injure a bird that flies and is happy?" he asked. "And how does it amuse you to pretend that I am dead? It is far more interesting to sit in the sunshine, and talk to the flowers, and think about life." And the Nonamiacs, who, of course, knew far more about life than the poor, lonely Prince, smiled in their superior knowledge, and pitied him for not understanding how ignorant he was; and the King, who had his own views about the education of princes, looked on unhappily.

But the Queen was supremely content.

"My son is original," she said. "In spite of his father, and his godfather, and his ancestors, he is original, as I intended him to be. And he shall marry a princess."

People sometimes wondered at the long silence of the fairy godfather; but the Queen did not mind that at all. "That is the best of having a fairy godfather," she said. "If it had been a godmother, now, she would have been interfering ever since, and I cannot endure interference."

On his sixteenth birthday, she sent for the Prince, and showed him the pictures of all the neighbouring princesses for miles round.

"It is time for you to marry a princess," she told him. "And since you are my son, and I love you, I wish you to marry the wife of your choice."

"How can I choose?" asked the Prince, in bewilderment. "They all look alike, to me. How can I care for one more than another? Is there really any difference between them?"

"Of course," said the Queen of Nonamia, "they are all princesses, so you cannot expect to find *very* much difference between

between them. But choose the most beautiful of them all, and she shall come here to marry you ; and, after that, you can go into the world and travel."

"The world?" asked the Prince. "Where is that? Is it the garden on the other side of the wall; and is it full of princesses, who are all exactly alike?"

"You will see, when you are married," answered his mother. But the Prince asked leave to think it over; and he wandered away to find his father, who was nodding over the morning paper in his library. A visit from his son was so unusual, however, that he woke up at once, and asked him what he wanted.

"That is what I don't know," sighed the Prince. "But I know I don't want to marry any of the beautiful, dull pictures my Queen-Mother has been showing me."

"Ah," thought the King, "the boy is a son of mine, after all."

"When you were a Prince, father," pursued his son, "and knew as little as I do about the garden on the other side of the wall, did *you* want to marry the picture of my Queen-Mother?"

The King remembered the picture of the Queen of Nonamia, and he coughed uncomfortably.

"Perhaps not. At least—of course, yes," he said, hastily, and coughed again.

"I suppose," continued the Prince, "they just showed you a lot of princesses, who all looked exactly alike, and you had to choose one, as I have got to. But are there no people in the world who can be distinguished from one another?"

"A certain number," replied the King.

"Then why," persisted the Prince, "may I not go out into the garden, on the other side of the wall, and choose a princess for myself?"

The King glanced nervously over his shoulder.

"You

"You forget your Queen-Mother," he whispered.

The Prince sprang to his feet, and began pacing restlessly up and down the room.

"I want you to give me something, father," he cried. "I want the gold key that hangs on your watch-chain, the key of the Sky Turret."

The King visibly trembled. The Sky Turret was the highest of the five turrets of the Palace of Nonamia, the one that looked over the length and breadth of the land of Nonamia; and no one had been allowed to enter it since the Prince's christening.

"Give it to me, father," he said, holding out his hand. "I want to look into the garden, on the other side of the wall."

The old King sighed, and gave him the key. "He is so like his dear mother," he murmured, in extenuation. And the Prince bounded out of the room, and ran straight up to the Sky Turret, and stepped out on the battlements. He looked round him, breathlessly, over the length and breadth of Nonamia, the flat and treeless country of Nonamia; and he marvelled at what he saw there; but, most of all, he wondered what it was that glistened and sparkled in the sunshine, just where the sky met the land, on the edge of the country of Nonamia.

The King had followed him up the stairs, and was standing by his side. He noted the wild, rapt look on his son's face, and it frightened him. "If his mother sees him, she will know," he thought, uneasily.

"Tell me, father," said the Prince, at last; "what is that thin, mysterious line of silver, that shines and glistens in the sunlight?"

"That," said the King, "is what they call the Restless River."

"The Restless River? What a beautiful name," exclaimed the

the Prince. "I am going there, at once. That is what I have wanted all my life, father, and you are going to help me to get there."

"My son," began the old King, in alarm; "you forget your Queen——"

"It is impossible to forget her," answered the Prince, with dignity. "I will come back again, when I have been to the Restless River. But I am going to find a princess for myself, a princess who is not like every one else. What is the use of a wife who is not to be distinguished from every one else? Father, I want the key of the little white door that leads into the garden on the other side of the wall."

And the King, who saw more resemblance, every moment, between the Prince and his mother, gave up the key without another word, and went back to nod over the morning paper, and pretend that nothing had happened.

But the Prince had already unlocked the little white door, and was speeding over the land of Nonamia, as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Is this the way to the Restless River?" he asked of the first peasant he met.

"Can you not read?" said the peasant, roughly, pointing to the direction on the sign-post.

"No," answered the Prince, simply; and he wondered why the man laughed at him. But he hastened on more swiftly than ever, and stood at last on the bank of the Restless River. There it was, rushing along as madly, and as untiringly, as it had done on the day when the woodcutter's daughter was drowned in it.

"Stop! stop!" cried the Prince, as he knelt down beside it, and plunged his hands into the turbulent water. "I want to
speak

“speak with you, and you do not stay a moment. Are you not weary of hurrying along like that?”

But the river rushed on as before.

“Stay for one moment,” begged the Prince. “I am so sorry for you, poor Restless River. Have you no time even to stay, and be comforted?”

But the river rushed on as before.

“Is it possible,” continued the Prince, “that you are obliged to hurry away so fast? I should so like to help you, poor Restless River. Will you tell me if I can do anything to bring you rest?”

As he said these words, a sudden calm fell on the rushing stream; and down the middle of it came floating a curious craft, all made of green lily leaves, and of white lily petals; and in it sat the most beautiful girl the Prince had ever seen.

She laughed outright, when she saw him kneeling there, and she steered her boat straight for the shore. The Prince had never heard a girl laugh before; and he could hardly wait until the boat touched the bank, before he stooped down, and lifted her up in his arms, and kissed her two cheeks. Then they both laughed together, and the Prince started at the sound of his own voice. For he had never heard himself laugh before, either.

“Now, I know why I had to come to the Restless River,” said the Prince, happily.

“You have been a very long time coming,” said the girl with a pout.

“Oh, but I am going to stay, now I have come,” the Prince assured her. “I have found a princess for myself, and the Queen-Mother may keep all her stupid pictures for her own amusement.

But the girl shook her head.

“I cannot

"I cannot stay here with you," she said, sadly. "I must be disenchanted first, for there is no rest for me, yet. See! it is calling me, already." For the river had begun to toss and rock again, and the lily boat was drifting away from the shore.

"Can I do nothing to disenchant you?" said the Prince, frantically. "I will go to the end of the world to serve you."

"Alas! I cannot tell you," answered the girl. "I only know that none but my true lover can disenchant me, and that he will be a Prince, who can neither read nor write."

"I am he! I am he!" cried the Prince, joyfully. "But, tell me first who you are?"

"I," said the girl, as she sprang into her green and white boat, "am the Restless River." And with that she was whirled away out of sight. And the river rushed on as before.

Then the Prince walked thoughtfully along the bank of the Restless River.

"I wonder why the Queen-Mother did not bring me up like other Princes?" he murmured. "Most people, I have been told, have a fairy godmother, who comes and helps them whenever they want to disenchant anybody. But I have only a godfather, and he never comes near me at all."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a grave-looking man suddenly came from nowhere at all, and stood in the path just in front of him.

"You have never wanted me before," he said calmly. "And you need not explain what you do want, now. I know all about it, and I hate unnecessary details. But, first of all, are you prepared to go through a certain amount of discomfort, and, if necessary, to fight?"

"I am a coward, and I hate fighting," said the Prince, sadly. "But I am a true lover, and I will die for my love if need be."

"That

"That I know full well, for are you not my godson?" said the fairy godfather, chuckling. "So, go and wrest the sharpest sword in the world from the strongest giant in the world, and take it to the head of the Restless River, and remove the dragon, who never ceases to flap his wings. And, after that, the river will be at peace."

"But where is the strongest giant in the world to be found?" asked the Prince.

"Over there, in a great stone castle, he sits alone," replied his godfather; "and only you, who can neither read nor write, will be allowed to enter there; for all the secrets of the world are in his keeping, and they are written on all the ceilings, and all the walls, and all the floors. So, start at once, and luck be with you."

"But when I have removed the dragon, what then?" asked the Prince.

"If you do not know what to do *then*," laughed his godfather, "you are no godson of mine."

And the Prince, who was about to thank him for his information, found that there was no one left to thank, for the fairy godfather had already gone back to nowhere at all; and he was left to find the castle of the strongest giant in the world. This was not very difficult, however, for there was but one castle to be seen; and the Prince walked up to it boldly, and shouted for admission.

"Go away," growled a disagreeable voice from within. "All the secrets in the world are written here, and you must not come in."

"Nonsense," said the Prince. "I can neither read nor write, so let me in. Surely, you must be very tired of keeping all the secrets in the world?"

"Keeping

"Keeping a secret is the dullest occupation imaginable, especially when it is nearly always the same secret," confessed the giant ; and he stretched a long arm out of the window, and fished up the Prince, and set him on the table before him. "You are quite sure you can neither read nor write?" he added, suspiciously.

"If I could," laughed the Prince, "it would never make me wish to keep a secret. Besides, I have a secret of my own, that is far more precious than all those you are guarding so jealously."

"What is that?" asked the giant, anxiously. "I am so tired of keeping the same old secrets, and I would give anything I possess to learn a new one."

"Done with you," said the Prince, who was delighted at the prospect of not having to fight, after all. "Give me the sword, that is hanging at your side, and I will tell you my secret."

And the weary old giant unbuckled the sharpest sword in the world, and handed it to the Prince.

"Now, tell me your secret," he said.

The Prince folded his arms, and laughed.

"I am in love with the most beautiful woman in the world," he said.

But the giant rushed at him, furiously.

"You have cheated me," he screamed. "Give me back my sword! *That* is not a new secret, it is the oldest secret there is ; it is exactly the same as all the secrets I have been keeping for millions of years!"

"Then you won't keep them any longer," said the Prince ; and the sharpest sword in the world sent the giant's head rolling down the stairs. And the Prince opened all the doors, and all the windows ; and every secret in the castle flew out on the four winds

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of heaven ; and that is why no one has ever kept a secret again, from that day to this. And the Prince walked on swiftly, until he reached the head of the Restless River.

And there lay a great dragon, in the middle of the stream, ceaselessly flapping his enormous wings, and making such a disturbance in the water, that the river was forced to rush downwards in its mad career.

“So *you* are the cause of all the trouble, eh ?” said the Prince. “Just come out of that, at once, will you ?”

“I only wish I could,” groaned the dragon, disconsolately. “I have been at it, for sixteen years, now ; and I shall never be released, until the Prince comes, who can neither read nor write. And that is never likely to happen ; for even Princes are educated, nowadays.”

“It has already happened,” said the Prince. “I am the Prince who can neither read nor write, and I have got the sharpest sword in the world ; so come out of that, and let me kill you.”

The dragon stopped flapping his wings, and looked at him, rather pathetically.

“Isn’t it a little hard,” he said, “that I should have to be killed for doing exactly as I wish to do ? I am only too glad to come out of this horribly cold water, and I really don’t see why I should be killed for it.”

“Neither do I,” observed the Prince, sheathing his sword. “And, now I come to think of it, my godfather never told me to kill anybody at all. It’s very unusual, for, in all the stories I ever heard, the Prince always had to kill somebody.”

“I’ve heard those stories, too,” said the dragon ; “but all the Princes in them seem to have had fairy godmothers, instead of godfathers ; and godmothers always complicate things, if they can.” By this time, he had waded to shore, and stood shivering with

with cold, before the Prince. "Are you really going to kill me?" he asked, gloomily.

The Prince swung his arm round his head, and threw away the sharpest sword in the world; and it fell with a splash into the water, and disappeared from sight.

"No," he said; "I am never going to kill anybody again."

And the woodcutter stood before him, in the place of the dripping, dreary dragon.

"I knew you wouldn't," he remarked quietly. "Your godfather settled that, before you could speak. Now, we will go and look for my daughter."

They did not have far to go; for, on the spot where the sword had fallen, the beautiful girl had again appeared, in her green and white boat; and her laugh rang gaily across the motionless water.

"It is really quite a relief to be able to rest, at last," she said, as the Prince lifted her on to the shore, for the second time. "Tossing about perpetually on a river like that becomes a little wearisome, when one has done it for sixteen whole years."

"So does splashing about in the cold water, in all weathers," added the woodcutter, holding out his hands to her. "Do you not see who I am?"

"It is not easy to recognise one's father, all in a hurry, when he has been a dragon for so long," laughed his daughter.

The Prince was looking puzzled.

"What is the good of all these spells and things," he observed, reflectively, "when we might have met one another, without any trouble at all?"

"No good whatever," said the voice of his godfather, who had again suddenly arrived from nowhere at all. "But, if you had had a godmother, instead of a godfather, you would have had
twice

twice as many spells and things as I gave you. On the whole," he added, looking critically at the two lovers, "I think I have managed your love affairs very successfully."

"Oh, no," they both exclaimed at once. "You are surely mistaken. We managed our love affairs *quite* by ourselves. *You* only managed the spell that kept us apart."

"No doubt," chuckled the fairy godfather. "But who is going to manage the Queen of Nonamia?"

Their faces fell, for every one had completely forgotten the Queen of Nonamia. Then the Prince threw back his head, and put his arm round the woodcutter's daughter.

"Will you come home with me, sweetheart?" he asked her. "I am going to manage the Queen-Mother, myself."

"The boy is certainly my godson," laughed the fairy godfather; and he prepared to go back to the palace too, for he wanted to see the fun.

But the woodcutter shook his head. "I will stay where I am," he said; "and build a cottage for myself. I had quite enough of the Queen of Nonamia, sixteen years ago."

So the lovers went back to the palace, and the fairy godfather went with them. It was only reasonable to suppose that the Queen would be furious at the overthrow of all her plans; and the Prince trembled a little, in spite of himself, when he led his little betrothed before the throne.

"I have come back from the garden, on the other side of the wall," he said, quietly. "And I have brought my own princess with me. Don't you think she is far more beautiful than all those others you showed me?"

The courtiers whispered to one another, in admiration of her great beauty. Truly, there had never been so beautiful a woman in the court of Nonamia before. But the Queen stared at the

two lovers, and was speechless. And the fairy godfather looked on, and smiled.

Then the little betrothed looked up at her lover, and sighed.

"I am no princess, dearest," she said, with her eyes full of tears. "I am only a woodcutter's daughter. Does it mean that I must go away, and leave you?"

The courtiers stopped making remarks about her great beauty, and hoped that no one had heard them. And still, the Queen stared speechlessly before her; and still, the fairy godfather looked on, and smiled.

"What's the difference?" asked the Prince, in surprise. "Are not all women princesses? And, since you are the most beautiful of all women, then, surely, you must be the greatest of all princesses?"

"Oh no, dearest," sighed his betrothed, hanging her head, humbly. "I am no princess, and you will have to send me away."

Then the Queen spoke, at last. She looked at the fairy godfather, and slightly shrugged her queenly shoulders.

"You have won," she said. "My son will marry the woodcutter's daughter. And he shall marry her *now*, without any more fuss; and I have the honour to bid you to his wedding. I have said it!"

And the fairy godfather chuckled.

"At least," he said, "you are the most original Queen the world has ever seen!"

The wedding was decidedly original, too, for there were no preparations for it whatever. No one had time to order a new dress, and there was no cake; and the King knew nothing about it, until it was all over. But the Prince and his bride were quite oblivious of everything, except of one another; and when it was

all

all over, they went back to the river again, and helped the wood-cutter to build a house that was big enough for them all; and there they took up their abode, and there they may be still, for all that anybody can tell.

“I don’t want to be a king,” the Prince declared. “I don’t like killing things, and I hate stuffy rooms, and ceremonies, and stupid subjects. Besides, what more does Nonamia want than the Queen-mother?”

And that is all that Nonamia has ever had, for the Queen is still enduring the stupidity of the Nonamiacs, and the King still does what the Queen tells him.

And the fairy godfather?

When the wedding was over, the Queen sent for him; and the impudence of such a proceeding so amused him, that he obeyed the summons at once, just as though he had not been a fairy godfather at all.

“Kindly tell me,” said the Queen, “whether you really did give my son a christening present, or not?”

“I gave him the gift of being a true lover,” replied the fairy godfather.

“Is that all?” exclaimed the Queen. “I need hardly have fetched you from Fairyland, just for that!”

“Your Majesty’s originality is to blame,” chuckled the fairy godfather. And he forthwith took the Queen’s advice, and retired into private life.

But it is said that others have followed the example of the original Queen of Nonamia; and that, now and then, a fairy godfather, who looks just like an ordinary person, is present at the christening of one or another of us. And, perhaps, that is why there are still some true lovers left in the world.