

Oscar Wilde
FAIRY TALES

THE STAR-CHILD

Once upon a time¹ two poor Woodcutters went home through a great pine-forest. It was winter, and a night of bitter cold. The snow was upon the ground, and upon the branches of the trees. The frost snapped the little twigs on their sides, as they passed. The mountain river was motionless in air, because the Ice-King kissed her. So cold was it that even the animals and the birds did not know what to do.

‘Ugh!’ snarled the Wolf, as he limped through the brushwood with his tail between his legs, ‘this is really monstrous weather. **Why doesn’t the Government look to it?**’²

‘Weet! weet! weet!’ twittered the green Linnets, ‘the old Earth is dead and she has her white shroud on .’

‘The Earth will marry soon, and this is her bridal dress,’ whispered the Doves to each other.

¹ once upon a time — однажды

² Why doesn’t the Government look to it? — Куда только смотрит правительство?

Their little pink feet were quite frozen, but they felt that it was their duty to speak romantically.

‘Nonsense!’ growled the Wolf. ‘I tell you that it is all the fault of the Government. If you don’t believe me I shall eat you.’

The Wolf had a very practical mind, and always had a good argument.

‘Well, as for me,’ said the Woodpecker, who was a philosopher, ‘**I don’t care**¹ an atomic theory for explanations. If a thing is so, it is so. At present it is terribly cold.’

Terribly cold it certainly was. The little Squirrels, who lived inside the tall fir-tree, rubbed each other’s noses to get some warm. The Rabbits curled themselves up in their holes, and did not look out of doors. The only people who enjoyed it were the Owls. Their feathers **were quite stiff with rime**², but **they did not mind**³. They rolled their large yellow eyes, and cried across the forest,

‘Tu-whit! Tu-who! Tu-whit! Tu-who! What delightful weather!’

The two Woodcutters went on. They blew lustily upon their fingers, and stamped with their huge boots upon the caked snow. Once they sank into a deep drift, and came out as white as millers. Once they slipped on the hard smooth ice where the marsh-water was frozen. Their faggots fell out of their bundles, and they picked them up and bound them together again. Once they lost their way, and they were very afraid. They knew that the Snow

¹ **I don’t care** — меня не волнует

² **were quite stiff with rime** — заиндевели

³ **they did not mind** — они не обращали внимания

is cruel to those who sleep in the wood. But they retraced their steps, and went warily. At last they reached the outskirts of the forest. They saw, far down in the valley beneath them, the lights of the village in which they dwelt.

They were overjoyed at their deliverance. They laughed aloud, and they saw the Earth like a flower of silver, and the Moon like a flower of gold.

But then they became sad, because they remembered their poverty. One of them said to the other,

‘Why do we laugh? This life is for the rich, and not for us. Why did not we die of cold in the forest? Why did not some wild beast eat us?’

‘Truly,’ answered his companion, ‘the rich have everything, the others have nothing. There is injustice in the world, there is eternal sorrow in it.’

But as they bewailed their misery to each other this strange thing happened. A very bright and beautiful star fell from heaven. It slipped down the side of the sky, passed by the other stars, and fell into the wood — not very far from them.

‘Look! It is a good piece of gold for whoever finds it,’ they cried, and began to run. They wanted to get some gold.

One of them ran faster than his mate, and outstripped him. He ran through the willows, and lo! there was indeed a piece of gold on the white snow. So he hastened towards it, and placed his hands upon it. It was a golden cloak, it had stars on it. And he cried out to his comrade:

‘Look! I see a treasure from the sky!’

When his comrade came near, they sat down in the snow, and loosened the folds of the cloak to divide the pieces of gold. But, alas! no gold was

in it, nor silver, nor, indeed, any treasure. Only a little child who was asleep.

And one of them said to the other:

‘This is the end to our hope. This child is completely useless for us. **Let us leave it here**¹, and go away. We are poor men, and have children of our own.’

But his companion answered him:

‘No, but it is an evil thing to leave the child to perish here in the snow. I am as poor as you are, and have many mouths to feed. But I want to bring this child home with me. My wife **will have care of it**².’

He took up the child tenderly, and wrapped the cloak around it. Then he went down the hill to the village.

‘What a fool!’ thought his comrade.

When they came to the village, his comrade said to him,

‘You have the child, therefore give me the cloak.’

But he answered him:

‘No, for the cloak is neither mine nor yours, but the child’s only.’

And he went to his own house and knocked.

When his wife opened the door and saw her husband, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Then she took from his back the bundle of faggots, and brushed the snow off his boots.

But he said to her,

‘I found something in the forest. Look! It is here, take care of it.’

¹ **let us leave it here** — давай оставим его здесь

² **will have care of it** — позаботится о нём

‘What is it?’ his wife cried. ‘Show it to me, we are poor, we need many things.’

And he drew the cloak back, and showed her the child.

‘Oh God!’ she murmured, ‘have we not children of our own? Why do you bring **changelings**¹ here? And who knows if it will not bring us bad fortune? And how shall we take care of it?’

She was wroth against him.

‘It is a Star-Child,’ he answered; and he told her the strange story.

But she mocked at him, and spoke angrily, and cried:

‘Our children are hungry. Why shall we feed someone’s child? Who will care for us? And who will give us food?’

‘God cares for the sparrows even, and feeds them,’ he answered.

‘Do not the sparrows die of hunger in the winter?’ she asked. ‘And is it not winter now?’

The man answered nothing, but did not come in.

A bitter wind from the forest came in through the open door. The woman trembled, and shivered, and said to him:

‘Will you close the door? A bitter wind comes into the house, and I am cold.’

‘It is always cold in a house where a heart is hard,’ he said.

And the woman answered him nothing, but crept closer to the fire.

Soon she turned round and looked at him, and her eyes were full of tears. And he came in swiftly,

¹ **changeling** — подкидыш

and placed the child in her arms. She kissed it, and laid it in a little bed — with the youngest of their own children.

In the morning, the Woodcutter took the curious cloak of gold and placed it in a great chest. His wife took a **chain of amber**¹ that was round the child's neck and put it in the chest also.

So the Star-Child lived with the children of the Woodcutter, and sat at the same board with them, and was their playmate. Every year he became more beautiful. All those who dwelt in the village were surprised, because the children of the Woodcutter were swarthy and black-haired, and the Star-Child was white and delicate as sawn ivory. And his curls were like the rings of the daffodil. His lips, also, were like the petals of a red flower, and his eyes were like violets by a river of pure water. And his body was like the narcissus of a field.

But this child grew proud, and cruel, and selfish. He despised the children of the Woodcutter, and the other children of the village. He said that they were of mean parentage, while he was noble. He sprang from a Star! He called himself their master and them his servants. He had no pity for the poor, or for the blind or maimed. He cast stones at them and drive them out. None came twice to that village to ask for alms.

Indeed, he was very beautiful, and mocked at the weakly and **made jest of them**². He loved himself only. In summer, when the winds were still, he

¹ **chain of amber** — янтарное ожерелье

² **made jest of them** — высмеивал их

liked to lie by the well in the priest's orchard and look down at the marvel of his own face.

The Woodcutter and his wife often chided him, and said:

'We did not leave you in the forest when you needed pity. Why are you so cruel to all who need pity?'

The old priest taught him the love of living creatures, and said:

'The fly is your brother. Do it no harm. The wild birds that roam through the forest have their freedom. Do not snare them for your pleasure. God made the worms and the moles, and each has its place. Who are you to bring pain into God's world? Even the cattle of the field praise Him.'

But the Star-Child did not heed their words, He listened and frowned and went back to his companions, and led them. His companions followed him, because he was fair and clever. He danced, and piped, and made music. And wherever the Star-Child led them they followed. Whatever the Star-Child bade them do, that did they.

When he pierced with a sharp reed the dim eyes of the mole, they laughed. When he cast stones at the leper they laughed also. In all things he ruled them, and they became cruel as he was.

One day through the village a poor beggar-woman passed by. Her garments were torn and ragged. Her feet were sick, and she was very tired and weary. She sat her down under a chestnut-tree to rest.

But when the Star-Child saw her, he said to his companions,

‘See! A foul beggar-woman under that fair and green-leaved tree. Come, let us drive her hence, for she is ugly.’

So he came near and threw stones at her, and mocked her. She looked at him with terror in her eyes. She did move her gaze from him. And when the Woodcutter saw all this, he ran up and rebuked the Star-Child, and said to him:

‘Surely you are very cruel and don’t know mercy. What evil did this poor woman do to you?’

The Star-Child grew red with anger, and stamped his foot upon the ground, and said,

‘Who are you to question me what I do? I am not your son.’

‘You speak truly,’ answered the Woodcutter, ‘yet did I show you pity when I found you in the forest?’

When the woman heard these words she cried, and fell into a swoon. The Woodcutter carried her to his own house, and his wife took care of her. When the poor woman rose up from the swoon, they set meat and drink before her. But she did not eat nor drink. She said to the Woodcutter,

‘Didn’t you say that the child was from the forest? And was it not ten years from this day?’

And the Woodcutter answered,

‘Yes, it was in the forest that I found him. It was ten years ago.’

‘And what signs did you find with him?’ she cried. ‘Did he have a chain of amber upon his neck? Did he have a cloak of gold tissue with stars round him?’

‘Truly,’ answered the Woodcutter, ‘it was even as you say.’

And he took the cloak and the amber chain from the chest, and showed them to her. When she saw them she wept for joy, and said,

‘He is my little son whom I lost in the forest. Please send for him quickly, for in search of him I wander over the whole world.’

So the Woodcutter and his wife went out and called to the Star-Child, and said to him,

‘Go into the house, and you will find your mother. She is there.’

So he ran in, filled with wonder and great gladness. But when he saw her, he laughed scornfully and said,

‘But where is my mother? For I see none here but this vile beggar-woman.’

And the woman answered him,

‘I am your mother.’

‘You are mad to say so,’ cried the Star-Child angrily. ‘I am not your son, you are a beggar, and ugly, and in rags. Therefore get out, and let me never see your foul face!’

‘But you are indeed my little son, whom I bare in the forest,’ she cried. She fell on her knees, and held out her arms to him. ‘The robbers stole you from me, and left you to die,’ she murmured, ‘but I recognized you when I saw you. I also recognized the signs, the cloak of golden tissue and the amber chain. Therefore please come with me! Come with me, my son, I need your love.’

But the Star-Child did not move from his place. He shut the doors of his heart against her. The woman wept for pain.

At last he spoke to her, and his voice was hard and bitter.

‘If you are really my mother,’ he said, ‘stay away, and do not come here to bring me to shame. I thought I was the child of a Star, and not a beggar’s child, as you tell me that I am. Therefore get away, and let me never see you again!’

‘Alas! my son,’ she cried, ‘will you not kiss me before I go? I suffered much to find you.’

‘No,’ said the Star-Child, ‘you are very foul, I can’t look at you. I prefer to kiss the adder or the toad than you.’

So the woman rose up, and went away into the forest. She wept bitterly. When the Star-Child saw that she was away, he was glad, and ran back to his playmates to play with them.

But when they beheld him, they mocked him and said,

‘Oh, you are as foul as the toad, and as loathsome as the adder. Go away, because we don’t want to play with you!’

And **they drove him out**¹ of the garden.

The Star-Child frowned and said to himself,

‘What is this that they say to me? I will go to the river and look into it. It will tell me of my beauty.’

So he went to the river and looked into it, and lo! His face was as the face of a toad, and his body was like an adder. And he fell down on the grass and wept, and said to himself,

‘Surely this is the result of my sin. I denied my mother, and drove her away. I was proud, and cruel to her. I will go and seek her through the whole world. I will ask her to forgive me!’

¹ **they drove him out** — они выгнали его

A little daughter of the Woodcutter came to him. She put her hand upon his shoulder and said, 'You lost your beauty — **it does not matter**¹. Stay with us, and I will not mock at you.'

And he said to her,

'No, I was cruel to my mother, and this evil is a punishment. I must go and wander through the world till I find her. I hope she will give me her forgiveness.'

So he ran away into the forest and called out to his mother to come to him, but there was no answer. All day long he called to her, and, when the sun set he lay down to sleep on a bed of leaves. The birds and the animals fled from him. They remembered his cruelty. He was alone save for the toad and the adder that watched him.

In the morning he rose up, and plucked some bitter berries from the trees and ate them. After that he went through the wood and wept sorely. And he wanted to know if anybody saw his mother.

He said to the Mole,

'You can go beneath the earth. Tell me, is my mother there?'

And the Mole answered,

'You blinded my eyes. How can I know?'

He said to the Linnet,

'You can fly over the tops of the tall trees. You can see the whole world. Tell me, can you see my mother?'

And the Linnet answered,

'You hurt my wings for your pleasure. How can I fly?'

¹ **it does not matter** — это не имеет значения

And to the little Squirrel who lived in the fir-tree, and was lonely, he said,

‘Where is my mother?’

And the Squirrel answered,

‘You killed my children. Do you want to kill her, too?’

And the Star-Child wept and bowed his head, and prayed forgiveness of God’s creatures. He went on through the forest, he looked for the beggar-woman. On the third day he came to the other side of the forest and **went down into the plain**¹.

When he passed through the villages the children mocked him, and threw stones at him. The farmers did not let him sleep even in the byres, because he was very foul. The workers drove him away, and there was none who had pity on him. Nor could he hear anywhere of the beggar-woman who was his mother.

During three years he wandered over the world, and often saw beggars on the road. But he met his mother nowhere.

He wandered over the world, and in the world there was neither love nor kindness nor charity for him. It was such a world as he made for himself in the days of his great pride.

One evening he came to the gate of a city that stood by a river. He was weary and footsore and tried to enter. But the soldiers who stood on guard dropped their **halberts**² across the entrance, and said roughly to him,

‘What do you want in the city?’

¹ **went down into the plain** — пошёл по долине

² **halberds** — алебарды

‘I look for my mother,’ he answered, ‘please let me enter in, she may be in this city.’

But the soldiers mocked at him. One of them wagged a black beard, and set down his shield and cried,

‘Truly, your mother will not be merry when she sees you, because you are uglier than the toad of the marsh, or the adder that crawls in the fen. Get away! Your mother does not dwell in this city.’

And another soldier, who held a yellow banner in his hand, said to him,

‘Who is your mother? Why are you not together with her?’

The Star-Child answered,

‘My mother is a beggar as I am. I treated her evilly. Please let me pass that she may give me her forgiveness, if she lives in this city.’

But the soldiers pricked him with their spears.

As he turned away, one whose armour was with gilt flowers, and on whose helmet couched a lion with wings, came up and asked the soldiers who it was. The soldiers said to him,

‘It is a beggar and the child of a beggar. Let him go away.’

‘No,’ he cried and laughed, ‘but we will sell the foul child for a slave and buy a bottle of sweet wine.’

An **old and evil-visaged man**¹ who passed by, said,

‘I will buy him for that price.’

¹ **old and evil-visaged man** — старик с дьявольским выражением лица

He paid the price and took the Star-Child by the hand and led him into the city.

After that they went through many streets and came to a little door in a wall that was covered with a pomegranate tree. The old man touched the door with a ring of graven jasper and it opened. They went down five steps of brass into a garden with black poppies and green clay jars. Then the old man took from his turban a scarf of figured silk, and bound with it the eyes of the Star-Child. Then he pushed him forward.

When the old man took the scarf off the Child's eyes, the Star-Child found himself in a dungeon. The old man set before him some mouldy bread on a trencher and said,

'Eat,' and some brackish water in a cup and said, 'Drink.'

Then the old man went out, locked the door behind him and fastened it with an iron chain.

The old man was indeed the magician of Libya and learned his art from one who dwelt in the tombs of the Nile. In the morning, he came in to the Star-Child and frowned at him, and said,

'In a wood that is nigh to the gate of this city of Giaours there are three pieces of gold. One is of white gold, and another is of yellow gold, and the gold of the third one is red. Today you must bring me the piece of white gold. If you don't bring it, **I will beat you with a hundred stripes**¹. Get away quickly! At sunset I will wait for you at the door of the garden. Remember to bring me the white gold,

¹ **I will beat you with a hundred stripes** — я дам тебе сотню ударов плетью

or I will punish you. You are my slave, I bought you for the price of a bottle of sweet wine.'

And he bound the eyes of the Star-Child with the scarf of figured silk, and led him through the house, and through the garden of poppies, and up the five steps of brass. Then he opened the little door with his ring and pushed him in the street.

The Star-Child went out of the gate of the city, and came to the wood.

This wood looked very nice, it seemed full of birds and of flowers. The Star-Child entered it gladly. But soon its beauty disappeared, and wherever he went harsh briars and thorns shot up from the ground and encompassed him. Evil nettles stung him, and the thistle pierced him with daggers. And he could not find the piece of white gold anywhere, though he sought for it from morn to noon, and from noon to sunset. At sunset he wept bitterly and decided to go home, for it was time to return.

But when he reached the outskirts of the wood, he heard from a thicket a cry. The Star-Child forgot his own sorrow and ran back to the place, where he saw there a little Hare in a hunter's trap.

The Star-Child had pity on it, and released the Hare, and said,

'I am a slave, but I can free you.'

The Hare answered him:

'Surely you gave me freedom. What can I give you in return?'

The Star-Child said to it,

'I look for a piece of white gold, but I can't find it anywhere. If I don't bring it to my master he will beat me.'

‘Come with me,’ said the Hare, ‘and I will lead you to it. I know where it is, and for what purpose.’

So the Star-Child went with the Hare, and lo! In the cleft of a great oak-tree he saw the piece of white gold. He was filled with joy, and seized it, and said to the Hare,

‘You rendered back my service and repaid the kindness many times over!’

‘As you deal with me,’ answered the Hare, ‘so I deal with you.’

The Hare ran away swiftly, and the Star-Child went towards the city.

Now at the gate of the city there was a leper. Over his face hung a cowl of grey linen. Through the eyelets his eyes gleamed like red coals. When he saw the Star-Child, he struck upon a wooden bowl, and clattered his bell, and called out to him, and said,

‘Give me a piece of money, or I must die of hunger. They thrust me out of the city, and there is no one who has pity on me.’

‘Alas!’ cried the Star-Child, ‘I have but one piece of money in my wallet, and if I don’t bring it to my master he will beat me, because I am his slave.’

But the leper entreated him, and prayed of him, till the Star-Child had pity, and gave him the piece of white gold.

And when he came to the Magician’s house, the Magician opened to him, and said to him,

‘Do you have the piece of white gold?’

The Star-Child answered,

‘I don’t have it.’

So the Magician beat him, and set before him an empty trencher, and said, 'Eat,' and an empty cup, and said, 'Drink'. After that he pushed him again into the dungeon.

In the morning the Magician came to him, and said,

'If today you don't bring me the piece of yellow gold, I will surely keep you as my slave, and give you three hundred stripes.'

So the Star-Child went to the wood, and all day long he searched for the piece of yellow gold. But he could find it nowhere. At sunset he sat down and began to weep. Soon the little Hare came to him.

The Hare said to him,

'Why do you weep? And what do you seek in the wood?'

The Star-Child answered,

'I look for a piece of yellow gold. If I don't find it my master will beat me, and keep me surely as a slave.'

'Follow me,' cried the Hare.

It ran through the wood till it came to a river. At the bottom of the river there was the piece of yellow gold.

'How shall I thank you?' said the Star-Child, 'for lo! You succour me for the second time.'

'But you had pity on me first,' said the Hare, and ran away swiftly.

The Star-Child took the piece of yellow gold, and put it in his wallet, and hurried to the city. But the leper saw him again, and ran to meet him, and knelt down and cried,

'Give me a piece of money or I shall die of hunger.'

The Star-Child said to him,

‘I have in my wallet but one piece of yellow gold. If I don’t bring it to my master he will beat me and keep me as his slave.’

But the leper entreated him sore, so that the Star-Child had pity on him, and gave him the piece of yellow gold.

When the Star-Child came to the Magician’s house, the Magician opened to him, and said to him, ‘Do you have the piece of yellow gold?’

And the Star-Child said to him,

‘No, I don’t have it.’

So the Magician beat him, and loaded him with chains, and cast him again into the dungeon.

In the morning the Magician came to him, and said,

‘If today you bring me the piece of red gold **I will set you free**¹. But if you don’t bring it I will slay you.’

So the Star-Child went to the wood, and all day long he searched for the piece of red gold. But he could find it nowhere. At evening he sat down and wept. Again the little Hare came to him.

The Hare said to him,

‘The piece of red gold that you seek is in the cavern that is behind you. Therefore weep no more but be glad.’

‘How shall I reward you?’ cried the Star-Child, ‘for lo! You succour me for the third time.’

‘But you had pity on me first,’ said the Hare, and ran away swiftly.

¹ **I will set you free** — я освобожу тебя

The Star-Child entered the cavern, and in its farthest corner he found the piece of red gold. So he put it in his wallet, and hurried to the city. And the leper saw him again, stood in the centre of the road, and cried out, and said to him,

‘Give me the piece of red gold, or I must die!’

And the Star-Child had pity on him again, and gave him the piece of red gold. He said,

‘Your need is greater than mine.’

Yet was his heart heavy, for he knew what evil fate awaited him.

But lo! As he passed through the gate of the city, the guards bowed down and said,

‘How beautiful is our lord!’ and a crowd of citizens followed him, and cried out, ‘Surely there is none so beautiful in the whole world!’

The Star-Child wept, and said to himself,

‘They just mock me, they just laugh at my misery.’

The concourse of the people was so large, that he lost his way, and found himself in a great square, in which there was a palace of a King.

The gate of the palace opened, and the priests and the officers of the city ran forth to meet him. They abased themselves before him, and said,

‘You are our lord, and the son of our King!’

The Star-Child answered,

‘I am no king’s son, but the child of a poor beggar-woman. You say that I am beautiful, but I know that I am ugly.’

Then the warrior with the helmet with a lion held up a shield, and cried,

‘Is not my lord beautiful?!’

The Star-Child looked, and lo! His face was very nice again, and his beauty came back to him. The priests and the officers knelt down and said to him,

‘It is prophesied that on this day our ruler comes. Therefore, let our lord take this crown and this sceptre, and be our King.’

But the Star-Child said to them,

‘I am not worthy, because I denied my mother. I must find her, and ask for her forgiveness.

Therefore, let me go, for I must wander again over the world. I may not stay here, though you bring me the crown and the sceptre.’

And he turned his face from them towards the street that led to the gate of the city, and lo! Amongst the crowd that pressed round the soldiers, he saw the beggar-woman who was his mother, and at her side stood the leper.

A cry of joy broke from his lips, and he ran over, and knelt down. He kissed the wounds on his mother’s feet, and wet them with his tears. He bowed his head in the dust, and sobbed, and said to her:

‘Mother, I denied you in the hour of my pride. Accept me in the hour of my humility. Mother, I gave you hatred. Please give me love. Mother, I rejected you. Receive your child now.’

But the beggar-woman did not answer him.

He reached out his hands, and clasped the white feet of the leper, and said to him:

‘I gave you of my mercy thrice. Bid my mother speak to me once.’

But the leper answered him not a word.

And he sobbed again and said:

‘Mother, my suffering is greater than I can bear. Give me your forgiveness, and let me go back to the forest.’

And the beggar-woman put her hand on his head, and said to him, ‘Rise’. Then the leper put his hand on his head, and said to him, ‘Rise,’ also.

And the Star-Child rose up from his feet, and looked at them, and lo! They were a King and a Queen.

And the Queen said to him,

‘This is your father whom you succoured.’

And the King said,

‘This is your mother whose feet you washed with your tears.’

And they fell on his neck and kissed him, and brought him into the palace. They clothed him in fair raiment, and set the crown upon his head, and the sceptre in his hand. And he became the rule. He showed much justice and mercy to all. He banished the evil Magician, and sent many rich gifts to the Woodcutter and his wife and their children.

He was not cruel to bird or beast anymore, but taught love and kindness and charity, He gave bread to the poor, and he gave raiment to the naked. There was peace and plenty in his land.

But he did not rule long, and in three years he died. And he who came after him ruled evilly.

THE HAPPY PRINCE

The statue of the Happy Prince stood on a tall column, above the city. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of gold. He had two bright sapphires for eyes. A large red ruby glowed on his **sword-hilt**¹. The people admired him.

“He is as beautiful as a weathercock,” remarked one of the Town Councillors; “only not quite so useful,” he added. He was afraid to look unpractical, which he really was not.

“Why can’t you be like the Happy Prince?” asked a sensible mother of her little boy who cried all day. “The Happy Prince never cries for anything.”

“I am glad there is someone in the world who is quite happy,” muttered a disappointed man as he gazed at the wonderful statue.

“He looks just like an angel,” said the **Charity Children**² when they came out of the cathedral

¹ **sword-hilt** — рукоять шпаги

² **Charity Children** — приютские дети

in their bright scarlet cloaks and their clean white pinafores.

“How do you know?” said the Mathematical Master, “did you ever see one?”

“Ah! We did, in our dreams,” answered the children.

The Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe.

One night a little Swallow flew over the city. His friends flew away to Egypt six weeks ago, but he stayed, because he was in love with the most beautiful Reed. He met her early in the spring as he flew down the river after a big yellow moth. He was so attracted by her slender waist that he stopped to talk to her.

“Shall I love you?” said the Swallow, who liked to come to the point at once.

The Reed made him a low bow. So he flew round and round her, touched the water with his wings, and made silver ripples. This was his courtship, and it lasted all through the summer.

“It is a ridiculous attachment,” twittered the other Swallows; “she has no money, and too many relations”.

Indeed the river was full of Reeds. Then, when the autumn came the birds all flew away.

After that he felt lonely, and began to tire of his lover.

“She can’t speak,” he said, “and I am afraid that she is a coquette, because she like to flirt with the wind.”

And certainly, whenever the wind blew, the Reed made the most graceful curtseys.

“I admit that she is domestic,” he continued, “but I like to travel, and my wife, consequently, must like to travel also.”

“Will you come away with me?” he said finally to her; but the Reed shook her head. She was attached to her home.

“You trifle with me,” he cried. “I will fly to the Pyramids. Good-bye!” and he flew away.

All day long he flew, and at night-time he arrived at the city.

“This is the place to rest,” he said; “I hope the town is good for me.”

Then he saw the statue on the tall column.

“I will stay there,” he cried; “it is a fine position, with plenty of fresh air.”

So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

“I have a golden bedroom,” he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he prepared to go to sleep. But just as he put his head under his wing a large drop of water fell on him.

“What a curious thing!” he cried; “there is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it rains. The climate in the north of Europe is really dreadful. The Reed liked the rain, but that was merely her selfishness.”

Then another drop fell.

“What is the use of a statue if it **cannot keep the rain off**¹?” he said; “I must look for a good **chimney-pot**²,” and he determined to fly away.

¹ cannot keep the rain off — не может защитить от дождя

² chimney-pot — дымоход

But before he opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw—Ah! what did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears ran down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity.

“Who are you?” he said.

“I am the Happy Prince.”

“Why do you weep then?” asked the Swallow; “you drench me.”

“When I was alive and had a human heart,” answered the statue, “I did not know what tears were. I lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden. In the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. There was a high wall round the garden, but I never asked what lay beyond it. Everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure is happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now I am dead. They set me up here. I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city. Though my heart is made of lead yet I weep.”

“What! is he not solid gold?” said the Swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks aloud.

“Far away,” continued the statue in a low musical voice, “far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman at a table. Her face is thin and worn. She has coarse, red hands, all pricked by the needle. She is a seamstress. She embroiders