

EYES OR MOUTH.

AUX DAMES.

VERY lovely was the Princess Undinette,—lovely? nay, bewitching; with her blue eyes, and golden hair thrown back from her forehead and gathered behind in a net of lustrous sea-pearls; small straight nose—not *retroussé*, no; red lips; and such a merry little dimpled chin. If you were a paterfamilias you must give it a little chuck, and cry, “Bless thee, my darling!” Well, but who is the Princess Undinette? Now attend, dear reader. Everybody who has studied German in the pages of that veracious historian, La Motte Fouqué, will remember in the chronicle of Undine her disagreeable old uncle, the Baron Kuhleborn; a man who was always turning up just when he wasn’t wanted, and ever insisting on a little confidential chat with somebody or other, of course when it wasn’t wished; moreover, being a man of very so-so sort of character, with a penchant for frightening people into fits. The Herr Baron was a decided family bore. It may therefore be a subject of congratulation to learn that in his old age he amended, forsook his solitary life and pranking ways in the haunted forest; and, on his niece’s death, he succeeded to her crystal palace beneath the blue-waved Mediterranean, married, had one child, whom in memory of his beloved niece he named, in diminutive playfulness, Undinette. Kuhleborn, however, had not entirely abandoned his erratic wanderings; and it was said—not that we vouch its truth—that, snatched from the engulfed vessel, many a chest of treasure, many a golden ingot, found its way to his marine palace. But shipwrecks are unhappily so frequent.

“Papa,” said his bright-eyed daughter one day, when he seemed in a particularly good temper, “I do wish—” Here the little beauty paused.

“Well, pet, what is it?”

“I do wish,” she continued, much in the same way as if she had asked for a pet kitten, “that some day if you should find a prince, you’d bring him home, and let me have him.”

But Kuhleborn naturally asked whether she wouldn’t like a pretty workbox or a tiny lap-dog better.

Then Undinette said she had set her heart upon a prince.

“Indeed, papa, we’ve all set our hearts upon having one.” Kuhleborn whistled. “We want to hear about the newest fashions from a pretty man’s pair of lips, as well as from Madame Goubaud’s magazine whether crinoline is still worn. You are too wise and clever to understand such trifles; and if you would get one, we’d take every care of him,—they must live so differently on the green earth above us.” Then she kissed Paterfamilias Marinus, and bade him good-bye.

An affectionate papa was Kuhleborn!

One morning Jasperina, favourite maid of honour to Undinette, flew breathlessly into her boudoir, where she sat reading the latest hideous murder, old K. at times kindly sending them the newspapers.

“It’s come! it’s come!—such a beauty!”

“Where? what? who?” exclaimed Undinette, starting up; “what’s the matter?”

“A prince, a live prince!”

“A prince! alive! are you sure?”

“Yes; your gracious sire has just sent him, together with a box of books for—”

“O, dear Jasper, where, where is he? You’re sure he’s alive?”

“O yes, Princess, for the Lady Coraline was obliged to scold him well when he was unpacked; he wanted to escape. But he’s quiet now; and if you’ll never tell,” continued Jasper, “I’ll take you where you shall have just one little peep at him.”

So they stole away together down the stairs of glistening stalactite. In a little room through the transparent walls they saw the Prince,—tall, slim, with pale cameo face (not a bit like her pa; Undinette had had her misgivings), raven hair, and whiskers encircling the whole face as with a frame of ebony. He was surrounded by attendants, and the Lady Coraline was explaining his whereabouts in a sort of lecture. She was Undinette’s governess, and a perfect treasury of wisdom and erudition.

Afraid of discovery, they now hurried away. When Undinette reached her chamber, she gazed at herself abstractedly in the mirror.

“What eyes!” she murmured; “large, dark, soft, tender!”

Then throwing herself on the couch. “Bring me my flacon: I feel so unlike myself; what can it be? Where’s Amber?”

“Here, madame,” was the answer; “but I bring bad news; the Prince has complained of sea-sickness, and the Lady Coraline is compounding an immense pill, infallible in its effects. I would not be a child of earth,” continued Amber gravely, “and have to take pills,—no, not for a crown.”

“Nor I,” cried Jasper.

“Poor thing, poor thing!” sighed the Princess; “how sweet it must be to nurse him!” and she sent them both away for further tidings.

The pill was made, put into an ivory box that just fitted it, and presented on a golden salver; and the Prince said he was convalescent. O, what an encyclopædia of practical knowledge, what a book of household management, was the Lady Coraline! The Princess embraced her with tears of joy, but Jasper sat and pouted in a corner.

Her dear little fishes, fed by her own hand, were found gasping away their lives, and every now and then Jasper murmured to herself, “Pill—poison.”

Next morning the Prince and Undinette met *en famille*. ’Twas in the breakfast-room—a pleasant parlour. Its walls were festooned with the deep crimson blossoms of the ocean rose; cushions of the dark green ulva were heaped around; in the centre was a table of madrepore, which glittered like the many-hued opal. The floor was a mosaic-work of small red and black pebbles; the most delicious fruits, ices, and preserves covered the board.

“I am very glad to see you,” said the Princess, holding out her hand; “I hope you will not find it dull here with us.”

“Dull!” cried the Prince, with a look—such a look, she blushed.

Amber said afterwards Jasper cried fudge; but the latter ever protested it was fish. Coraline whispered to her pupil that it was not etiquette, and so on; but Undinette boldly said he was her own pet, a present from papa, and it didn’t matter.

Then they sat down to breakfast; but he scarcely tasted these dainties; his dark eyes were concentrated upon the Princess, whose heart beat with emotion. A presentiment, though she never owned it, whispered she would not be the first naiad whose earthborn lover had wiled her heart away from her quiet ocean home, to live with him a life of unrest and fitful happiness; yet with *him*,—she sighed, the Prince sighed. The wise Coraline looked at them both through her glasses; it was a decided case of—lunacy, she would have added, but she thought it might be as well her *pupille* was settled; and if the papa Kuhleborn found his home lonely, why she, Coraline, would

not object "for better for worse." It's so stupid reading for ever,—besides, it weakens the eyes, dims the complexion, and brings on old age and wrinkles, added the governess. Therefore when, after the meal was over, he proposed they should walk in the gardens, the Lady Coraline made no objection.

Arm-in-arm the young lovers rambled on, followed by the attendants. Sometimes they rested in a bower of roses, while Undinette sang and the Prince listened,—and how sweet it was to hearken to his words!—or else in sparry grotto they watched the waves dashing over and over on the sands, while the sea-birds shrieked overhead, and Coraline looked on while Amber and Jasper plucked the purple sea-weed from the rocks.

Thus passed the first day. On the second the Prince was shown the treasure-vaults beneath the palace—their contents greatly increased since Kuhleborn had taken to his sea voyages. Feasting his eyes on enormous piles of gold and silver, the dazzled Prince murmured "Arabian Nights;" and, taking advantage of Coraline's mislaying her spectacles, he proposed upon the spot.

"My Prince, my pet,—papa!" was all Undinette could whisper, but her lover knew she would be his own. The enraptured prince embraced her, but the next moment—the maids of honour spoke of it often afterwards; it was an evil omen—he turned his head away and sneezed!

Undinette was too happy to notice it, though. As they went back to the palace, she began to wonder what her dear papa Kuhleborn would say to all this.

The third day at breakfast the Prince complained of want of sleep, and while he carelessly ate a peach—taking upon himself the airs of a *mari* already—he asked the Princess if they kept fowls.

"My heart's treasure," she said, "have you not seen my doves?"

The Prince explained,—he meant farmyard poultry; he would like a new-laid egg at breakfast, also a broiled chop.

Egg! chop! They all looked at one another. Undinette clasped her hands.

Chop! egg! could he indeed love her? She cast an appealing look at him. The Prince got up, flung down his peach. Undinette flew towards him. "O, dearest! O, dearest! how can you think of such material substances, when *I love you!*" she sobbed.

The Prince stalked away, forbidding even Limpet, his little page, to follow him. Amber and Jasper were petrified. Undinette would have fainted; only she was too angry to attempt it. But the wise Coraline merely shook her head.

"Don't cry, darling."

Now Limpet the little page came forward.

"Dear lady," he said, "forgive me. I overheard the Prince yesterday say something so peculiar; it was: 'He couldn't feed on sweets and kisses; he wants a good substantial dinner!'"

Thereupon Coraline beat him for being wiser than herself; and the page began to sob as well as his mistress.

"I have heard that the Chinese," spoke Coraline, after musing a while, "are so fond of roast pig, that they set fire to their dwellings to feast upon its flesh: now if the Prince is a Chinese, you know—"

"O!" shrieked Amber, "will he set the palace on fire then to roast us?"

"We're not pigs, you goose!" cried Jasper.

"My lady governess," replied the Princess with dignity, "the Chinese have little eyes, and wear a pig-tail; now my Prince—"

"Well, men are men, my dear," cried Coraline.

There was a pause. Presently the Princess wiped her eyes; if the Prince could not subsist upon her love alone, she must humour his weakness; she gave a message to Amber,

who in her turn imparted it to the head cook, he to the purveyor of the kitchen ; and in an instant Wrack and Tang, two sturdy Tritons, were seen scuttling down the palace stairs, carrying a large empty basket between them. One of the housemaids, seeing them with the basket, asked if they were seeking for scarce shells for their mistress's grotto ; but Wrack shook his head.

"They're gone to fetch another prince, I shouldn't wonder !" said the housemaid.

The rest of the day the Prince sulked, the Princess wept. Coraline read the Mermaid's Cookery-book, which was Greek to her. Jasper looked out of window, and Amber kept running every minute to the terrace stairs. At last the tender-hearted Undinette could bear it no longer. She went to him and took his passive hand.

"I'm sorry you're not well, but I've sent for something."

"No, no more physic," interrupted the Prince ; "I will not take it !"

"You mean you'll throw it to the fishes !" said Jasper, aside.

He spoke so crossly that Undinette could only say :

"Sea-born maidens as we are, the food you craved at breakfast would be abhorrent to us but for your sake."

"Madame," said Amber running in, "he's arrived."

"Madame," said the head cook with a lowly bow, "the pig is in the grand saloon."

"Well, then, my heart's treasure," said the happy Undinette,—for *he* smiled upon her once more,—“let us go and visit him.”

She took his arm ; Coraline put on her glasses and followed ; the maids of honour and the cook closed the procession. Limpet ran before to throw open the doors. The pig was quite a little picture, plump and rosy. He was placed on a dish of the rarest porcelain, and covered with a damask cloth. The head cook, the purveyor, and the clerk of the kitchen, threw it gently back and disclosed the porcine beauty. Undinette clapped her hands ; Coraline smiled ; but the Prince didn't look quite so gratified.

"Now, my precious, will you lunch now—this very moment—or shall the beauty be kept till dinner ?"

"What, do you expect me to eat the porker raw ?" shouted the never-to-be-satisfied Prince.

"O, this will be the death of me," sobbed Undinette.

"I knew it," cried Coraline ; "it must be roasted. Leave it to me, young people. You must have some sauce too—pomegranate seeds,—or would you prefer capsicum pods powdered ?"

"Good heavens, madame !" roared the Prince ; "I'm frozen, famished already."

"Frozen ! famished ! and I love you so !"—she was cut to the very heart, and two great pearly drops glittered in her blue eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. He should have kissed them off : he didn't. The Princess was forced to pull out her own embroidered *mouchoir* and wipe them away. And was it come to this ? Once he would have done it. Now, how changed he was ! Chop ! egg ! never could she forget or forgive. A moonlight saunter with the Princess on the beach gave him cold and rheumatism—instead of making love, he only thought of sneezing. When she sang he yawned, unless he chanced to fall asleep. But, the pig.

"Well, roast it," said the Prince discontentedly. "I'll take a stroll meanwhile. Don't follow me," he said, looking at Undinette. For once he had overrated his attractions ; she had no intention of doing this.

"How can I love this man !" exclaimed the Princess indignantly. "A man who's always thinking of his bel—"

"O, heavens !" shrieked Coraline ; "thinking of his *what* ?"

"Well, never mind. Take away the monster."

Thereupon the innocent pig was carried by the cook and his assistants into the kitchen.

"Let's broil him on the coals," cried the first scullion, tapping the plump carcass; "like chestnuts, you know,—'twill be rare."

But the head cook testily refused either to roast or broil. There was no precedent for such an act. He said he would not run the risk of setting the kitchen chimney on fire, unless the Baron Kuhleborn himself commanded it to be done; then he would sacrifice the chimney and his own life, and do it. The cook held out. Kuhleborn might not return for weeks; meanwhile was the Prince to starve? But the cook calmly went on with the icing of an enormous bride-cake. Coraline went back with the news. Undinette listened, wiped her eyes.

"I said I wanted a prince to pet him, make him happy; but who ever dreamt of his making such a fuss about his dinner! I've changed my dress a dozen times a day; I've worn all my jewels."

"Madame," cried Amber, "if I were you, to save the Prince's life, I'd even fly with him to his own land."

"What! and leave her dear papa to tear out his gray hairs, you wicked girl!" shrieked Coraline.

"Besides, he never hinted such a thought," said Undinette simply.

Limpet suggested that the Princess should give him full authority, and he would undertake the subordinates should lock the cook up in his own closet, while they made an enormous bonfire on the sands; "and surely, madame, between us all we may be able to manage the pig."

"Hum!" cried Coraline.

"O!" said Jasper.

That very moment they all saw from the open window the Prince chatting very familiarly with the pretty housemaid before mentioned.

"I perceive," said Undinette, "neither youth, beauty, love, devotion—"

"Kisses, bonbons, honeyed words," put in Amber.

"Mines of gold and silver," added Jasper.

"Womanly blandishments combined with masculine erudition," from Coraline.

"Devotion, love, beauty, youth," repeated the Princess,— "nothing beneath the green earth and blue sky, can in a man's eyes be equivalent to the lack of his dinner; therefore, let this man go back to his own land."

"Yes, let him sigh and make love to his lamb."

"Yes, let him go and munch his mutton," put in Amber and Jasper together.

"Summon Wrack and Tang."

They came; again they left the palace. This time they carried *two baskets*. They threw the Prince and the pig into the sea.

The pig sank, but the Prince swam safely to the land, and after a few dangers reached his father's palace—luckily in time for dinner.

As for the intractable cook, Undinette revenged herself by ordering him to eat the great bride-cake himself; and Kuhleborn on his return found the cook suffering from indigestion, which compelled him to give up his situation—an act for which the cook could find no precedent. The Prince was never spoken of; but Undinette could not at once forget him. It may be the Prince too felt regret; for in his eagerness to acquit himself of blame he intends delivering a course of public lectures. He is sure they will be popular, for in his judgment a long-vexed question will be set at rest for ever. And he already hears the deafening applause which will greet him from an awe-stricken multitude as they hear these simple words, "Man's dinner is woman's mission."