

THE BLUE MOON.

NILLYWILL and Hands-pansy were the most unimportant and happy pair of lovers the world has ever gained or lost. With them it had been a case of love at first blindness since the day when they had tumbled into each other's arms in the same cradle. And Hands-pansy, when he first saw her, did not discover that Nillywill was a real princess hiding her birthright in the home of a poor peasant; nor did Nillywill, when she first saw Hands, see in him the baby beginnings of the most honest and good heart ever sprung out of poverty and humble parentage. So from her end of their little crib she kicked him with her royal rosy toes, and he from his kicked back and laughed: and thus, as you hear, at first blindness they fell head over ears in love with one another.

Nothing could undo that; for day by day earth and sun and wind came to rub it in deeper, and water could not wash it off. So when they had been seven years together there could be no doubt that they felt as if they had been made for each other in heaven. And then something very big and sad came to pass; for one day Nillywill had to leave off being a peasant child and become a princess once more. People very grand and grown-up came to the woodside where she flowered so gaily, and caught her by the golden hair of her head and pulled her up by her dear little roots and carried her quite away from Hands-pansy to a place she had never been in before. They put her into a large palace, with woods and terraces and landscape gardens on all sides of it; and there she sat crying and pale, saying that she wanted to be taken back to Hands-pansy and grow up and marry him, though he was but the poor peasant boy he had always been.

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Those who had charge of Nillywill in her high station talked wisely, telling her to forget him. "For," said they, "such a thing as a princess marrying a peasant boy only happened once in a blue moon!"

When she heard that Nillywill began every night to watch the moon rise, hoping some evening to see it grow up like a blue flower against the dusk and shake down her wish to her like a bee out of its deep bosom.

But night by night silver, or ruddy, or primrose, it lit a place for itself in the heavens; and years went by, bringing the princess no nearer to her desire to find room for Hands-pansy among the splendours of her throne.

She knew that he was five thousand miles away and had only wooden peasant shoes to walk in; and when she begged that she might once more have sight of him, her whole court, with the most unutterable politeness, cried "No!"

The princess's memory sang to her of him in a thousand tunes, like woodland birds carolling; but it was within a cage which men call a crown that her thoughts moved, fluttering to be out of it and free.

So time went on and Nillywill had entered gently into sweet womanhood, the comeliest princess that ever dropped a tear; and all she could do for love was to fill her garden with dark-eyed pansies, and walk among their humble upturned faces which reminded her so well of her dear Hands,—Hands who was a long five thousand miles away. "And, oh!" she sighed, watching for the blue moon to rise, "when will it come and make me at one with all my wish?"

Looking up, she used to wonder what went on there. She and Hands had stolen into the woods, when children together, and watched the small earth-fairies at play, and had seen them, when the moon was full, lift up their arms to it, making, perhaps, signals of greeting to far-off moon-brothers. So she thought to herself, "What kind are the fairies up there, and who is the greatest moon-fairy of all who makes the blue moon rise and bring good-will to the sad wishers of the human race? Is it," thought Nillywill, "the moon fairy who then opens its heart and brings down healing therefrom to lovers upon earth?"

And now, as happens to all those who are captives of a crown, Nillywill learned that she must wed with one of her own rank who was a stranger to her but for his name and his renown as the lord of a neighbouring country; there was no help for her,



WITH A DIFFERENCE.—“They say that before he took tae the meenistry he was ane o’ they scoolptor folk, but he saw the error o’ his ways, an’ noo—he just chisels the de’il.”

By L. Raven Hill.

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since she was a princess, but she must wed according to the claims of her station. When she heard of it, she went at nightfall to her pansies and told them of her grief. They, awakened by her tears, lifted up their grave eyes and looked at her.

“Do you not hear?” said they.

“Hear what?” asked the princess.

“We are low in the ground: we hear,” said the pansies; “stoop down your head and listen!”

The princess let her head go to the ground; and “click, click,” she heard wooden shoes coming along the road. She ran to the gate, and there was Hands, tall and lean, dressed as a poor peasant, with a bundle tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief across his shoulder, and five thousand miles trodden to nothing by the faithful tramping of his old wooden shoes.

“Oh, the blue moon, the blue moon!” cried the princess; and, running down the road, she threw herself into his arms.

How happy and proud they were of each other! He, because she remembered him and knew him so well by the sight of his face and the sound of his feet after all these years; and she, because he had come all that way in a pair of wooden shoes just as he was, and had not been afraid that she would be ashamed to know him again.

“I am so hungry,” said Hands, when he and Nillywill had done kissing each other. And when Nillywill heard that, she brought him into the palace through the pansies by her own private way: then with her own hands she set food before him and made him eat. Hands, looking at her, said, “You are quite as beautiful as I thought you would be!” “And you—so are you!” she answered, laughing and clapping her hands. And “Oh, the blue moon,” she cried, “surely the blue moon must rise to-night!”

Low down in the west the new moon, leaning on its side, rocked and turned softly in its sleep; and there, facing the earth through the cleared night, the blue moon hung like a burning grape against the sky. Like the heart of a sapphire laid open, the air flushed and purpled to a deeper shade. The wind drew in its breath close and hushed till not a leaf quaked in the boughs; and the sea that lay out west gathered its waves together softly to its heart, and let the heave of its tide fall wholly to slumber. Round-eyed, the stars looked at them—

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selves in the charmed water, while in a luminous azure flood the light of the blue moon flowed abroad.

Under the light of many tapers within drawn curtains of tapestry, and feasting her eyes upon the happiness of Hands, the princess felt the change that had entranced the outer world. "I feel," she said, "I do not know how,—as if the palace were standing siege. Come out where we can breath the fresh air!"

The light of the tapers grew ghostly and dim, as, parting the thick hangings of the window, they stepped into the night.

"The blue moon!" cried Nillywill into her heart; "oh, Hands, it is the blue moon!"

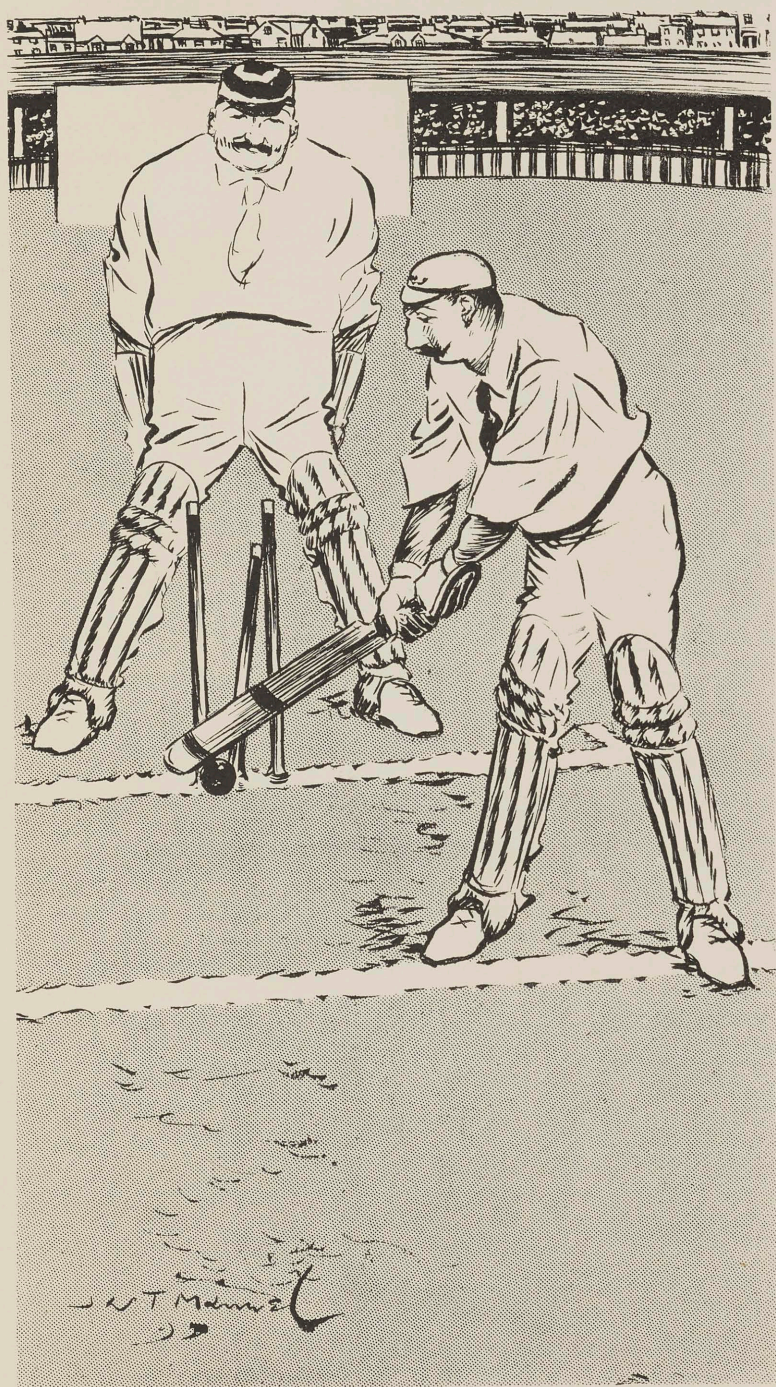
All the world seemed carved out of blue stone; trees with stems dark-veined as marble rose up to give rest to boughs which drooped the altered hues of their foliage like the feathers of peacocks at roost. Jewel within jewel burned through every shade from blue to onyx. The white blossoms of a cherry-tree had become changed into turquoise, and the tossing spray of a fountain as it drifted and swung was like a column of blue fire. Where a long inlet of sea reached in and touched the feet of the hanging gardens, the stars showed like glow-worms, emerald in a floor of amethyst.

There was no motion abroad, nor sound: even the voice of the nightingale was stilled because the passion of her desire had become visible before her eyes.

"Once in a blue moon!" said Nillywill, waiting for her dream to become altogether true. "Let us go now," she said, "where I can put away my crown! To-night has brought you, and the blue moon has come for us: let us go!" "Where shall we go?" asked Hands. "As far as we can," cried Nillywill. "Suppose to the blue moon! To-night it seems as if one might tread on water or air. Yonder across the sea, with the stars for stepping stones, we might get to the blue moon as it sets into the waves."

But as they went through the deep alleys of the garden that led down to the shore they came to a thing more wonderful. Before them, facing the sea, stood two great reindeer, their high horns reaching to the overhead boughs; and behind them lay a sledge, long and with deep sides like the sides of a ship. All blue they seemed in that strange light.

There, too, but nearer to hand, was the moon-fairy himself waiting—a great figure of lofty stature, clad in furs of blue fox-skin, and with herons' wings fastened above the flaps of his hood;



"Ah! Ha! How's that?"
By J. W. T. Manuel.

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and these lifted themselves and clapped as Hands and the princess drew near.

“Are you coming to the blue moon?” called the fairy, and his voice whistled and shrewed to them like the voice of a wind. Hands-pansy gave back answer stoutly: “Yes, we are coming,” knowing no better thing to say. “But,” cried Nillywill, holding back, “what will the blue moon do for us?”

“Once in the blue moon,” said the moon fairy, “you can have your wish and your heart’s desire; but only once in a blue moon can you have it. Are you coming?” “We are coming,” cried Nillywill. “Oh, let us make haste!”

“Tread softly,” said the moon-fairy, “and stoop well under these boughs, for if anything awakes to behold the blue moon, the memory of it can never die. On earth only the nightingale of all living things has beheld a blue moon; and the triumph and pain of that memory wakens her ever since to sing all night long. Tread softly, lest others waken and learn to cry after us; for we in the blue moon have our sleep troubled by those that cry for a blue moon to return.” He looked towards Nillywill and smiled with friendly eyes. “Come!” he said again, and all together they had leapt upon the sledge and the reindeer were running fast down toward the sea.

The blue moon was resting its lower rim upon the waters. At that sight, before they were free of the avenues of the garden, one of the reindeer tossed up his great branching horns and snorted aloud for joy. There was a stir in the thick boughs, and a bird with a great trail of feathers moved on its perch. The sledge, gliding from the land, passed out over the smoothed waters, running swiftly as upon ice, and the reflection of the stars shone up like glow-worms as Nillywill and Hands-pansy with the moon-fairy sped away along its bright surface.

The still air whistled through the reindeers’ horns; so fast they went that the trees and the hanging gardens and the palace walls melted away from view like wreaths of smoke. Sky and sea became one magic sapphire closing them in towards the centre of its life, to the heart of the blue moon itself.

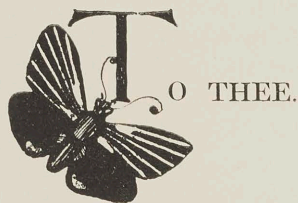
When the blue moon had set below the sea, then far behind upon the land they had left the leaves nestled and drew themselves sharply together, shuddering to get rid of the stony stillness, and the magic hues in which they had been dyed; and again the nightingale broke out into passionate triumph and complaint.

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Then also from the bough which the reindeer had brushed with its horn a peacock threw back its head, and cried in harsh lamentation, having no sweet voice wherewith to acclaim its prize; and ever since so cries, as it goes up into the deep boughs to roost, because it shares with the nightingale her grief for the memory of departed beauty which never returns to earth save once in a blue moon.

But Nillywill and Hands-pansy, living together in the blue moon, look back upon the world, if now and then they choose to remember, without any longing for it or sorrow.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN.



As Orpheus flower and fern
Called to his knees,
And by delicious tones
Ravished the trees,
Forcing the oaks and poplars high,
Nimble as maids, to change their sky;

So doth thy exquisite voice,
Thrilling employ,
Make of my body a lyre
Noble with joy:
Hearing thee speak, I needs must come
Into thy breast, which is my home.

NORMAN GALE.