



Santa and the Boy King

By Lucrece Hudgins

Chapter 1

Once, long ago, in the land of Mervania, there was a boy King named James. He was nine years old but he was tall for his years and strong, with fine shoulders and firm hands.

Dressed in his golden crown and purple robes with long train, he spent his days reviewing his soldiers, signing laws, studying Greek and arithmetic, and riding his princely horse on the palace paths.

What a very wonderful life, you might think. But, it wasn't so at all.

For, though James was King and ruled all the peoples of Mervania, he himself was ruled by his own ministers and had less freedom than the lowest subject in all his kingdom. The Keeper of the Royal Diet told him what to eat, the Royal Teacher told him what to study; the Royal Dressmaker told him what to wear, and so on.

He wanted to box - they made him ride horseback. He loved peanut butter sandwiches - they made him eat artichokes. He longed to carry a sling shot - they made him carry a sword.

But, worst of all, they wrote the proclamations for the people he ruled. He himself merely signed them.

He lived in a magnificent palace which was surrounded by three walls, one made of brick, one of concrete, and one of steel. In all his life, James had never been beyond the walls of the palace.

Only once a year did he see any of the people he was supposed to rule. This was at the Christmas Festival when a magnificent tree was lighted on the palace lawns and a few children were allowed to come in and sing carols, eat popcorn balls, and present small gifts to their boy King.

Now, this year, when James was nine years old, he protested. "I want a different kind of Christmas party this year," he told his ministers. I want all the children of Mervania to come, and their mothers and fathers, too, and -"

"But, Your Majesty," interrupted Lord Potts, who was James' uncle anti chief minister. "There would not be room on the palace grounds."

"Then let's have the festival outside the palace." cried the King eagerly, for he always had always wanted to see beyond the palace walls.

"Too many germs!" exclaimed Lord Dilly, the Court Physician, and he told James about some dreadful creatures named Measles and Mumps and Chickenpox which apparently

were lying in wait for His Majesty just outside the palace walls.

It was certainly not the first time the King had been talked out of his heart's desire but after all the Christmas Festival was supposed to be his very own party so he tried once more to have a few things his way.

"Well, at least we can have something besides popcorn balls for refreshment," he said stiffly.

"It's very expensive feeding a lot of children," stated Lord John the King's treasurer. "And we get nothing in return for it. Nothing at all."



This was really too much. The King jumped from his throne and ran from the hall, dragging his long ermined trains behind him.

"It's no fun at all being King," he thought angrily when he was in his own room. "I would rather be most anything else than King of Mervania!"

He stared out of his windows and far away he could see the Street and marketplaces of Mervania. "If only I could go out there," he thought longingly. "If only I could see my own kingdom just once!"

Then, quite suddenly, he was filed with a great big plan.

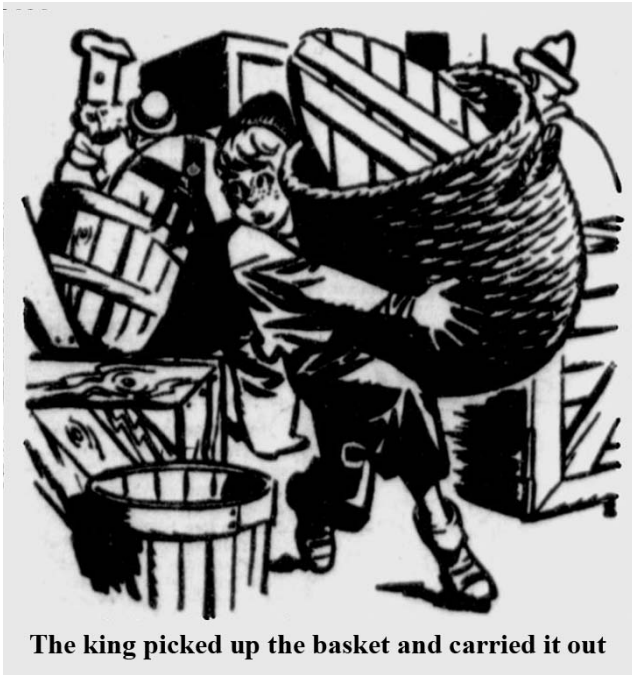
"Why not run away!"

In an instant the thought became action. He took off his golden crown and purple robes and laid them carefully on his bed. He pulled on a sweater and stood before a mirror. He looked quite like any other little boy!

“In my blue sweater and black breeches, no one could possibly recognize me,” he thought happily. “What a day I shall have!”

Then, his heart bursting with excitement, he slipped out of his room and raced down the palace ball.

Chapter 2
THE KING ESCAPES



The king picked up the basket and carried it out

When James, the boy King, decided to run away from the palace, he did not think he would be doing wrong. "I shall stay away only a few hours," he solemnly planned. "And no one need ever know I have gone."

He made straight for the palace kitchens as the Royal Cook was his real friend and frequently gave him a doughnut or apple tart when he most needed it. He thought the cook might now be able to advise him how to get outside the palace walls.

But when he got to the kitchen he found the utmost confusion. Some farmers from outside the walls were delivering great baskets of vegetables for the royal meats.

"Put the potatoes here, the beets there, the cabbages on this, the string beans under that," chattered the cook as he bustled madly about directing the proceedings.

The King tried to catch his eye but there was not a chance as the cook saw him but thought he was merely another farmer.

"Move. Move out of the way for pity's sake," he swore and he gave the King a little shove for indeed he was in the way.

As the King fell back he stumbled over a large covered basket which had been emptied of pumpkins. Unnoticed, the King picked up the basket, and carried it out the door. There stood the farmers' wagon. The boy leaped in, placed his basket far in the back and then climbed inside the basket drew down the lid.

In a short while, the farmers followed him from the kitchen. They tossed other empty baskets into the wagon before they, too, climbed in and away the wagon rumbled.

The little King trembling with excitement heard the guards open each of the three gates and he knew that now, at last, he was outside the palace where he had been a prisoner all his life.

On and on rumbled the wagon, bouncing the King about in his basket until he was sure there was not a place on his body which had not been made black and blue. At last the rumbling stopped and the farmers got out. The boy King pushed open the lid of his basket and peeped out.

What a strange new world! The wagon was in a cobbled street and the farmers were just disappearing in a shop where refreshments were to be had. James climbed out of his basket and stared at the shops and the people who filled the little street.

Suddenly two small boys popped up beside the wagon. "Give us a ride!" they begged.

"Oh, no," replied James. "The wagon doesn't belong to me." Then, noticing the ball the boy carried, he said, "What kind of a ball is that may I ask?"

Both boys burst into laughter. "How funny you talk," cried one. "It's a softball, of course."

"I've never seen one," blurted the boy and his friend asked, "What is your name?"

"I am James," replied the King.

"James?" laughed the boy. "Well, we will call you Jimmy!"

The King's face lit up with pleasure. "Oh, please do!" he exclaimed eagerly. "And will we be friends?"

"Well, that depends," said the boy, "You must prove your courage first. I am Henry and this is Timothy. If you can do everything we do then we are friends."

"Oh, I'll do anything!" cried James eagerly.

"Come, then," ordered Timothy. "We will see if you have the courage to face the Witch's Ring."

Chapter 3

JAMES TRIES ON THE MAGIC RING

What a morning that was for the boy King of Mervania! Arm in arm with his remarkable new friends he marched the streets of the town, munching apples and nuts and candies which the boys dug out of what seemed to be an inexhaustible supply in their pockets.

Nothing more was said about the mysterious witch's ring and, in fact, Timothy and Henry appeared to have forgotten their condition of friendship: that James prove his courage by doing all they did. The boys simply accepted James for what he seemed to be a nice fellow who didn't seem to know much about games.

They taught him to kick their football and how to shoot marbles. They introduced him to every game they knew all went well until Timothy said, "Let's play King and the People."

"What is that?" asked James who was having such a wonderful time and was almost forgetting that he was a King.

"One of us is King and chops off the heads of the others," explained Henry

"But - what for?" cried James in astonishment.

"Silly!" drawled Henry "Because that's what Kings do."

"Oh, no!" protested James. "That isn't so!"

"You just don't know anything," snorted Timothy. "Whenever something displeases our King he orders someone's head to come off. We've never seen our King and he has never seen us but that's the way it goes. My father says so."

James was too miserable to argue. Could it be true that heads were cut off by his ministers and blamed on himself? Suddenly he wanted to return to the palace at once. "I'll find out what's going on," he thought. "I will change things for; after all, I am the King!"

"Where are you going" cried Timothy as James started off. "Wait, we haven't shown you the witch's ring. Come along - this will astonish you!"

James turned back. He could not resist having a few more precious minutes with his new friends. Together they walked down a lonesome road, crossed a burnt out field, entered a small woods and stopped, finally, beside a special oak tree.

Henry pulled back a piece of loose bark and showed James a tiny hole in the tree. Wedged in the hole was a silver ring.

"But, what is it?" asked James. His voice was a whisper because the other boys had whispered since entering the woods.

"It's the witch's ring," explained Timothy, his eyes filled with awe. "It has been here forever and ever and it is said that if you put it on something terrible will happen."

James reached in and pulled out the ring. "It's quite ordinary looking," he said calmly, happily aware that his friends were



"It's the Witch's Ring!"

impressed with his bravery. He longed to have them admire him as much as he did them. "I say, shall I try it on?" he whispered, hoping they would stop him at once.

But Henry said exactly the wrong thing. "You wouldn't dare!" he snorted, so excited he forgot even to whisper.

James' hands trembled just a little and he began to feel somewhat sick. He wanted to put the ring back and turn and run out of those woods as fast as he could. But, he was, after all, a King and there are things a King can't do.

"It's probably just a ring someone lost here years ago," he said, but his mouth was very dry and he found it quite impossible to swallow. He poked his forefinger into the ring.

Henry and Timothy gasped and both cried, "Oh, don't!" for they really didn't want anything to happen to this boy who was so strange but so friendly.

But James shut his eyes and squeezed the ring down past both knuckles. He did feel very brave now and for perhaps the first time in his life quite like a King.

But, heavens! He was a King no longer! The instant the ring settled on his finger James turned into a little girl!

Chapter 4

A KING WITHOUT A KINGDOM

Timothy and Henry stared at the little girl who stood before them. And the little girl, who was really James, King of Mervania, stared, too, at the red polka-dot dress, dainty, white socks and small black slippers.

“It’s just a joke!” cried James at last and his voice was high and sweet like that of a girl. He tore at the red bonnet on his head but it would not budge. It appeared to be held on with some invisible glue and the same was true of his dress. Try as he would he could not tear it off.

Finally Henry found his voice (a very scared voice it was, too) - “You are bewitched!”

“Then un-bewitch me!” shouted James fiercely in his little girl’s voice. He was so frightened that he had to shout very loudly in order not to cry.

Timothy and Henry began to back away but their eyes never left James’ face. “There’s nothing we can do.” whimpered Timothy. “I’m going to get away from here before something else awful happens. You may be a witch, too, now.”

“I’m not!” declared James furiously. “I’m still James. I’m not a bit different inside!”

And, indeed, it was true. Inside, he was still a little boy, still James, King of Mervania. It would have been better for him, perhaps, if he had been turned into another person altogether.

But Timothy and Henry were too overcome with terror to listen to the poor boy’s pleading. They turned abruptly and ran away as fast as their trembling legs would carry them, falling down only once and not looking back a single time. Poor James! He did not much blame his friends. He would have liked to run away from himself.

He sat down on a stump and tried to pull off the cursed silver

ring. It would not move beyond the knuckle. Though it had slipped on so easily it now appeared to have become a part of his hand. He gave it up finally and started back for the palace.

“I shall have one of the black smiths file it off,” he thought and blushed with shame at the thought of his ministers seeing him dressed as a girl. “They’ll say it serves me right for stealing away from the palace. Oh, to have this wretched business over with!”

But-alas! The wretched business was only just beginning.

He returned to the palace gates and banged on the outer walls with a rock. A small peep hole burst open and the face of a bearded guard appeared.

“What is it?” he asked irritably for he had been interrupted while playing cards with his companions.

“Let me in,” ordered James. “Hurry!”

“Mercy on us!” exclaimed the guard, truly astonished. “Who are you to speak so?”

“I am the King,” exclaimed James sharply and he was irritable, too, for he was in a great hurry to have the ring filed off.

The guard was silent for a moment. Then he shouted for his comrades. “Glory be! There’s a wee girl here says she’s the King. What am I to do with her?”

His friends joined him and suddenly the gate was flung open and James was surrounded by five of his tallest, strongest guards. “Must be she think it’s Christmas Festival time,” suggested one. “It’s a bit early, child. Come again five days from now.”

“I have no time for this!” cried James, stamping his tiny slippered foot. “Call Lord Potts. He will tell you who I am.”

The guards laughed. “Indeed,” roared one. “Lord Potts would take off our heads if we disturbed him for such as this.”

“And I will put you on bread and water myself unless you let me in at once,” shouted the boy and he pushed against them, seeking to dart under their arms.

“Enough of this.” exclaimed the bearded guard suddenly. “The child is out of her mind and we’d best have nothing to do with her.” With that the gates slammed and the little King was left alone outside the walls.

But not quite alone for at that very moment there was a tug at his pretty polka-dot dress and looking down James saw a tiny whiskered, baldheaded creature no taller than his knee and clothed entirely in yellow silk.

“Perhaps I can help you, Miss,” politely murmured this fantastic body.



“Let me in! Hurry!”

Chapter 5

JAMES MEETS HENNEPIN

Poor James! Things were really getting too much for him. First to be turned into a girl, then to be shut out of his own palace because the guards did not recognize him as the King, and now this - this little creature tugging at his skirt.

“Let me help you, Miss,” repeated the squeaky voice not two feet above the ground.

“Then don’t call me Miss” snapped James far more severely than was necessary. “I am the King!”

“Very well,” said the creature amiably, chewing on his red whiskers. “But if I may say so, Your Highness, it is a strange thing to see a King in a dress and bonnet and patent leather slippers.”

“You are very strange, too,” replied James. “What kind of a creature are you?”

“I am a gnome.” explained the creature. “My name is Hennepin.”

James caught his breath. “If you are a gnome,” he suggested timidly, “perhaps you know magic.”

“Indeed, yes,” replied Hennepin. “Once I went to a Gnome School and had several courses in Magic. And two courses in Love Potions and one entire school term in Witchcraft. Then I had – “

“Then perhaps you can help me!” interrupted James and he kneeled beside the little creature and told him the story of the silver ring and the curse that had fallen upon him. Hennepin studied the ring carefully but he could only shake his tiny bald head.

“Really the matter is very serious.” He took James’ hand. “My dear - I mean - Your highness, you must go to Santa Claus.”

“Santa Claus!”

“To be sure. He is a close, close friend of my cousin’s uncle’s brother-in-law and will be very glad to help you. Just mention my name.”

“But, how on earth would I get to Santa Claus?”

“Very simple, really, I learned it in school. You merely take this pill I give you and when you wake up you will be in Santa Land.”

The gnome dug out of his pocket a box of pink pills and offered one to James. “It’s very tasty. Don’t be afraid.”

Hardly daring to refuse for fear he might hurt Hennepin’s feelings, James took a pill and popped it into his mouth. Almost at once he felt sleepy and sank down on the ground.

When he awoke he was in Santa Land and in all his life afterwards he never knew how he got there or what was in the remarkable pill to give it such magic powers.

But there was Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus and dozens of fairies and elves and brownies all hammering and sawing and cutting and sewing on mountains of Christmas toys.

Mrs. Claus was the first to see James as he stood in the workshop door. She pushed her spectacles to the top of her head and beamed.

“What a precious little girl!”

Then all the Santa-folk left their work and surrounded James. “What a sweet dress” exclaimed one. “And such lovely curls!” Santa himself finally put aside the bicycle he was working on and greeted the visitor.

“Get something for her,” he told his wife. “She shall have part of her Christmas now.”

“My, my, yes,” agreed Mrs. Claus, and she snatched up a large rubber ma-ma doll and laid it in James’ awkward arms.

“I - I’d rather have a football!” blurted the boy suddenly and his cheeks were suddenly so crimson that Mrs. Claus stepped back and Santa gasped.

“Oh, please help me,” cried James and catching Santa’s hand he told him the story of his bewitchment.

Santa sat on an overturned crate and shook his head sadly. “I know that ring well,” he said. “Truly you are bewitched, if it stays on your finger while the sun sets six times, then you will be a girl forevermore.”

“Oh, there must be some way to get it off!” cried Mrs. Claus indignantly.

“Yes. Perhaps there is.” nodded Santa. “My boy, you must go to the Witch of Zanzell.”



“Truly, you are bewitched!”

Chapter 6

THE WITCH'S POTION

"The Witch of Zanzell lives at the very center of the earth," said Santa to the boy King who stood before him so sadly. "She is the only witch I know of who can make magic potions to break evil spells. I think she can help you."

"But, however will he get there?" exclaimed Mrs. Claus anxiously.

"The journey there is very difficult," agreed Santa soberly.

James tried to stick his hands in his pockets but remembered, just in time, that there were no pockets in his red polka-dot dress, and so clasped his hands behind his back. "I will get there!" he said bravely. "I must. The sun already has set once and if the ring remains on my finger five more days I am lost."

Then Santa took the boy out of the work shop and led him to the shed where the reindeer were kept. "My reindeer will take you to Zanzell," he said, lifting James atop his best and fastest deer. "When you get there you will find a well that leads to the depths of the earth."

He started to kiss the child's pink cheeks but remembering that James was really a boy and oven a King, he shook hands instead and ordered the deer to start.

How the snow flew from the deer's hoots as he sped over the vast icelands! Truly he went faster than the wind and James, clinging to the deer's back, his skirts flying over his head, could well understand how Santa could cover the whole world in a few hours on Christmas Eve.

In a very little while they had left the snow lands and the deer swept from the ground and flew through the sky. On and on they went as the sun grew warmer and the earth beneath them ever greener.

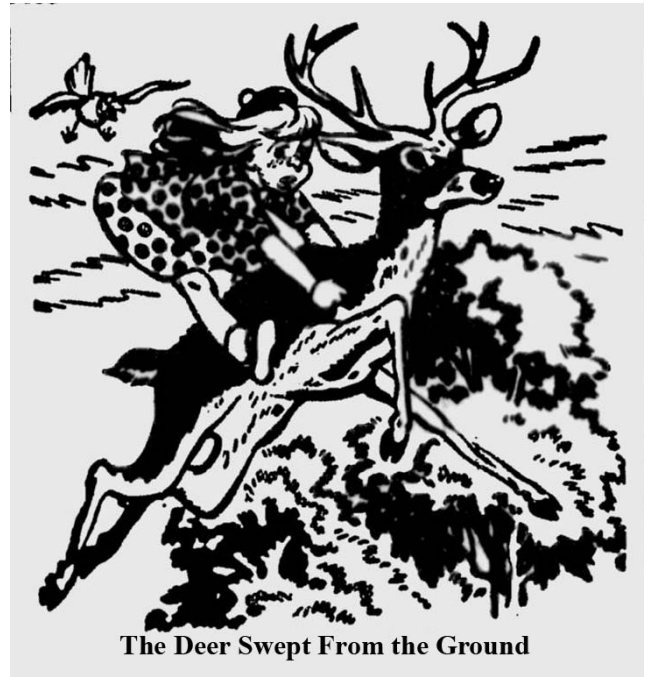
At last they reached the very middle of the globe and here the deer came to the earth. James sprang off and ran anxiously about searching for the well.

Very soon he came upon it - an ordinary looking well with a low stone wall around it. He pulled at the rope to draw up the bucket but it turned out to be not a bucket but a tiny chair!

James hesitated. Though he was a king he was also a very small boy and it is quite a frightening thing to think of traveling to the center of the earth.

But the sun was directly over head and he knew that in a few more hours it would set for the second time with the ring still on his finger. So, with thumping heart, he climbed into the chair.

Why, it was like an elevator! Slowly, slowly, it went down and James breathed easier when he discovered there was no water in the well. As he went deeper and deeper he kept peering overhead at the sky. At first it was several feet around but gradually it grew smaller until there was only a needle point of light and, finally, it, too, disappeared and there was only darkness.



The Deer Swept From the Ground

The little King was tired and after a while he fell asleep. When he woke the chair had come to a stop and the boy found himself sitting in a small rocky cave. In front of him were two blue lights. As he stared the lights moved towards him, closer and closer until they were right under his nose.

"What do you want?" crooned a rusty old voice from under the blue lights.

Then James realized that this was the Witch of Zanzell and the blue lights were her eyes. He was about to explain who he was when suddenly the cave rumbled, the air about him quivered, and a monstrous roaring filled the well. In an instant all was quiet again.

The voice under the blue lights cackled. "Merely the grumbling of the earth. Nice, isn't it?"

James swallowed with difficulty. "I - I don't like it."

"May I point out," said the voice coldly. "That I did not invite you here."

"Oh, no. I mean - oh, yes." stammered James hastily. "I mean - or, can you - will you - take off my ring?"

Chapter 7

THE WITCH MAKES A POTION

“What kind of a ring are you talking about?” asked the Witch of Zanzell when James begged her to remove it.

Quickly the boy explained how the ring had turned him into a girl and how he could never again be King of Morvania if the sun set five more times while the ring was on his finger.

It was difficult talking to the witch because all he could see were the two blue lights of her eyes. Suddenly he felt a bunch of dry bones taking his hand and he realized with horror that the bones were the hands of the Witch.

The two blue lights bent close to his finger and the rusty voice spoke. “It’s a very pretty ring and you make a very pretty girl. Why not stay that way?”

“Oh, no!” cried James, and he tried to tell her how he had always hated being king because his ministers ruled him but that now he had to get back because he had found that his ministers wore wicked and he must punish them and be a real king now.

“All that means nothing to me,” grumbled the witch indifferently. “Just a lot of talk talk.”

“But - you will take it off?”

“I will.”

The blue lights moved away and a great clattering of pots and pans began. Suddenly there was a tiny flame in the cave and for the first time James was able to see about him. The witch was indeed, a pile of bones, covered with skin. But the blue lights of her eyes faded as the fire she had kindled grew brighter.

The ancient creature laid a great iron cauldron on the fire and dumped into it certain things she found on her shelves. What things! Fish eyes and star dust. Apple cores and shredded rainbow. Rabbit’s fur and spring rain. Snakes’ scales and pressed forsythia.

Then she stirred and stirred and the fire grew hotter and the mixture bubbled and the steam filled the tiny cave till the sweat ran down the boy’s face and his knees grew weak. His stomach tightened and he was sick with the thought of drinking this magic potion which would disenchant him.

“I will do it.” he told himself harshly. “I will. I will.” And he closed his eyes and clenched his fists and repeated it over and over like some mystic formula of his own. “I will. I will.”

At last the stirring and mumbling stopped and the witch presented James with a bowl of thick black liquid. He took it resolutely in his hands. “Must - must I drink all of it?” he faltered.

“Demon’s fire!” shrieked the witch who was quite worn out with her Labors, “You don’t drink it! You soak your hand in it and the ring will slide off.”

James’ face lit with relief, He sat down and prepared to dip his hand in the liquid. “No! No!” cried the witch. “You must go

up and do it by the light of the setting sun. Be quick now. And careful, I used all of my spring rain in it and there won’t more until March.”

So James thanked her as best he could and returned to his little chair in the well shaft. Slowly the chair moved to the face of the earth. The sun was resting on top of the western mountains when James climbed out of the well.

“How good the witch is!” he thought happily as he placed the precious bowl on a rock and rolled back the sleeves of his red polka dot dress. “And how shall I ever thank Santa!”

But when he leaned down to cup his hand in the magic potion it had moved away!

Potion, bowl, and rock were traveling lickity-split across the field and, as the boy stared in horror, the bowl slid off and dumped the precious liquid into the thirsty ground



The Fire Grew Hotter and the Mixture Bubbled

Chapter 8

A TRIP ON A TURTLE

James threw himself on the ground and tried to wet his hand in the spilled liquid. But the dirt had swallowed it and scarcely turned damp. Meanwhile, the rock on which he had placed the bowl continued majestically across the field for it wasn't a rock at all but a turtle, 107 years old.

Never was there such tragic disappointment! The boy King could only bite hard on his lips for even though he had turned into a girl he would not let himself give way to a girl's tears. And while he stood despairing the sun slid behind the mountains and set for the second time since the enchantment began.

"What is to become of me?" he thought. "And what is to become of Mervania?" Thinking of Mervania he felt suddenly that he must return there at once for his ministers must be sick with worry over him and perhaps, after all, they would accept him as king even if he had to wear a dress and bonnet and golden curls all his life.

He ran to the turtle who had caused all the trouble and who was sitting now on the edge of the field. "How can I get to Mervania?" he asked. "Do you know the way?"

The turtle stuck out his head and nodded. "I know the way but it is far."

Then James couldn't help asking accusingly. "Why did you upset my bowl? How could you have done so cruel a thing?"

"Because I object to being taken for a rock," retorted the turtle. But he was quite softhearted really so he said, "However, I have some relatives in Mervania and will be glad to go there and take you. Hop on my back."

"B-but wouldn't it take an awfully long time?"

"Not at all," replied the turtle. "When I travel at night I travel very fast. People see turtles only in the daytime and so they imagine we are pokey. At night we are quite different. Hop on and see."

And James did see! By the light of the moon the turtle swept over the hills, through the fields, and across rivers while the boy King rocked on his hard shell back. When the sun came up the turtle deposited James at the gates of the palace of Mervania.

What excitement there was there! The outer gates stood open and men and women bustled through with an air of immense self importance. There were butchers carrying pigs on their shoulders; bakers with gigantic cakes; wine merchants with jugs of wine.

"Why they appear not to have missed me at all!" thought James. "Could it be possible no one yet knows I've gone?"

He approached one of the guards. "What is the excitement?" "Why," said the guard "Don't you know? Lord Potts is preparing for his coronation."

"Coronation! But - the King - I -"

"Lord Potts says the King has abdicated and disappeared and he himself is next in line and will be crowned on Christmas Eve."

"Let me in! Let me in!" cried James. "I am the King!"

"What's this?" cried the guard, taken by surprise. But James suddenly knew it was quite useless to argue. Turning away he ran up to a lady carrying great bolts of cloth.

"Let me help you?" he begged, planning to enter the palace as her assistant.

The lady, a dressmaker come to help with the coronation robes of Lord Potts, was glad enough to fill the child's arms with bolts of silk and velvet until his face was quite hidden from view.

"What a pity it is about the boy King," whispered the dressmaker anxious to gossip.



"Lord Potts will be Crowned on Christmas Eve"

"Oh, if only you knew," began James as he ran along behind her. But before he could say another word a strange hand reached from the shrubbery bordering the gates and tripped him. Bolts of silk and velvet went flying, the dressmaker shrieked, and the guard came running.

"I've heard about you!" he shouted. "Imagining yourself to be king! If you don't go away at once I'll arrest you and your head will come off!"

Chapter 9

MRS. CLAUS REMEMBERS SOME SCISSORS

The palace gates crashed shut and the poor King lay in the shrubbery where he had fallen. Before he could really catch his breath his old friend Hennepin stood before him.

"I'm sorry I had to trip you," apologized the bald headed gnome. "But, really, there's no point in your entering the palace. It's quite the wrong thing to do."

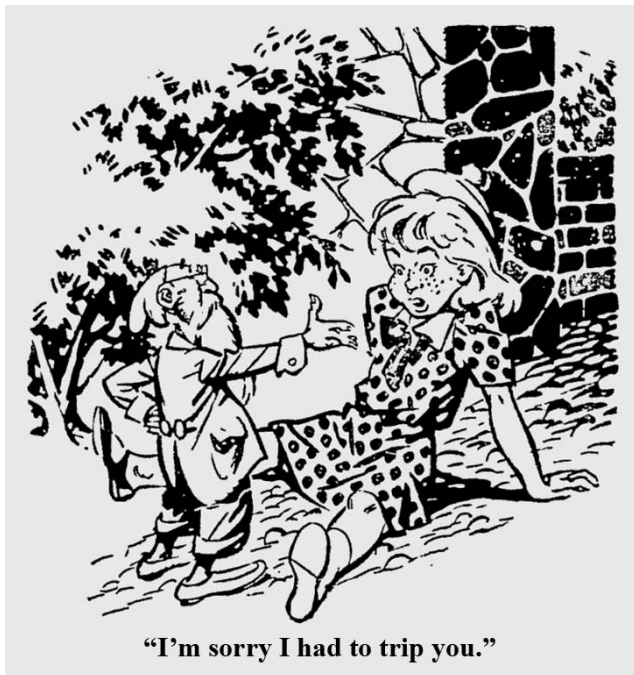
"But, if I could just get in I could tell Lord Potts of my enchantment and perhaps he could think of some way to break the spell!" cried James, and he was very annoyed with the gnome for tripping him just as he was about to get in with the dressmaker

"Lord Potts would never help you," retorted Hennepin. "He's so set on being crowned King that the last thing in the world he wants is to see you. Come now, tell me, wasn't Santa able to help you?"

Then James told the friendly gnome about his adventures with the Witch of Zanzell and about the spilling of the potion which was to soak off the ring.

"Well, never mind." comforted Hennepin. "You must return to Santa and see what he advises." And with that he pulled out his little box of pink pills and gave one to James. The boy ate it and again he felt into a deep sleep and when he woke he was once more in Santa Land.

"Why, here's that lovely little girl again!" cried Mrs. Claus who was quite forgetful and simply could not keep it straight in her mind whether James was a girl who was supposed to be a king or a boy who was supposed to be a girl or a king who was supposed to be a boy.



But when James turned away from the fairies, who were working on the dolls and jumping ropes and jack straws and looked yearningly towards the tables where marbles were being polished and wagons fitted and basketballs pumped up, she remembered about the ring and called Santa at once.

"What! Couldn't the Witch of Zanzell help you?" cried Santa.

So the boy told him of his adventures and the fairies stopped their work to listen and Mrs. Claus wept a little and Santa was very, very solemn.

Then an old dwarf pulled out a file and began filing at the magic ring on James' finger. But though he filed for thirty minutes not a speck of silver dust came off. Then fairies brought soap and water and soaped James' hand until the blood left the fingers but still the ring would not budge.

Finally Mrs. Claus said, "Come and get some lunch, my dear and we'll all feel better."

So unhappy was the poor king he felt he never wanted to eat again in all his life. But Santa took his hand and said laughing "If you don't eat a lot Mrs. Claus will think you really are a girl,"

So James sat down at Santa's table and began to eat. My! There were things he had never seen before, gingerbread with hip cream; blueberry pie a la mode; caramel cake with filling three inches thick and cream puffs and banana royals and chocolate eclairs.

When he was finished, Mrs. Claus said, "I never saw anyone eat like that before!"

"That's because you've never seen a King before," said Santa.

Suddenly Mrs. Claus said, "Child you have such lovely hair!"

James blushed for he hated to think of the curls the silver ring had given him. He said, "I wish you could cut them off!"

"I would," said Mrs. Claus. "But my scissors are very poor." She turned to Santa and complained. "If only you'd bought me those wonderful scissors we saw in the bazaar at Karoo last summer L could -"

Santa leaped from the table. "Those scissors!" he cried. "Didn't the clerk say they would cut anything?"

"Yes, indeed." remembered Mrs. Claus. "He said they could cut capers, cut down expenses and cut off a son without a shilling. Of course they could cut ordinary things, too, like -"

But neither James nor Santa were listening. They both had the same idea at once.

"Come, my boy," cheered Santa. "It is your one chance. Find the scissors of Karoo!"

Chapter 10

A BARGAIN WITH A FISHERMAN

Once again James mounted Santa's reindeer - a different one this time, for the first deer was resting after the trip to Zanzell. In an hour the deer lighted in the little resort town of Karoo. It was a place where tourists came in the summer and now that the land was covered with snow the streets were empty and few stores were open.

When he came to the bazaar where Mrs. Claus had seen the scissors for sale, James was stopped by a large sign which read: "Closed for the winter."

"What shall I do?" thought the boy miserably for it began to seem to him that all his efforts were in vain. But, just as he was about to turn away, a window on the second floor was flung open and an old man in night gown and sleeping cap peered out.

"What do you want?"

James hastily described the scissors he had come to buy. He had to shout very loud to be heard and half his words were carried away by the December wind.

"I know nothing of such scissors!" roared the man and banged down the window. But, in a second it was open again. "I remember them now," he cried. "I spend the winter sleeping and you are rude to wake me," he added irreverently.

"But the scissors?" shouted James. "May I buy them?"

"I don't know. I sold them to a politician. Perhaps he's finished with them. Name's Mooney."

He went to the city hail and found Mooney in an office surrounded by red tape. The boy climbed through the yards of tape and explained what he was after. The politician remembered them very well.



"I cleared all this land with those Magic Scissors"

"Wonderful things. I had cut down practically all the red tape in this office with them. Then my mother-in-law borrowed them and I haven't seen them since."

So James went to Mooney's mother-in-law but she had gone south for the winter. However the servants remembered the scissors.

"The mistress only used them to make unkind cuts," they said. "So the butler stole them and gave them away to the woodchopper who lives beyond the hills."

Wearily the boy King trudged to the woodchopper. He lived in a little cabin surrounded by empty lands. He welcomed the boy and proudly pointed out the cleared fields.

"Last year this was one large forest but I cleared all the land with those magic scissors."

"Are they truly so wonderful?" asked James. "Will they cut anything?"

"Then may I cut this ring?" asked James eagerly.

But the woodchopper shook his head. "I thought you knew. I sold the scissors to Marcel the Fisherman. Go to him. There is absolutely no doubt that he can cut off your ring with the scissors."

"It's the last time," thought the boy as he left the woodchopper and hurried back to the sea. "I do not think I can go much further." indeed he was tired and his heart was ready to break.

He found Marcel, the Fisherman, mending his nets beside the sea. "Do you have the scissors?" asked James, scarcely daring to hope any longer.

"I have them," replied Marcel shortly. "What is it to you?"

"Oh, if you'll only cut my ring"

"I have no time for that. When I finish these nets I must fill my basket with fish."

"But - It will take only a second! Please -"

"Why, what do you want?" faltered the boy.

"Fill my basket with fish and I'll cut your ring," bargained Marcel.

"Oh, certainly! And away James rushed to get the basket from the fish shed.

But what a basket! James turned pale as he stared at the enormous thing twelve feet high and twelve feet long and twelve feet wide.

Staring at it James felt his hopes die away. And at that very moment the sun sank into the ocean and the third day of the King's enchantment was over.

Chapter 11

FILLING THE BASKET

When the sun had set and Marcel the fisherman had gone home for the night there was nothing for the poor king to do but huddle beside the enormous basket and try to sleep.

The next morning he took the fishing lines which Marcel gave him and went to work. Hour after hour went by and at the end of the fourth hour he had caught 18 fish and the bottom of the basket was not half covered, - no, not even a quarter covered.

He went to Marcel and begged him to change his mind.

“A bargain is a bargain.” snapped the fisherman. “Do not bother me until the basket is full.” With that he got in a boat and rowed away to mend his nets a half mile off shore.

Poor James! Again and again he threw his line but hopelessness filled his heart and he knew that if he stood there fishing for a hundred days he could not fill the basket.

Suddenly there was the screeching of many birds and looking up the boy saw hundreds of sea gulls sweeping the sky darting to the water, landing on the beach, and frolicking in the waves.

“It’s a pretty sight, isn’t it?” inquired a pleasant voice. “Why, what’s the matter, little girl? You look very sad!”

James turned to find the cherubic face of a fat little dwarf peering quizzically at him.

“I have everything in the world to be sad about!”

“Sakes!” cried the dwarf. “How could that be? Surely so lovely a lass as yourself can find nothing but happiness in the world!”

“But you see, I am not lass at all!” Then James told the friendly dwarf all his troubles. “And you see,” he ended. “Though I have come so far and waited long the fisherman won’t let me cut the ring until the basket is full. How could anyone ever fill so large a basket?”

“Easy,” said the dwarf tranquilly. “I am the very one to help you.”

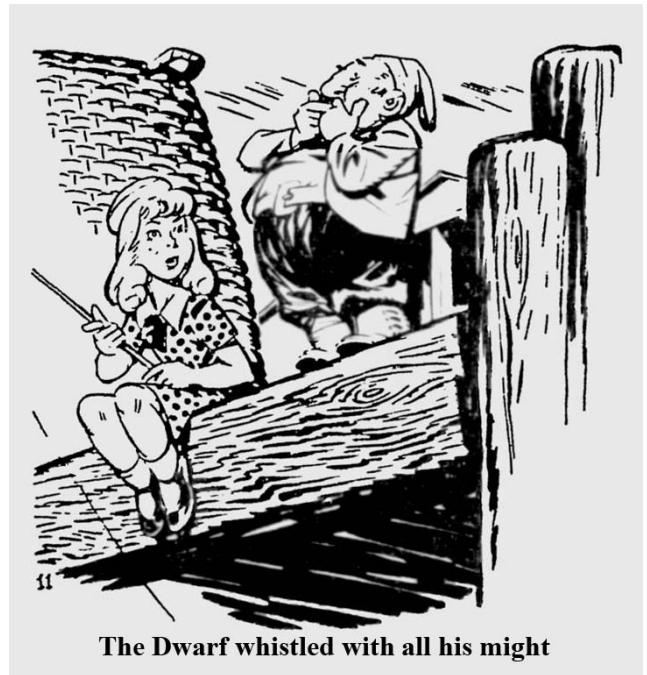
“Oh, can you fish?” asked James but not very hopefully because he felt that not even ten fishermen could fill the basket in time.

“Not I. But my gulls can.”

Then the dwarf whistled with all his might and before James’ astonished eyes the gulls left off their playing and gathered on the sand in quite orderly lines. The dwarf leaned forward and began speaking with many strange sounds, with whistles and squawks and harsh tones and now and then a whisper of incredible sweetness.

“What did you say to them?” cried James when the gulls suddenly took off from the beach, line after line of them, swinging gracefully into the air and out over the water.

“I told them to fill your basket,” explained the dwarf happily. “They will do anything for me, you see, because I am the only other creature in the world who speaks their language.”



The Dwarf whistled with all his might

And so it was! As James watched each gull darted into the waves, came up with a fish, flew to the beach and dropped it into the huge basket.

In less than an hour the basket was full! The boy King ran up and down on the beach so happy he could not bear to keep still.

“Come!” cried the dwarf, “Race to your fisherman and finish this business!” He pushed James into a dory and the boy took the oars and rowed eagerly out to sea.

“Have you given it up?” cried the fisherman as James approached.

“Yes,” replied James. “For the basket is full.”

“What! It can’t be!”

“But it is. And now, if you please, may I use your scissors?”

“Certainly, certainly,” agree the fisherman very pleased and astonished to have gotten so unexpected a haul of fish.

He leaned from his boat and passed the scissors to James. But at that very moment a small wave came between the boats so that when Marcel let go the scissors James’ hand was not there to get them and the scissors fell to the bottom of the sea.

Chapter 12

JAMES VISITS A GRAVEDIGGER

When the magic scissors fell to the bottom of the sea James wept and Marcel the fisherman wept, too, for underneath his toughness he was good of heart and was truly sorry for what had happened. He tried diving into the water but no matter how far he went he could not reach the bottom.

There was nothing now for him to do but return to Mervania. It was not so very far away and the dwarf who spoke the language of the gulls took the unhappy boy home by a short cut.

In mid-afternoon he stood once again by the palace gates but this time he did not even try to get in. "What is the use?" he thought bitterly. "They will only throw me out again." Besides he felt now that he could not bear to see them preparing to crown Lord Potts as the new king.

He looked about in the shrubbery for his old friend Hennepin and very soon found him sound asleep under a holly bush.

"What - again!" shouted the baldheaded gnome in astonishment. Then James related his adventures and the funny little creature could only shake his head and moan. "Truly, you are bewitched!"

Just at this moment a tall, narrow faced man approached James and Hennepin. "How sad you look," said the lean and hungry looking man. "One would think you were gravediggers, too."

"Are you a gravedigger?" asked Hennepin.

"Yes, I have been digging the grave for the little King."

"But, I am the little King!" cried James. "I am not dead at all! Only see -"

"Ha! ha! You joke but perhaps not so much as you think. They have done some strange things in the palace these few days but strangest of all is my digging grave for a boy that isn't there."

"Listen, gravedigger," said Hennepin. "Listen to my story." And he told the tall man the story of the enchanted King. Clearly the gravedigger did not believe a word of it but he admired the ring and would liked to have had it for himself.

"I can cut it off for you"

"Can you really?" gasped James. Oh, if only -"

"Come with me."

In a little while they entered a small shack by the river. It was dirty and disordered and there was an evil smell all about. The gravedigger motioned to his guests to be seated. They couldn't find anything to sit on so they stood by the door while the gravedigger sharpened a long narrow knife on a whetstone.

"Zzzz" when the knife on the stone and James' knees trembled and Hennepin's whiskers stood on end.

Suddenly the gravedigger reached out and grabbed the boy's skirts. "Lay your finger there," he directed holding James' wrist in a tight grip.

"What are you going to do?" whispered James, too frightened to speak out loud.

"Cut off your finger!"

"My finger!"

"Certainly. How else could I get off the ring?"

The mad gravedigger raised the knife over his head but just as he was about to bring it down a handful of white dust was flung in his eyes.

"Run, James, run!" cried Hennepin, leaping up and down and flinging more and more white dust at the gravedigger.

The crazy man released James and the boy and the gnome raced from the shack and never stopped running until they were once more under the holly bush at the palace gates.

"That was very close," said Hennepin gasping for breath. "Good thing I carry these things around with me. That was Star Dust. Our mad friend will see nothing but stars for a week."

He reached in his pocket and pulled out the box of familiar pink pills. "You must return to Santa Claus. And this is the last time for this is the last pill I have."

With a weary sigh James took the pill and swallowed it. As he fell asleep the sun set for the fourth time and there remained only two days more to break the enchantment.



"I'm going to cut off your finger"

THE GOLDEN DEED

Santa Land was bubbling with excitement when James arrived for the third time. It was only two days before Christmas and there was so much bustling that no one noticed James as he walked forlornly about in his red polka dot dress.

Santa's great red sleigh stood in the stables and while the stable brownies polished it, other brownies loaded it with dolls and scooters and skates and footballs and wagons. In the shops, elves and fairies worked frantically, putting finishing touches on bicycles and doll carriages and panda bears.

"It's always this way," grumbled Patrick Tweedleknives, the oldest dwarf in Santa Land. "Things are always put off to the last minute so that by Christmas day a creature is so tired he can't even digest his Christmas dinner!"

"Come now!" laughed Santa as he put a wonderful stuffed elephant in his bag. "If you ate less you would digest better!"

Then Santa saw James. He threw down his bag and held out his hands to the unhappy boy. "So! You didn't get the scissors after all."

James could only shake his head. He didn't have the heart to tell all his adventures. Mrs. Claus came over and hugged the little King. "Mercy me!" she reproached Santa. "Isn't there something you can do for this child?"

Santa took off his hat and rubbed his fingers through his hair. "It is a very stubborn enchantment. Only Mr. Tompkins himself could break it."

"Mr. Tompkins?" asked James, catching his breath. "Who is Mr. Tompkins?"



Lord Potts marched into the room

"He is the Master Magician of the world," explained Mrs. Claus. "He's a very close friend of ours but we see him only once every hundred years or so. He is so busy."

"Mr. Tompkins controls all the magic of the earth," said Santa. "If he wished he could stop even my reindeer from leaving the ground."

"And - would he help me?" cried James hardly daring to have hope again.

"It is very difficult. He lives in the Land of Cigam and to even enter the land you must present a Golden Deed at the gate."

"A Golden Deed? What would that be?"

"That is the difficulty for time is short and you are very small. What good deed could you do which would shine at the Gates of Cigam?"

"Would a good deed be something to make people happier?" asked James shakily.

"That would be it."

"Well, then," cried James eagerly. "I know what I shall do! I shall tear down the three walls of the Palace of Mervania so that forever afterwards my people can come in as they please and I myself shall mix with them and know what is in their hearts."

Santa clapped his hands. "Go at once! There could be no better deed than that!"

So James returned to Mervania. He stopped at a pastry shop in the town and bought 17 pies from the astonished clerk. Then with the pies stacked house high he marched to the palace gates.

"I am delivering pies for the feast," he announced with great authority.

Fortunately, there were new guards who had never seen him before and they let him in at once. With pounding heart he passed through the three gates of the three walls and entered the palace.

He went straight to the official chamber where all royal business was transacted. There was no one to be seen as Lord Potts and his ministers were busy trying on their coronation robes in their own rooms.

Quickly James deposited the pies on the floor and then climbed into the carved chair before the great desk where he had signed so many royal laws before he had been turned into a girl.

He drew out a sheet of parchment and taking up the royal quill he wrote:

"I hereby order all court carpenters to begin work immediately tearing clown all walls surrounding the palace.

James, the King."

He took his own seal from the desk drawer and pressed it beside his signature.

Then he dropped the order into the mail slot which would carry it to the proper place.

As the slot closed there was a sound of footsteps, the door was flung open and Lord Potts marched into the room.

Chapter 14

THE CHASE

“What are you doing here?” roared Lord Potts glaring at the child in the red polka-dot dress who dared enter the royal offices of the palace.

James caught his uncle’s hand. “Don’t you recognize me?” he pleaded. “I am James. Your nephew. The King. I have been bewitched. I -”

Lord Potts flung off the child angrily. “What madness is this?” he snorted. “The King is dead. Or run away. Or something. At any rate he has disappeared. Tomorrow night I shall be crowned King at the Christmas Festival. In the meantime, kindly explain your joke.”

“It is no joke! This ring I am wearing has turned me into a girl but by tomorrow I shall have it off. You must stop your coronation plans at once!”

Lord Potts stared at the boy. Then he went to the door and shouted furiously for the palace servants. Six of them came running into the chamber and knelt respectfully before his Lordship.

“Imprison this impertinent child!” ordered Lord Potts. “This is what comes of letting the townspeople stand about the gates. When I am King the people will be kept in their proper places.”

“Yes, my Lord,” agreed one of the servants and kindly laid a hand on the arm of the sweet and gentle looking James.

Then what a typhoon the sweet and gentle child became. His fists swung out knocking the astonished servant off his feet. With head bent the little King charged across the chamber and butted Lord Potts square in the stomach. The other servants ran forward and encircled him but the boy dropped to his knees and plunged between their legs. He darted to the door and in another instant was racing down the hall.

“Get her.” shrieked Lord Potts, holding his aching stomach. “I’ll have your heads if you don’t catch her!”

The servants raced off. “Help! Help!” they screamed as they swept through the corridors only just managing to keep the fleeing King in sight.

Other servants joined the chase, and the guards and all the ministers of the court, and all were convinced they were pursuing a demon for who could ever imagine a little girl would have such strength in her arms and such swiftness in her legs?

The boy King knew every chamber, every closet, every inch of the place. He slammed doors behind him, threw chairs in the way of his pursuers, climbed through windows, leaped onto balconies, reentered through different windows.

As he came to the wide marble stairway leading to the great hall below, the heel of one of his tight patent leather slippers broke and tripped him. He staggered and fell to the floor. His pursuers raced forward.



“We have her! Snatch her! Snatch her!” screamed Lord Potts.

But just as a dozen pair of hands reached for his dress; the little King sprang up, jumped astride the marble banister and with his red polka-dot dress ballooning over his head went, zipping down.

But, alas! At the very bottom of the steps stood the court cook - come to see what all the noise was about. There was no way out: the poor King landed right in the arms of the only man in the court who had ever been truly his friend.

“Lock her up! I’ll see to her punishment tomorrow!” roared Lord Potts whose dignity had been very badly hurt by the chase.

So lock the little King up they did and the guards and the servants and the ministers retired in groups to catch their breaths and wonder aloud at the remarkable speed of such a little girl.

“It is all over now,” thought the boy in despair.

The daylight grew dim in his prison cell and he saw through the barred window that the sun was setting on the fifth clay of his enchantment.

“Only one more day,” he cried bitterly. “And no one in all my Kingdom to help me.”

Chapter 15

HELP COMES

The little King sat in the dark cell, sad and weary. "There is nothing more I can do," he thought "My kingdom is gone and I shall be a girl forever more."

At that very moment the prison door opened and his old friend and palace cook entered carrying a candle in one hand and a bowl of milk in the other.

"They have sent you milk," said the cook. "And I have brought it myself for I am sorry that I should have been the one to catch you as you came zooming down the banisters."

"Oh, cook" blurted James. "Don't you know me? I am James, your King. Don't you remember the times you gave me doughnuts in the kitchen and the times you brought me milk and raisin cookies after I went to bed?"

The cook started, "They do say you're queer," he faltered. "And imagine yourself to be the King. But I think to myself - how could the girl know such things if there were not something to her claim?"

"It's true! Listen to me, this is the truth" And, with tears in his eyes, he told the cook how five days before he had slipped away from the palace to play outside the gates, how he had found the magic ring and been turned into a girl, and how he was on his way to the Master Magician to have the spell broken.

"Get me out of here," he begged. "And by tomorrow night I shall be back - your rightful King."

"And suppose the spell isn't broken," said the cook. "What then? "



"Then I shall come back anyway and let you lock me up again. For there would be nothing else for me in all the world."

"It could be done," said the cook slowly. He did not quite believe the strange tale but he didn't dare to wholly disbelieve it.

"Upstairs the palace is a madhouse. The court carpenters claim to have received an order to tear down the palace walls and they are doing it while Lord Potts and the others are raging and threatening to take off everybody's head. There is such confusion - you could slip out easily. Yes, yes, it could be done. Come! Follow me."

So it happened that the boy was sneaked out of the palace and by sunrise stood at the Ivy covered gates of Cigam.

Now Cigam is Magic spelled backwards and it is the land where all the magic of the world is invented, The Master is a kindly little man in a derby hat named Mr. Tompkins and if it were not for Mr. Tompkins there would be no such things as wishing wells, love charms, or magic potions.

James stood at Cigam and begged the Keeper of the Gates to let him in.

"You cannot enter here without showing a Golden Deed!"

"But, I have one!" cried James eagerly. "I have ordered the three walls surrounding the palace of Mervania to be torn down so that the people can be a part of the palace and the ruler a part of the people"

"Enter, then," said the Keeper and he opened the gates and pointed out to James the house of the Master Magician.

As he walked the winding path to the house the boy had to stop again and again to stare at the strange lights of Cigam. There was a fat and jolly man pumping at a gigantic pipe which rose 500 feet into the sky.

"I am a Cloud Maker," explained the man. I can blow all kinds of clouds - any kind Mr. Tompkins may order for the day."

James stared in astonishment at the puffy white blobs of cloud that came from the end of the pipe and floated over the world.

Next to the Cloud Maker was the Rain Maker. And next to him the Designer of Rainbows. And then came the Snow Maker. And so on,

But when James came at last to Mr. Tompkins' door he received his worst disappointment of all.

Mr. Tompkins was not at home! "He will not return until after sunset" said Mrs. Tompkins, not dreaming that for James it would be the sixth time and therefore forever too late.

Chapter 16

THE SUN KEEPER

It was really too much! To have come so far, through so many crushing disappointments, and now, at the last hour, to find Mr. Tompkins away until after sunset.

“You see,” explained Mrs. Tompkins kindly as she led James into the Master Magician’s house. “It is Christmas Eve and Mr. Tompkins has a very busy day arranging that all the stockings which will be hung by the chimneys tonight will stretch wide enough and long enough to hold all the toys Santa will bring.”

She smiled at James and patted his hand. “I imagine Santa will bring you a lovely china doll - with blue eyes and perhaps real yellow curls. How happy you will be!”

“Oh no! You see, I’m not a girl at all,” cried James desperately. “I’m a boy and I’m really a king. And I – oh, if only you could help me!” Then he told her of the magic ring on his finger and how Mr. Tompkins must remove it before sunset or it would be too late.



“Dear me,” exclaimed Mrs. Tompkins in distress, “I do know that ring. There is only one like it in the world and it is true. If it is worn six days it will be worn forever and not even Mr. Tompkins could get it off. It was meant to be worn by a boy who really wanted to become a girl. How terrible you should have found it!”

She walked about in great agitation, clicking her tongue and shaking her head. “My husband could take it off at once if he were only here now,” she murmured distractedly. “He has only to press a button in his office. But which button I don’t know and besides he has the key to his office.”

“Tell me.” begged James. “Where has he gone? I could try to find him.”

“Yes, go look. He is somewhere in Cigam. He never leaves the land. But where he is exactly I cannot say.”

So James ran from the house and raced from one end of Cigam to the other but no trace could he find of Mr. Tompkins, nor could he find anyone who had seen him. The sun climbed to the top of the heavens and then began its slow descent and suddenly the distracted boy saw that the end of the day was very nearly at hand.

“What shall I do? What shall I do?” he cried returning to Mrs. Tompkins.

“He is coming now! I see him far down the road!” exclaimed Mrs. Tompkins who was standing on the porch gazing through a spy glass. “But he will never be here in time. Run, child! Run to the sunkeeper. Beg him to keep back the sun.”

The boy darted next door then to the sunkeeper’s house - or, rather, shop - for it was an extraordinary place of many levers and pulleys and cranks and turn-styles, - and all windows with no roof at all.

“Please, sir,” cried James bursting into the shop. “Please hold back the sun - just for a few seconds- - until Mr. Tompkins gets home!”

The sunkeeper’s face was as red almost as the sun itself, it was round, too, and very kind.

“Great day!” he exclaimed. “It’s time now to slip her down beyond the hills. Whatever would people say if the sun suddenly stood still in the sky? And what about the people on the other side of the earth who are waiting for the sun rise?”

“But, it will be only a minute!” begged James, nearly breathless with his effort. “Mr. Tompkins is coming now!”

The sunkeeper glanced at the great clock on the wall whose hands clearly pointed to sunset time. Then he yanked down a lever and James trembled with joy to see the great red sun stand still on the horizon.

Quickly the sunkeeper snatched up the telephone and called the cloud maker. “Let’s have lots of clouds.” he roared, “Dark ones and quickly, too!”

In another instant huge puffs of stormy clouds raced across the horizon and in a very short time the sun was hidden so that the peoples of the world thought it was night time after all.

“I can hold it five minutes,” said the keeper. “At the end of that time no power on this earth can keep her from setting.”

“It’s long enough!” cried James joyously. “For here comes Mr. Tompkins now!”

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

“Don’t say anything,” cried Mr. Tompkins when James reached him. “I know it all. How much time has the sunkeeper given us?”

“Five minutes!” gasped James. The two of them raced into the house where they were joined by Mrs. Tompkins. The old magician snatched out his keys, unlocked his office door and stood for a moment gazing at a multitude of push buttons which covered the four walls.

“This is it,” he said at last and, reaching out, he firmly pressed one button among the thousands.

While he held his finger on the button, a part of the magic of the world came to a halt; the nightingale ceased to sing; ghosts stopped their haunting; magic carpets left the skyways.

And the ring on James finger lost its power.

With a single tug the boy pulled it off. The red polka-dot dress vanished, the long yellow curls became short and crisp, the patent leather slippers became boy’s boots; the little King was back again.

And just in time for even as Mr. Tompkins withdrew his finger from the button, the sun slipped, at last, into the hills.

Then the little boy did a strange thing. He burst into tears! But they were tears of joy and relief. They lasted only a moment and were, perhaps, the last tears he would shed for his life long.

“Listen, now,” murmured Mr. Tompkins gently. “What do you hear far off in the sky?”

“Bells!” whispered James. “Far - far away!”

Mr. Tompkins nodded, “Santa Claus is coming. Christmas Eve is here.”

Yes, it was Christmas Eve and Santa was making an early start on his long journey around the whole wide world. But first he had come to pick up James.

“Come,” he said, “I will return you to your kingdom and that will mean a merry Christmas for Mervania.”

So James huddled beside Santa in the great red sleigh, the silver bells jingled, and away they spread through the night sky.

And what was happening in Mervania at this very moment? Confusion! Terrible confusion.

Lord Potts was splendidly arrayed for his coronation but everything was going wrong. The bricklayers and carpenters were tearing down the three walls of the palace insisting they had orders from James the King. And the townspeople who had heard the strange story were climbing the crumbling walls and shouting aloud for their rightful King into this madness came the twinkling of Santa’s silver bells. Out of the sky came the great red sleigh. And out of the sleigh stepped James.

His heart nearly burst to see the people - His people - and hear them shout his name so joyously. He wanted to tell them how different things would be for them now, how he was going to be a real King and look out for them and live for them alone.

But all he could say was, “Thank you.”

Then Lord Potts, so stunned and so ashamed, knelt before the King and begged his forgiveness. And James said, “Of course. But you must leave the palace now and live and work like other people.” Then he told the other ministers they must do the same. “From now on the people themselves will be my ministers,” he said.

The Santa Claus pulled a great bag packed with gifts from his sleigh and tossed it into the Courtyard.

The people cheered - oh, how they cheered! And Santa shouted to his reindeer to take off and away he went calling gaily from his sleigh:

“A Merry Christmas to All! Oh, a Merry Christmas to all!”

THE END



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