The journey of Blondine lasted, as the Tortoise had said, six months. They were three months passing through the forest. At the end of that time she found herself on an arid plain which it required six weeks to cross. Then Blondine perceived a castle which reminded her of that of Bonne-Biche and Beau-Minon. They were a full month passing through the avenue to this castle.

Blondine burned with impatience. Would she indeed learn the fate of her dear friends at the palace? In spite of her extreme anxiety, she dared not ask a single question. If she could have descended from the back of the Tortoise, ten minutes would have sufficed for her to reach the castle. But, alas! the Tortoise crept on slowly and Blondine remembered that she had been forbidden to alight or to utter a word. She resolved, therefore, to control her impatience. The Tortoise seemed rather to relax than to increase her speed. She consumed fourteen days still in passing through this avenue. They seemed fourteen centuries to Blondine. She never, however, lost sight of the castle or of the door. The place seemed deserted; she heard no noise, she saw no sign of life.

At last, after twenty-four days' journey, the Tortoise paused, and said to Blondine:—

“Now, princess, descend. By your courage and obedience you have earned the recompense I promised. Enter
the little door which you see before you. The first person you will meet will be the fairy Bienveillante and she
will make known to you the fate of your friends.”

Blondine sprang lightly to the earth. She had been immovable so long she feared her limbs would be cramped
but on the contrary she was as light and active as when she had lived so happily with her dear Bonne-Biche and
Beau-Minon and ran joyously and gracefully gathering flowers and chasing butterflies.

After having thanked the Tortoise most warmly she opened the door which had been pointed out to her and
found herself before a young person clothed in white, who asked in a sweet voice, whom she desired to see?

“I wish to see the fairy Bienveillante. Tell her, I pray you, miss, that the princess Blondine begs earnestly to see
her without delay.”

“Follow me, princess”, replied the young girl.

Blondine followed in great agitation. She passed through several beautiful rooms and met many young girls
clothed in white, like her guide. They looked at her as if they recognized her and smiled graciously.

At last Blondine arrived in a room in every respect resembling that of Bonne-Biche in the Forest of Lilacs. The
remembrances which this recalled were so painful that she did not perceive the disappearance of her fair
young guide.

Blondine gazed sadly at the furniture of the room. She saw but one piece which had not adorned the apartment
of Bonne-Biche in the Forest of Lilacs. This was a wardrobe in gold and ivory, exquisitely carved. It was closed.
Blondine felt herself drawn towards it in an inexplicable manner. She was gazing at it intently, not having
indeed the power to turn her eyes away, when a door opened and a young and beautiful woman, magnificently
dressed, entered and drew near Blondine.

“What do you wish, my child?” said she, in a sweet, caressing voice.

“Oh, madam!” said Blondine, throwing herself at her feet, “I have been assured that you could give me news of
my dear, kind friends, Bonne-Biche and Beau-Minon. You know, madam, without doubt by what heedless
disobedience I gave them up to destruction and that I wept for them a long time, believing them to be dead but
the Tortoise, who conducted me here, has given me reason to hope I may one day see them again. Tell me,
madam, tell me if they yet live and if I may dare hope for the happiness of rejoining them?"

“Blondine”, replied the fairy Bienveillante, sadly, “you are now about to know the fate of your friends, but no matter what you see or hear, do not lose courage or hope.”

Saying these words, she seized the trembling Blondine and conducted her in front of the wardrobe which had already so forcibly attracted her attention.

“Blondine, here is the key to this wardrobe. Open it, and be brave!”

She handed Blondine a gold key. With a trembling hand the princess opened the wardrobe. What was her anguish when she saw the skins of Bonne-Biche and Beau-Minon fastened to the wardrobe with diamond nails! At this terrible sight the unfortunate princess uttered a cry of horror and fell insensible at the feet of the fairy. At this moment the door opened and a prince, beautiful as the day, sprang towards Blondine, saying:—

“Oh, my mother! this is too severe a trial for my sweet Blondine!”

“Alas! my son, my heart also bleeds for her. But you know that this last punishment was indispensable to deliver her for ever from the yoke of the cruel genius of the Forest of Lilacs.”

The fairy Bienveillante now with her wand touched Blondine, who was immediately restored to consciousness but despairing and sobbing convulsively, she exclaimed:—

“Let me die at once! My life is odious to me! No hope, no happiness, from this time forth for ever for poor Blondine! My friends! my cherished friends! I will join you soon in the land of shadows!”

“Blondine! ever dear Blondine!” said the fairy, clasping her in her arms, “your friends live and love you tenderly. I am Bonne-Biche and this is my son, Beau-Minon. The wicked genius of the Forest of Lilacs, taking advantage of the negligence of my son, obtained dominion over us and forced us into the forms under which you have known us. We could not resume our natural appearance unless you should pluck the Rose, which I, knowing it to be your evil genius, retained captive. I placed it as far as possible from the castle in order to withdraw it from your view. I knew the misfortune to which you would be exposed on delivering your evil genius from his prison and Heaven is my witness, that my son and I would willingly have remained a Hind and a Cat for ever in your eyes in order to spare you the cruel tortures to which you have been subjected. The Parrot
gained you over, in spite of all our precautions. You know the rest, my dear child. But you can never know all
that we have suffered in witnessing your tears and your desolation.”

Blondine embraced the Fairy ardently and addressed a thousand questions to her.

“What has become of the gazelles who waited upon us so gracefully?”

“You have already seen them, dear Blondine. They are the young girls who accompanied you. They also were
changed when the evil genius gained his power over us.”

“And the good white cow who brought me milk every day?”

“We obtained permission from the Queen of the Fairies to send you this light refreshment. The encouraging
words of the Crow came also from us.”

“You, then, madam, also sent me the Tortoise?”

“Yes, Blondine. The Queen of the Fairies, touched by your repentance and your grief, deprived the Evil Genius
of the Forest of all power over us on condition of obtaining from you one last proof of submission, compelling
you to take this long and fatiguing journey and inflicting the terrible punishment of making you believe that
my son and I had died from your imprudence. I implored, entreated the Queen of the Fairies to spare you at
least this last anguish but she was inflexible.”

Blondine gazed at her lost friends, listened eagerly to every word and did not cease to embrace those she had
feared were eternally separated from her by death. The remembrance of her dear father now presented itself.
The prince Parfait understood her secret desire and made it known to his mother, the fairy Bienveillante.

“Prepare yourself, dear Blondine, to see your father. Informed by me, he now expects you.”

At this moment, Blondine found herself in a chariot of gold and pearls, the fairy Bienveillante seated at her
right hand, and the prince Parfait at her feet, regarding her kindly and tenderly. The chariot was drawn by four
swans of dazzling whiteness. They flew with such rapidity, that five minutes brought them to the palace of
King Benin. All the court was assembled about the king, all were expecting the princess Blondine.

When the chariot appeared, the cries of joy and welcome were so tumultuous that the swans were confused
and almost lost their way. Prince Parfait, who guided them, succeeded in arresting their attention and the chariot drew up at the foot of the grand stairway. King Benin sprang towards Blondine who, jumping lightly from the chariot, threw herself in her father's arms. They remained a long time in this position and everybody wept tears of joy.

When King Benin had somewhat recovered himself he kissed, respectfully and tenderly, the hand of the good fairy who, after having protected and educated the princess Blondine had now restored her to him. He embraced the prince Parfait whom he found most charming.

There were eight resplendent gala days in honor of the return of Blondine. At the close of this gay festival, the fairy Bienveillante announced her intention of returning home. But Prince Parfait and Blondine were so melancholy at the prospect of this separation that King Benin resolved they should never quit the place. He wedded the fairy and Blondine became the happy wife of Prince Parfait who was always for her the Beau-Minon of the Forest of Lilacs.

Brunette, whose character had entirely changed, came often to see Blondine. Prince Violent, her husband, became more amiable as Brunette became more gentle and they were very happy.

As to Blondine, she had no misfortunes, no griefs. She had lovely daughters, who resembled her, and good and handsome sons, the image of their manly father, Prince Parfait. Everybody loved them and every one connected with them was happy ever after.

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