

Sweet Pea and Sweet William

Wilbur Herschel Williams

English

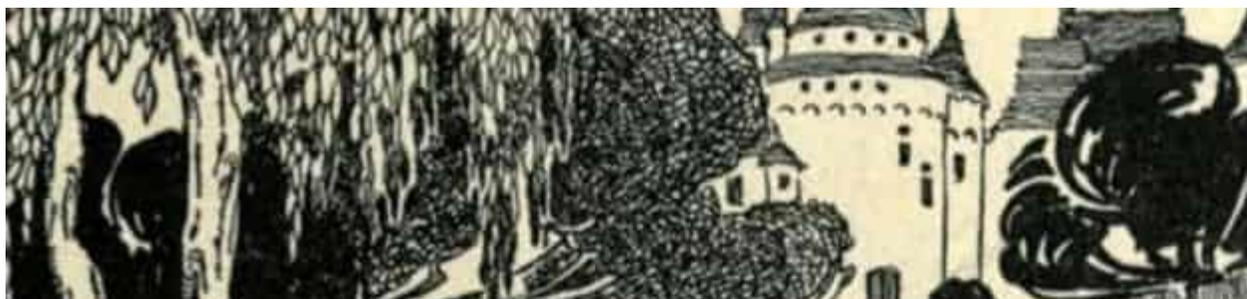
Intermediate
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At one time “Merrie England” was filled with fairies and other sprightly beings. They were so numerous and so powerful that they could do whatsoever they wished with the people that lived there. Even the nobility suffered from their strange pranks, and several instances have been recorded where they changed the destinies of Princes and Princesses as well as of Kings and Queens. Yet these fairies could do no lasting harm, and the good deeds they did far exceeded in number their mischievous acts.

The Duchess of Cornwall, who was a very fashionable lady, suffered so many annoyances from the hands of these mysterious creatures, that she spent most of her time upon the water.

One day she entertained a party of ladies in her boat on Lake Dozmaree. The Duchess, who was a great mischief as well as a great talker, sat knitting at one end of the boat. Frequently she would thrust one of her knitting-needles into the lake, saying that she wanted to see how deep the water was.

When the boat had reached the middle of the lake, a man with the body of a fish, and with long hair hanging about his flat face and hiding his fishy eyes, caught hold of the boat and splashed water all over the merry-makers.



“Wicked woman!” he cried. Illustration by M.H. Squire, published in *Fairy Tales from Folk Lore* by Wilbur Herschel Williams (1908), Moffat, Yard, and Company.

“Wicked woman!” he cried, leering at the Duchess, as he rocked the boat all the ladies were deathly sick. “With thy knitting-needles thou hast poked out the eyes of my wife and all my children. Because thou hast been so thoughtless, in thy efforts to be funny, I will bewitch thy son. In the future he shall not be able to do as he wishes, but shall do the contrary. If he wishes to eat, he will go to sleep; if he wishes to laugh, he will cry; if he wishes to rest, he will turn somersaults. I cannot alter his heart, but I can make him go against all that his good heart prompts him to do. It will serve thee right for thy carelessness.”

The creature vanished, and at the same time the ladies heard a plaintive noise, as if a colony of mussels and oysters were crying and lamenting. The Duchess, in great alarm, hurried back to the castle to see her little son, who was two years old. She had named him Sweet William, because he was such a pretty, modest, and lovable child.

She bade the nurse bring him to her at once. When he saw his mother, the boy wanted to show his affection; but the wicked creature at the bottom of the lake had bewitched him. When his mother asked him for a kiss, he struck her; when she begged him to say that he was sorry, he declared that he would do it again; and when she told him to go to bed, he crawled into the big chest in the butler’s pantry. Never had a child acted so unbecomingly, and never was there one that became more unpopular than Sweet William.

On that same day the King of England had an experience that caused even more unhappiness than that which the poor Duchess was compelled to endure. He was hunting in the wood, when he became separated from the rest of his party. Tired and hungry, he sat down upon a grassy mound, and took a cold chicken from his wallet.

“How nice it is to be alone!” he said to himself. “Now I can eat in peace. It will be great sport to have my men search all about for me, and they will show great appreciation when they find me.”

The King ate his lunch; but when a hungry person eats his dinner alone, he is not so apt to be polite as he is when others are watching him. He ate the cold chicken in a few minutes, throwing the bones on the grass.

Suddenly a queer little woman, who was a pixy not more than a foot tall, stood before him, shaking a stick in his face. The King, who had never known what it was to see anyone behave in such a manner in his presence, was more amused than shocked.

“Why are you so angry?” he asked, beginning to laugh.

“I will teach you a lesson in manners!” she shrieked at the top of her voice. “Why did you throw bones at my children? One of them is crippled for life, another has a broken head, and the rest are badly bruised.”

“I am very sorry,” said the King, much astounded.

“You are sitting upon my house, and I hope you will go away at once,” she resumed. “It is a shame that my little ones cannot play in the grass without being pelted by chicken bones hurled at them by a big, rude King.”

The Ruler of England hastily rose from his comfortable seat, and, to his surprise saw that the grassy mound was a sod house with tiny doors and windows. “I beg your pardon, my good woman,” said the King, very much humiliated.

“Fy upon you!” cried the pixy, still brandishing her stick. “I will bewitch your daughter that has just been born at St. James’s Palace. You shall never see her until she is about to be given in marriage, and she shall be reared by a poor shepherd.”

The King, whose feeling of amusement had died away, blew his bugle, and soon all his companions came to his assistance. He told them what the pixy had said, and turned to point out the sod house; but it had disappeared. The pixy had vanished also, and all that could be heard were the plaintive cries of crickets.

When they reached the palace, a herald came riding forth to meet them. “This is an unhappy day for your Majesty,” he groaned, bowing before the King. “An hour ago a little daughter came to your palace, but hardly had the glad tidings been made public, when she was stolen. We have searched the palace from the battlements to the moat, even looking into the cupboards and linen closets, but nowhere can she be found.

The Royal Squires are scouring the country to find a trace of her.”

Great was the grief of the King when he saw his poor wife, who was weeping bitterly. He told her of his experience in the wood, and she seemed relieved. “I knew that she was stolen by the elves,” she said; “but now I

am comforted to know that she will be well cared for and will live to marry” —

“A wood-chopper, probably,” interrupted the King. “What would England land do, if the husband of its future Queen turned out to be a low, common woodsman?”

Meanwhile the little Princess was sailing through the air, well guarded by a party of elves, who were friends of the pixy that lived in the wood. High above the church steeples they flew, on and on over flat moorlands and mountains to the hut of a shepherd, where they swiftly descended, at last dropping their precious burden into a pan of peas.

A good old woman, who was shelling the peas, half asleep, jumped up and cried out in surprise, when she saw a pink baby in her lap. At first she thought that the tiny visitor had come from one of the pods she was opening; and never was a woman more surprised.

“Father, father!” she cried. “Look at the sweet baby that came to me while I was shelling peas! Bless her dear little heart; she shall be our daughter.”

The old shepherd was equally delighted and beamed with happiness when his good wife stopped her work to make odd little garments for the baby to wear.

“And what shall we name her?” he asked.

“There is only one suitable name in all the kingdom for our little daughter, and that is Sweet Pea,” chuckled the good old woman.

So the Princess was reared by the shepherd and his wife, and learned to tend sheep as well as any mountaineer in the country round. Although the good old couple could not afford to buy her many pretty things, they taught her many beautiful lessons of love and sacrifice that possibly she would never have learned in the palace. At night she would read and study, trying to improve her mind as best she could.

Meanwhile Sweet William, although kind at heart, was the worst behaved lad in all England. Not one of the noble maidens liked him, for it is said that when he courted a lass, he would call her a horse or some other animal instead of calling her a dear. When he tried to dance, he would stand on his head; when he meant to smile sweetly, he would make ugly faces; and when he went to shake hands with his mother's guests, he would box their ears instead. Everyone but his mother believed that he was crazy.

One night the beautiful fairy Morgana, who always favored the Cornish people, came to the Duchess and whispered: "Scatter fern-seed on the waters of Lake Dozmaree; it is good for blind eyes."

The next day the Duchess and all her ladies went to the wood and gathered ferns. Then they rubbed them between their hands, and took the seed to the lake. When they were in the 'midst of it, they sprinkled the seed upon the water.

Immediately, the man who was half fish rose from the water and leaned over the boat.

"Because thou hast healed the eyes of my family and restored their sight, I will reward thee," he said to the Duchess. "Thy son shall soon be in manner what he is in heart — but not until he is married."

The Duchess felt very much relieved. So she sent her son to school and later to the Court of St. James, where he could learn good manners and in every way become fitted to rule the Duchy of Cornwall when his father should pass away.

The King had great patience with Sweet William, although the lad slept during dinner and wanted to eat after he had gone to bed. Whenever Sweet William made up his mind to say nothing, but to sit quiet, so as not to make himself ridiculous, all at once he would begin to sing and turn handsprings.

One day a strange thing happened to Sweet Pea as she was eating her lunch in the pasture. She took an egg from her pail and neatly cut off the ends with a sharp knife. Then she took the delicate skin that lined the egg and made it into a tiny jacket.

She had just finished her pleasant task when she heard a loud, cackling laugh. At the same time the little pixy woman appeared, evidently much pleased about something.

"Give me those two shells, that I may use them for porridge bowls," she said.

“Certainly,” replied Sweet Pea, “and here is a tiny jacket that possibly might fit one of your little ones.”

“Thank you,” cried the pixy, much delighted. “It will fit my youngest child, and, indeed, he should feel honored to wear a garment made by the future Queen of England.”

“I will come every day and make you porridge bowls and jackets” said Sweet Pea, who was always eager to help others.

“Because you have done this, I will tell you who you really are,” said the pixy, advancing another step. “You are not a shepherd’s child, but the daughter of the King. Here comes your future husband, who is the heir of the Duke of Cornwall. He is bewitched, so pay no heed to what he may say or do.”

At that moment Sweet William came riding along. When he saw Sweet Pea, he was bewildered by her beauty.

“Good morning,” he said, doffing his hat. “Never before have I seen such an ugly face or such awkward manners.”

“Good morning, sir,” replied Sweet Pea. “I was thinking the same about yourself.”

He leapt from his horse and came close to Sweet Pea, gazing at her with pleading eyes. At that moment his hounds began to chase the girl’s sheep, and a great commotion followed. Instead of calling off his dogs, he made them run down and kill every sheep in the flock.

“Alas! your hounds have killed all my sheep, and my poor father and mother will have no money to keep them through the winter,” cried the girl, her eyes filled with tears. “Unless you pay for the loss of their sheep, I will report you to the King.”

“I am extremely glad that they killed your sheep,” said Sweet William, turning a somersault. “I will not pay for the damage that my hounds have done, for they were certainly justified in killing your sheep.”

After rudely pulling the girl’s hair, he mounted his horse and rode away. Sweet Pea was so vexed at his conduct that she went to her home, dressed herself in her best gown, and rode on horseback to the palace of the King. She had much difficulty in getting to see him, for the guards thought that she was a beggar.

When the King saw the slender maiden standing before him, so pretty and modest, her face flushed with embarrassment and her long lashes half concealing her eyes, he became very much interested in her; and when

he had heard how one of his men had been wantonly rude to her and had made his hounds kill her sheep, he was very angry, indeed.

“I did not mean to complain to your Majesty,” she said with a low bow, “but I should like to have my dear old father and mother receive money for the loss they have sustained, as they are very poor.”

“You shall have the rascal whose hounds killed your sheep, my sweet lass,” said the King, “and you can do with him whatever you please. You may order him to be hanged, if you wish, and I will see that he dangles at the end of a tight rope before sundown.”

“I should like to marry the one who has caused me all this suffering,” said the maid, blushing rosy red.

The King was surprised, but he laughed long and loudly. Then he turned to his chamberlain and said:

“Send each man of my court to me, one at a time, that I may find out who it was that has caused this maiden so much trouble. If he be a married man, he shall pay her a goodly sum ; if he be a bachelor, he shall marry her in my presence today.”

One courtier after another was brought before the King, but Sweet Pea shook her head each time, saying:

“It is not he, your Majesty.”

The last one to appear was Sweet William, who looked very guilty and equally as uncomfortable.

“He is the man,” said Sweet Pea. “I had quite forgotten that his hair is the color of yellow wheat and his eyes the hue of the anemone. I am very sorry that I have caused your Majesty so much trouble.”

In vain Sweet William begged to be released. He offered to pay the girl fifty pounds if she would permit him to go free; but she shook her head.

“I will have you, according to the King’s agreement,” said the girl firmly, “and the more you protest, the harder it will be for you.”

“But I do not love you I” cried Sweet William. “I hated you the first time I saw you. Never have I seen a girl so ugly-”

Nevertheless the King called for his chaplain, and although Sweet William had to be held by six soldiers, the wedding ceremony was performed.

As soon as Sweet Pea touched his hand, Sweet William embraced her rapturously.

“At last the spell is broken,” he said, “and the words I speak are those that my heart prompts. I cannot tell you how much I love you, dear little shepherdess, nor can I tell you how happy the sight of your fair face makes me.”

At that moment the fairy Morgana appeared and said to the King:

“Fear not that the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall will be displeased at this union; for the girl is nobler born than any of the House of Cornwall.”

“How can that be?” asked the King in surprise.

“Because she is your daughter, — the future Queen of England.”

Much happiness followed this announcement, and the King and Queen and the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and all the nobility as well as the common people, spent a fortnight in feasting and rejoicing.

Sweet William and Sweet Pea then went to the castle at Cornwall; and, so it has been said, the generous bride threw buns filled with currants out of the stagecoach window to the Cornish peasants as she rode merrily along to her grand new home.

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