

The Page-Boy and the Silver

Goblet

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Scottish

Advanced
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There was once a little page-boy, who was in service in a stately Castle. He was a very good-natured little fellow, and did his duties so willingly and well that everybody liked him, from the great Earl whom he served every day on bended knee, to the fat old butler whose errands he ran.

Now the Castle stood on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea, and although the walls at that side were very thick, in them there was a little postern door, which opened on to a narrow flight of steps that led down the face of the cliff to the sea shore, so that anyone who liked could go down there in the pleasant summer mornings and bathe in the shimmering sea.

On the other side of the Castle were gardens and pleasure grounds, opening on to a long stretch of heather-covered moorland, which, at last, met a distant range of hills. The little page-boy was very fond of going out on this moor when his work was done, for then he could run about as much as he liked, chasing bumble-bees, and catching butterflies, and looking for birds' nests when it was nesting time.

And the old butler was very pleased that he should do so, for he knew that it was good for a healthy little lad to have plenty of fun in the open air. But before the boy went out the old man always gave him one warning."Now, mind my words, laddie, and keep far away from the Fairy Knowe, for the Little Folk are not to

trust to.”

This Knowe of which he spoke was a little green hillock, which stood on the moor not twenty yards from the garden gate, and folk said that it was the abode of Fairies, who would punish any rash mortal who came too near them. And because of this the country people would walk a good half-mile out of their way, even in broad daylight, rather than run the risk of going too near the Fairy Knowe and bringing down the Little Folks' displeasure upon them. And at night they would hardly cross the moor at all, for everyone knows that Fairies come abroad in the darkness, and the door of their dwelling stands open, so that any luckless mortal who does not take care may find himself inside.

Now, the little page-boy was an adventurous wight, and instead of being frightened of the Fairies, he was very anxious to see them, and to visit their abode, just to find out what it was like. So one night, when everyone else was asleep, he crept out of the Castle by the little postern door, and stole down the stone steps, and along the sea shore, and up on to the moor, and went straight to the Fairy Knowe.

To his delight he found that what everyone said was true. The top of the Knowe was tipped up, and from the opening that was thus made, rays of light came streaming out. His heart was beating fast with excitement, but, gathering his courage, he stooped down and slipped inside the Knowe. He found himself in a large room lit by numberless tiny candles, and there, seated round a polished table, were scores of the Tiny Folk, Fairies, and Elves, and Gnomes, dressed in green, and yellow, and pink; blue, and lilac, and scarlet; in all the colours, in fact, that you can think of.

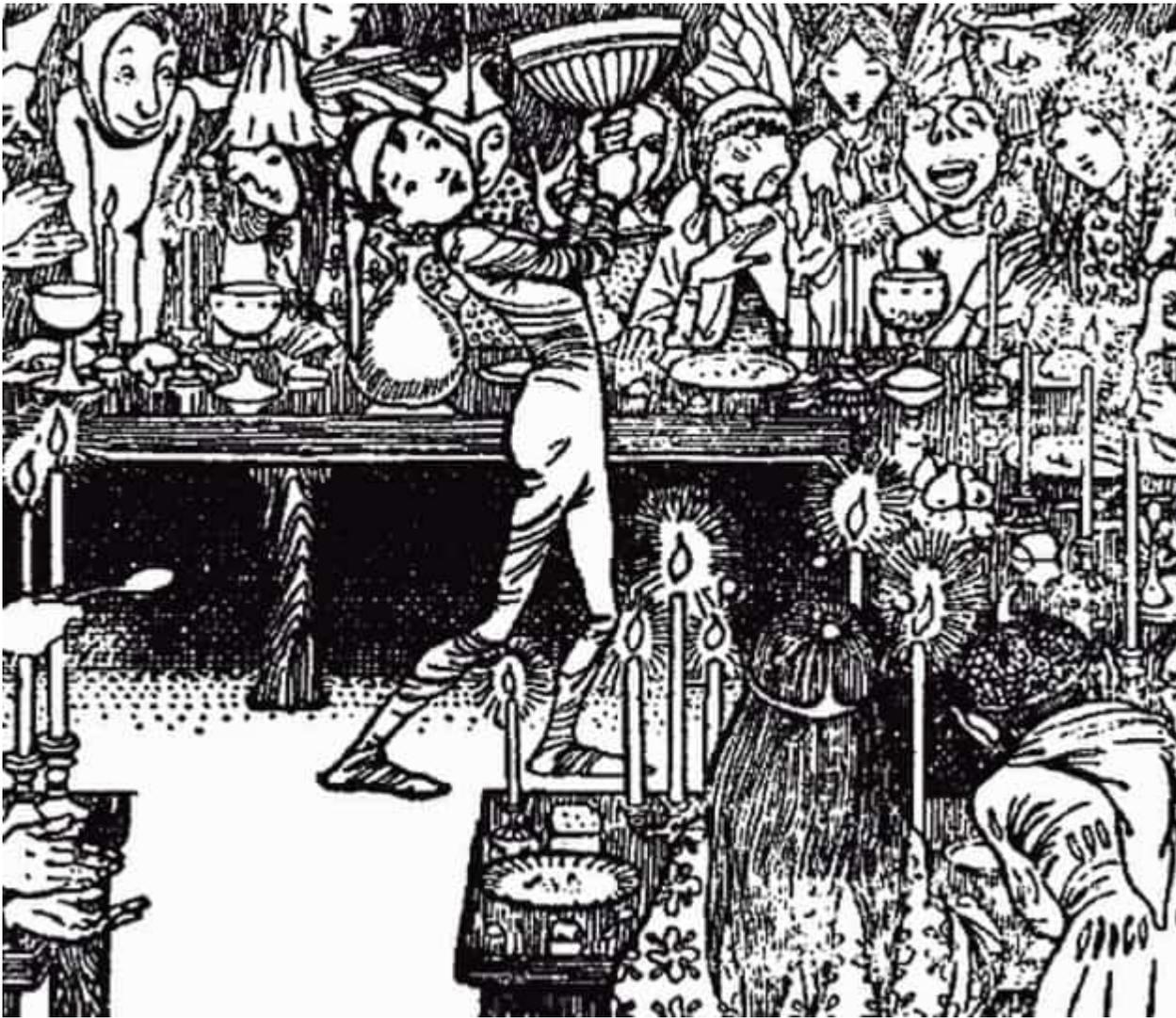
He stood in a dark corner watching the busy scene in wonder, thinking how strange it was that there should be such a number of these tiny beings living their own lives all unknown to men, at such a little distance from them, when suddenly someone—he could not tell who it was—gave an order.

“Fetch the Cup,” cried the owner of the unknown voice, and instantly two little Fairy pages, dressed all in scarlet livery, darted from the table to a tiny cupboard in the rock, and returned staggering under the weight of a most beautiful silver cup, richly embossed and lined inside with gold.

He placed it in the middle of the table, and, amid clapping of hands and shouts of joy, all the Fairies began to drink out of it in turn. And the page could see, from where he stood, that no one poured wine into it, and yet it was always full, and that the wine that was in it was not always the same kind, but that each Fairy, when he grasped its stem, wished for the wine that he loved best, and lo! in a moment the cup was full of it.

“‘Twould be a fine thing if I could take that cup home with me,” thought the page. “No one will believe that I have been here except I have something to show for it.” So he bided his time, and watched.

Presently the Fairies noticed him, and, instead of being angry at his boldness in entering their abode, as he expected that they would be, they seemed very pleased to see him, and invited him to a seat at the table. But by and by they grew rude and insolent, and jeered at him for being content to serve mere mortals, telling him that they saw everything that went on at the Castle, and making fun of the old butler, whom the page loved with all his heart. And they laughed at the food he ate, saying that it was only fit for animals; and when any fresh dainty was set on the table by the scarlet-clad pages, they would push the dish across to him, saying: “Taste it, for you will not have the chance of tasting such things at the Castle.” At last he could stand their teasing remarks no longer; besides, he knew that if he wanted to secure the cup he must lose no time in doing so.



“He raised the cup to his lips, but he did not drink from it. With a sudden jerk he threw the water over the candles.” Illustration by Morris Meredith Williams, published in *The Scottish Fairy Book* by Elizabeth W. Grierson (1918), J.B. Lippincott Company.

So he suddenly stood up, and grasped the stem of it tightly in his hand. “I’ll drink to you all in water,” he cried, and instantly the ruby wine was turned to clear cold water. He raised the cup to his lips, but he did not drink from it. With a sudden jerk he threw the water over the candles, and instantly the room was in darkness. Then, clasping the precious cup tightly in his arms, he sprang to the opening of the Knowe, through which he could see the stars glimmering clearly.

He was just in time, for it fell to with a crash behind him; and soon he was speeding along the wet, dew-spangled moor, with the whole troop of Fairies at his heels. They were wild with rage, and from the shrill shouts of fury which they uttered, the page knew well that, if they overtook him, he need expect no mercy at their hands.

And his heart began to sink, for, fleet of foot though he was, he was no match for the Fairy Folk, who gained on him steadily. All seemed lost, when a mysterious voice sounded out of the darkness:

“If thou wouldst gain the Castle door, Keep to the black stones on the shore.”

It was the voice of some poor mortal, who, for some reason or other, had been taken prisoner by the Fairies—who were really very malicious Little Folk—and who did not want a like fate to befall the adventurous page-boy; but the little fellow did not know this.

He had once heard that if anyone walked on the wet sands, where the waves had come over them, the Fairies could not touch him, and this mysterious sentence brought the saying into his mind. So he turned, and dashed panting down to the shore. His feet sank in the dry sand, his breath came in little gasps, and he felt as if he must give up the struggle; but he persevered, and at last, just as the foremost Fairies were about to lay hands on him, he jumped across the water-mark on to the firm, wet sand, from which the waves had just receded, and then he knew that he was safe.

For the Little Folk could go no step further, but stood on the dry sand uttering cries of rage and disappointment, while the triumphant page-boy ran safely along the shore, his precious cup in his arms, and climbed lightly up the steps in the rock and disappeared through the postern. And for many years after, long after the little page-boy had grown up and become a stately butler, who trained other little page-boys to follow in his footsteps, the beautiful cup remained in the Castle as a witness of his adventure.

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