

THE FAIRY COURT

ELLA VAN GILDER

ACT I

SCENE I. *At the edge of the forest.*

(Enter Prince and Princess, holding their sides and laughing boisterously)

Both.

Ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha!

Prince.

Oh, dear sister, what a lark,
To escape the palace park.

Princess.

I did all my tasks forsake,
Pleading that my head did ache.
(Holds head in a mocking way, laughing.)

Prince.

My old master, meek and mild,
To the turret I beguiled.
He will spend a quiet hour
Locked within the castle tower.
(Laughs uproariously.)

Princess.

Now, to plan what we will do,
Or what mischief we may brew.

Prince.

Let us to the forest dim,
In forbidden pools to swim.

(Start into the forest)

Princess.

But see! who runs in yonder wood?

Prince.

Whoe'er it is, he means no good.

(Shouts to man)

Fellow, stay thy rapid pace,
On your knees to plead for grace!

Knave.

Mercy, my lord, I do no harm.

(Man turns and kneels, hands uplifted)

Princess.

'Tis a poacher; sound the alarm.

Prince.

Thou shalt hang from yonder tree
Ere the setting sun you see.

Knave.

Pity, fair prince! We sought the shade
Of this sequestered forest glade.

My child is dying from the heat;

Behold my wife and babe so sweet.

(Points to wife, holding a dying child in her arms)

Princess.

What care we for the dying brat!

Prince.

Go, beggars; take that and that.

(Exit all, Prince and Princess throwing stones at fleeing man and woman)

SCENE II

(Enter Fairy Queen and attendants)

Fairy Queen.

Ah, woe is me! Ah, woe is me!

That I such cruel sights do see.

Those two, who should examples be

Of kindness and humility,

With ugly words the stillness mar;

So they must to the prison bar.

(Turns and addresses Mercury)

Go, fleet of foot and quick of brain,

Summon thou the wicked twain,

And ope their eyes that they may see

Our fairy court in majesty.

Mercury.

I go, most noble Fairy Queen:

The truant pair will soon be seen.

(Exit Mercury)

Fairy Queen (To Herald).

Summon the fairies of the glen

To hold the court. We'll rest till then.

(Exit Queen and Fairies. Herald sounds the call)

SCENE III

(Enter troops of Fairies from four corners)

(Fairy dance)

First Fairy.

We come from the fern brake in the dell;

Second Fairy.

And we from the midst of the heather bell.

Third Fairy.

We come from the heart of the garden rose;

Fourth Fairy.

And we from where the clover blows.

(Enter Queen and attendants. All drop on one knee as Queen enters)

Fairy Queen.

Fairies arise! and listen well
While I a shameful story tell.
The Prince and Princess of this isle
Are disobedient, cruel, wild;
Know naught of love or courtesy.
Say what shall be the penalty?

Herald.

Prisoners, stand forth your fate to hear.

(Prince and Princess come forward)

First Fairy.

Let them go for a day and a year,
To the wood where wildest winds are hurled,
Where dwell the elves of the underworld.

Princess.

(Pleadingly)

O, speak not such a cruel fate!

Fairy Queen.

Silence! Repentance is too late.

Second Fairy.

Their ugly thoughts I'll turn to crawling things;

Third Fairy.

Their cruel words, to flies that sting:

Fourth Fairy.

Rodents shall be their low desire
Till noble deeds their hearts inspire.

Prince.

You cannot such a sentence bring,
For we are children of the King.

(Puts arm around his weeping sister)

Fairy Queen.

Know, haughty prince, a court there is
Higher and mightier than his;
A court all other courts above,
Whose only law is that of love.

Prince and Princess.

Oh, spare us, noble Queen, and we
Will thy most humble servants be.

(Fall on their knees, pleading, with hands uplifted)

Fairy Queen *(To Herald)*

Summon the elves, 'tis almost day.
Sentence is passed, we need not stay.

(Enter Elves and followers)

Here are the culprits, guard them well.
Now we'll away to the fairy dell.

(Exit Queen and fairies)

(The Elves are dressed in green. Their leader speaks to the children)

Leader.

Ho, ho! what have we here?
A princeling and his sister dear!
Now young folks, if you are wise,

Make all haste to dry your eyes.
And if to home you would return,
With lightning speed your lessons learn,
Comrades, we must not tarry long,
But while we rest let's sing a song.

(All join arms and sing together)

SONG

Oh, we are mischievous elves,
Gnomes of the borderland.
From green and slimy stagnant pools
Comes forth our naughty band.

We curdle the milk in the spring house;
We won't let the fires burn;
We keep the butter from coming
Whenever the women churn.

Oh, we are the mischievous elves,
Gnomes of the borderland.
From green and slimy stagnant pools
Comes forth our naughty band.

Leader.

We'll give our royal guests a chance
To see how cleverly we dance.

*(Elves dance. All sit in a circle, with legs crossed,
moving their arms and swaying from side to side)*

Leader.

Come, Slimy Toad, sit in the middle;
Play us a tune upon your fiddle.

(An Elf moves forward and plays on an instrument)

Leader *(At finish)*.

Now to our windy caves we go,

And take our princely pair in tow.

(Exit all)

ACT II

SCENE I

(Enter King and Queen and attendants)

King.

Good-morrow, Queen, how goes the day?

Queen.

I am to unknown fears a prey.

King.

Come, walk with me on the terrace green.

'Twill banish all thy fears unseen.

But who comes here? A trooper bold!

Speak fellow, and thy news unfold.

(Trooper kneels, uncovering his head)

Trooper.

Good sire, the message that I bring

Will sadden both the Queen and King.

Princess and Prince cannot be found;

We've searched the castle and the ground.

Queen.

Ah, woe is me! The presentiment

I had today was a warning sent.

(Sinks to a bench weeping)

King.

Go, fellow, call the guard and men

To search in every town and fen.

(Trooper goes. King turns to comfort Queen)

Be brave, dear wife, we must indeed
Banish our fears would we succeed.

SCENE II

*(Prince and Princess in a dark forest, clothes torn,
looking very weary)*

Princess.

Oh, will we never leave this place?
Briars scratch my hands, flies sting my face.
I'm afraid of the snails and the gnawing rats,
Of the hooting owls and the flying bats.

Prince.

I tried to cut the brambles through,
But the more I cut, the more they grew.
Come rest your head upon this mound,
And I will lay me on the ground.

Princess.

Upon this mound I lay my head;
Would 'twere my grave and I were dead.

(Both fall asleep)

SCENE III

*(Enter King and Queen, the Queen wringing her
hands. They are followed by Herald and attendants)*

Queen.

No news, my lord? My heart is sore;
I've wept 'till I can weep no more.

King.

Patience, dear heart, this present plight

Is for some good; 'twill come out right.

Queen.

I pray you, send for the Fairy Queen.
By her all hidden things are seen.

King.

We will. Go, Herald! By my troth
We'll beg an audience for us both.

Herald.

Swiftly will I seek her bower
And here return within the hour.

(Exit Herald)

Queen.

My ladies now a song will sing;
Perhaps it will some comfort bring.

(The Ladies-in-waiting sing "The Sandman")

SONG—*The Sandman*

The Sandman comes at close of day.
He takes his pack as he comes this way
On a little cloud across the sky,
And he throws the sand as he goes by,
Singing his little lullaby:

"Where are the children—girls and boys?
Come, put away your books and toys,
And off we'll go to slumber land,
Sailing swiftly, hand in hand;
And slumber sweetly through the night,
To waken when the sun is bright.

Sleep, my baby, sleep.

“The little stars a watch will keep
All through the nighttime while you sleep.
And angels sitting at your head
Will guard you in your little bed,
Safely keep you through the night,
And wake you with the morning light.
Sleep, my baby, sleep.”

(Herald enters, and kneels before the King)

Herald.

Liege, the Fairy Queen sends word to thee
She holds her court 'neath the greenwood tree.

King.

Come, let us no more moments waste,
But to her court with greatest haste.

(Exit all)

SCENE IV. *Court of the Fairy Queen*

(Enter King, Queen, and attendants)

Fairy Queen.

I bid you welcome, royal pair.
I know your wish and speak you fair.
Your children both our prisoners be
Until they learn true courtesy,
Until they have the will, and can
Love and serve their fellow man.
Their thoughts must e'er be pure and true:
And then they may come back to you.

Queen.

But how will they these lessons learn

That they may thus their freedom earn?

Fairy Queen.

A faithful watch o'er them I'll keep
And whisper to them while they sleep,
That they may wake and learn to pray
To the great Ruler of the Day.

King.

Farewell! I beg you to be near
And safely guard our children dear.

(Exit King, Queen, and attendants)

ACT III

SCENE I. *The Dark Forest*

(Prince and Princess sleeping. Enter Fairy Queen and fairies, who dance around the children, stopping occasionally to whisper in their ears. Children yawn, stretch, and wake up)

Princess.

Brother, I've dreamed the strangest dream:
This brook was like a crystal stream;
This gloomy wood seemed like a bower,
And every thorn a wondrous flower.

Prince.

I, too, have dreamed strange things this night:
Methought all this a field of light;
And every poppy in the sun
Was some kind deed that we had done.

Princess.

The thing that seemed to me most strange,

Was that this curious, marvelous change
Took place because our hearts were clean,
And in our minds dwelt nothing mean.

Prince.

I dreamt that by our loving deeds
We changed this wilderness of weeds
To fertile lands where wheat does grow.

Princess.

Let's try and see if it is so.

(Enter a peddler, carrying a heavy pack)

Prince.

Here comes a peddler with a pack.
Friend, I'll lift that from your back.

Princess.

And let me hasten to the spring,
A cup of water cool to bring.
Here on this mossy bank rest a while,
For you have walked full many a mile.

(Brings water and helps stranger to rest on bank)

*(Peddler, throwing off cloak and hood, reveals the
Fairy Queen)*

Fairy Queen.

Children, your lessons have been learned,
And you have now your freedom earned.
Tomorrow, ere the sun has risen,
You will be far from this dark prison.

SCENE II. *Castle Grounds*

(King, Queen; attendants in background)

Queen.

Let's to the forest walk away;
Our children may return today.

King.

I hear a fairy horn proclaim
The Fairy Queen comes with her train.

(Enter Fairy Queen, fairies, Prince and Princess)

Fairy Queen.

Here are your children, safe and sound,
And sweeter ones could ne'er be found.

(The Queen embraces the children, weeping)

Queen.

It seems my heart would burst for joy
To have again my girl, my boy.

King (To Herald).

Proclaim a feast throughout the land;
Invite this Fairy and her band.

Fairy Queen.

Thanks, Sire, we cannot longer stay.
The sun rides high—we must away.

(Exit fairies and Fairy Queen)

(King, Queen, and their children form a group in the garden)

Prince.

'Tis good to be at home once more,
But not as we were heretofore,
For now we see that only love
A truly royal prince can prove.
Our only happiness is when
We gladly serve our fellowmen.