



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Butterfly

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



In the time of the illustrious Merinous, it was indeed a pleasure to be a king; the laws were just, the people obedient, and peace was over the land. This monarch would have been the happiest of men, but for the continual complaints of his consort, which tore his very heart in twain. She wept continually for her daughters, nineteen of whom had perished in the flower of youth. The Fairy of the Fountain had promised a twentieth; but years passed away in fruitless expectation. “You have neglected to do the fairy sufficient homage,” said the king one day; “I shall give orders to conduct you to the foot of the mountain with pomp and splendour. But when arrived there the mountain itself must be climbed on foot, with many fatigues: most women would rather die childless than encounter them.”

“Courage shall not be wanting on my part,” said the queen, “and I wish to set out immediately.”

The king kissed her forehead, bade her good-night, and fell asleep.

At early dawn appeared in the grand court of the palace an equipage, dazzling as the sun itself; the wheels were of massy gold, with emerald nails, which sparkled in the light. It was drawn by forty-two horses, white as snow, whose reins were of rose-coloured satin, the fashion of that period. They snorted impatiently, striking fire from the pavement beneath their feet; their eyes were inflamed; their bits covered with foam, and their proud and triumphant air seemed already to announce the success of the queen’s enterprise. Three thousand chevaliers, armed at all points and mounted on fiery coursers, wheeled about the chariot, the air resounding with their joyful acclamations of—”Long live King Merinous and his august spouse!”

The queen saluted the people with the utmost grace and condescension, which caused such immoderate joy, that she was almost stifled by the pressure of the crowd: but the guards gently kept them at a distance, and the procession passed on.

When her majesty had reached the foot of the mountain, she alighted from her chariot, and, accompanied by only four maids-of-honour, proceeded on foot.

This mountain was formed of slippery earth, slightly covered over with green turf, but giving way at every step. The queen’s pretty little white satin shoes were soon left behind; and her feet next stuck so fast that she could not withdraw them; her fair hands were in the same plight; she cried aloud for succour, fearing she should be completely buried alive.

Turning then round to look for her maids-of-honour, she perceived that they had fallen flat on their faces (the impression remains till this day), and were struggling, making the most desperate efforts, less in consideration of their own danger than that of the queen. In fine, after four hours and a half’s patient perseverance they succeeded in regaining their feet; and strange to say, no mud or clay attached itself to their clothes; nothing worse than a slight shade of the green turf, which assumed the appearance of a gauze veil. The fairy then, seeing the queen willing to overcome difficulties, would not try her further, but with one stroke of a wand reduced the mountain two or three hundred feet; the remaining height was very dry and easy of ascent.

The queen was thus conducted to a delicious grove: a coral fountain rose in the midst; its waters, of the purest rose-colour, wound along the meadow, murmuring plaintive airs, whose words were perfectly distinguishable. The fairy there welcomed her majesty, who prepared to explain the occasion of her journey; but that was quite unnecessary. The fairy, exacting profound secrecy, presented her with a phial of water drawn from the fountain, strictly ordering that it should be broken when she had drunk it all. The queen, charmed by this reception, made presents of inestimable value, and rejoined her maids-of-honour, who had been thrown into an enchanted sleep. They then returned to the palace in such high spirits, that all the court danced and sung for a month afterwards.

In due course her majesty became, for the twentieth time, a joyful mother.

The magnificence and liberality displayed on this occasion exceed belief. The royal palace was surrounded by three hundred large spouts which poured forth alternately, night and day the choicest sweetmeats, confectionery, and money; the streets, in fact, were filled—the passengers had only to stoop down and be satisfied.

But in the midst of these festivities the Fairy of the Fountain, uncovering the little princess's cradle, which was of mother-o'-pearl studded with diamonds, perceived a beautiful butterfly, placed immediately under the infant's left eye.

The chief cradle-rocker, who dreaded being taxed with negligence, took a humming-bird's wing, and endeavoured to chase it away, but all in vain: it remained quite unconcerned in the same spot, extending its large wings of rose-colour and azure-blue on the face of the princess, appearing rather to caress than to wish to do her any injury. "Ah!" said the fairy, "this butterfly is not what you imagine. It is a powerful fairy, who presides at the birth of the most distinguished princesses, and endows them with a degree of levity which generally leads to misfortune. I can lessen the evil, without doubt, but I cannot entirely avert it." The queen wept bitterly at this sad news, and the king saw no person during eight days. He then ceased to think on the subject.

Misfortunes rarely enter into the speculations of kings. Masters of the destinies of others, mankind flatter them into a belief that their power can almost control fate itself. Accordingly, the visit of the butterfly did not produce much permanent inquietude. The poets-laureate and literati of the court turned it into numerous sentimental conceits; amongst others, that the insect had fastened on the princess's cheek mistaking it for a rose. This idea branched out into a hundred elegies, a thousand madrigals, and fifteen hundred songs, which were sung in all the principal families, and adapted to airs, some already known, and others composed for the occasion.

The fairy frequently visited her little charge, but was unable to conquer her fickle disposition. Ten different nurses had already been obliged to give her up; she scratched them, bit them, and obstinately refused to be fed. When she grew older, and began her education, she was so easily wearied and vexed, that no one dared to contradict her. The fairy was consulted; who made her smell at a very rare flower. This produced a degree of intelligence so extraordinary, that in three days she could read, write, speak all languages, and play on every instrument after just twenty-three minutes' application.

The queen was now delighted, for the princess's talents were noised abroad equally with her beauty. She had scarcely attained the age of fourteen when many kings sought the honour of her hand. The good King Merinous was well stricken in years, and fondly desired to see Papillette established. All who seemed worthy of her received a favourable reception, and amongst this number was the accomplished Prince Favourite. After he had been presented in due form, the old monarch asked his daughter what she thought of their new guest.

"Sire," replied the maiden, "I have been brought up with too much modesty and reserve to bestow attention on strangers of the other sex."

"That is true," returned the monarch; "but merely regarding him as a picture, how has he appeared to you?"

"Tall and handsome," answered Papillette, "his chestnut hair clinging in close and crisping curls to his ivory brow; his eyes of violet-blue, filled with soft vivacity; his teeth, of the most brilliant white, divide lips of coral; his nose is perfect Grecian, and his limbs like the rarest statuary. I might say more, had I ventured to look at the prince."

"It is enough," said the king; "your first glance has shown you enough. I am delighted that you are so sensible to the merits of Prince Favourite, as I design him for your husband. Love him accordingly."

"Your majesty's commands are laws to your dutiful daughter," replied Papillette.

One may easily imagine with what magnificence preparations were made for the nuptials; the king hastened them, lest his daughter's fickleness and levity might cause disappointment to their dearest hopes.

Papillette one day, while steadily regarding her lover, who was kneeling before her, appeared struck by something which made an impression as sudden as disagreeable. She repulsed Prince Favourite, saying she was seized with a headache, and could not be troubled with company.

The lover submissively arose and went to seek the queen, beseeching her to find out what he had done, and to intercede in his favour. Her majesty accordingly questioned the princess, who, bathed in tears, threw herself into the arms of her mother, confessing that she had made a discovery which totally altered her sentiments regarding the prince. "Is it possible," added she, "that you have not perceived his ears, of so unusual a size, and a deep red colour?"

"Is that all?" cried the queen. "In truth, I have not observed it; but to take notice of an imperfection so very trifling, would make us appear ridiculous indeed."

"People cannot help their feelings," replied Papillette; "I have quite a horror of red ears; it is little worth while to be daughter of a great king, if one must be crossed and thwarted in the most important arrangement of life."

The queen reasoned long; but this only increased Papillette's resistance: therefore, being quite defenceless against the tears of a child so dear, her majesty promised to speak to the king.

Merinous was firm in all his resolutions; he therefore declared, that his daughter should become the wife of Prince Favourite, whether she liked it or not.

The queen had not courage to impart this dreadful intelligence; but she threw herself on the generosity of the prince, beseeching that he would himself break the engagement—thus shielding Papillette from the resentment of the king.

The distracted lover was ready to die with grief: but promised to do all she requested. He asked but three days' grace.

The queen consented; and Prince Favourite then summoned Queséca, chief barber to the king, "Barber," said he, "each country has its particular prejudices—its own ideas of beauty; here I find large ears are deemed a deformity; therefore, I command thee to cut off mine."

"I cannot do it," replied the barber; "your royal highness has been grossly deceived. I have the honour of shaving the first lords of the court, and I know many of them whose ears are equally red and ten times as long as those of your royal highness. These very lords are amongst the most distinguished favourites of the king."

"I have summoned thee," replied the prince, "to operate and not to prate; obey my orders, and inflame not my ears still further by thy discourse."

"Alas!" said the barber, "since your royal highness means to sacrifice them to an unreasonable caprice, what signifies it whether they are inflamed or not?"

At these words the prince made a threatening gesture; and Queséca, no longer daring to resist, took his razor, and with a trembling hand separated two of the handsomest ears from one of the finest heads in the world: for be it known, that the princess only made a pretext of this assertion, because she had taken a fancy for somebody else.

The wound bled profusely: the prince applied healing balm; and when in a condition to appear before her, enclosed his two ears in a little box, rare and precious, and presented it to Papillette, his heart once more filled with hope and love.

The princess eagerly opened the beautiful little casket, then dashed it with horror to the ground. "Prince!" she cried, "what can have induced you to mutilate yourself so cruelly? Could you imagine that I would ever wed a man who submitted to lose his ears?"

"Madam," said the prince, in consternation, "it was by my own order that—"

"What a fool you were then!" cried Papillette. "If you are not willing to become the ridicule of the court, I advise you to quit it with the greatest expedition imaginable."

The prince dared not call her cruel and ungrateful: he retired to the thickest retreats of a forest, and soon after entirely lost his reason.

The princess, once more free, confessed that amongst her numerous suitors there was one whom she preferred; this was Prince Malabar, whose martial mien announced the soul of a hero. The queen did not deny that Malabar had sought her daughter's hand, even before Favourite aspired to that honour, and King Merinous could now no longer insist on a marriage with this unfortunate prince, since he was quite insane, ran naked through the woods, sometimes believing himself a hind, sometimes a wolf, and never stopping until exhausted by grief and despair. But in consenting to the marriage of his daughter with Prince Malabar, the king declared that, should she again change her mind, he would never forgive her.

The happy day was once more fixed, and Papillette, three days preceding, invited her lover to meet her in a delightful grove at the extremity of the gardens. This grove was planted with myrtles, so thick and high that they afforded a pleasant shade. Beautiful flowers sprang up on all sides; and, added to the warblings of the birds in the trees, were the voices of hidden musicians, singing a chorus, composed by the princess herself. This, however, Malabar, who was a soldier, and not a musician, and who naturally wished to have his lady-love's society all to himself, did not sufficiently appreciate.

"Princess," said he, "I had much rather hear you talk than these people sing."

"Are then those cares despised," replied Papillette, "which I have so assiduously employed to amuse and gratify you by the display of my talents?"

"Your dearest talent," cried he, "is that of pleasing: it comprises every other. Send away these people, I pray." He added in a tone of the utmost irritation: "I hate—I detest music!"

"Have I rightly heard?" exclaimed the princess angrily; "and do you pretend to love, if your soul is insensible to such transporting sounds?"

"I wish they would transport themselves far enough away," returned the lover, who, like most other lovers, could be in an ill humour sometimes. "My princess, do order this scraping and squalling to cease."

"On the contrary, I order my musicians to remain," answered Papillette, quite indignant, "and never, never will I unite myself to him whom divine melody hath no power to move. Go, prince, barbarous alike in taste and science, seek some rustic maid, best suited to your insensibility."

The musicians, too far distant to hear these words, struck up a lively tune. Malabar imagined this done in derision, and it required all his respect for the princess to prevent him from falling on them sword in hand. He repented much his words, but considered it beneath his dignity to retract them; the princess also refused to retract hers: so they parted.

Malabar resolved on instant death. Mounting the noblest courser in his stable, he rode down to the sea-coast, and plunged him right over a perpendicular cliff into the waters below.

The tide happened to be coming in, so that the body was soon washed on shore, and brought before the eyes of the cruel princess, laid on a litter formed of willow, hung with draperies of black crape.

She was standing at the window when the melancholy procession passed, and inquired what it was. None dared answer; they only removed the covering from the face of the corpse. She uttered a loud shriek, and fainted away.

The king and queen lavished on her the most tender cares, but all in vain: she declared that she regarded herself as an inconsolable widow, and insisted upon putting on the deepest weeds.

King Merinous respected this caprice, and ordered twenty thousand yards of crape for her use. She was just giving orders to have her apartments festooned with it, and holding a cambric handkerchief to her eyes, when a little green ape (a drawing-room favourite) dressed itself in weepers, and disposed one of the widow's caps most tastefully under its chin.

At this sight the princess burst out laughing so loudly and heartily, that all the court ladies, who had been trying which could pull the longest and most sympathetic countenance, were greatly relieved, and began immediately to smile a little.

Gradually, they removed from her eyes the trappings of woe, and substituted ribbons of rose-colour and blue of every shade and variety: trying on these, so diverted Papillette's melancholy, that the poor drowned prince was soon forgotten. Her tears indeed were vain; he had already enough of water.

The king was in despair. "Alas!" said he to the queen, "we shall never have the consolation of marrying Papillette, or beholding our grandchildren. Of two monarchs so worthy of her, one has lost his reason, the other has cast himself into the sea; and while we continue to weep, she, already consoled, thinks only of diverting herself!"

"Sire," replied the queen, "calm your apprehensions. Our daughter is yet too young to feel true love in all its fervour; let us have patience, and seek alliance with none but those truly worthy of her affections."

"Such is my wish," replied the king, "and I begin to turn my views upon Prince Patipata; he has seen the portrait of Papillette, and is satisfied; but, though a wise and noble monarch, his personal qualifications are little in his favor."

"How so?" rejoined the queen.

"Because he is stiff, tall, and spare; his eyes bleared and filmy; his hair red, and so scanty withal, that it seems like a few stripes of blasted flax hung around a distaff."

A few days after this conversation, Prince Patipata arrived at court; and the queen did not conceal from Papillette, that, notwithstanding his personal disadvantages, he was intended for her spouse.

The princess laughed immoderately, yet, just for amusement, she displayed towards him all the arts and graces of coquetry to perfection.

Prince Patipata having been informed of the deplorable end of his predecessors, concealed his love as carefully as the others had proclaimed theirs. He was so reserved and cold, that the princess longed exceedingly to discover the state of his feelings. Accordingly, one day, while Patipata was walking with Salmoé, his intimate confidant, she hid herself in the trunk of an old tree, which had been hollowed out by lightning, and afforded apparently a secure retreat. The prince seated himself at the foot of it, but he had observed the princess; and, making a sign of intelligence to his companion, feigned to continue a conversation of which she was the subject. "Assuredly," said he, "the princess is very handsome; but flatterers, poets, and painters always overstep the truth. Her portrait has deceived me: its large blue eyes bear assuredly some resemblance to those of Papillette, but they bespeak an ardent and feeling heart, while hers is frivolous, volatile, and incapable of love. Her smile would be charming, but for its satirical irony. And what is the value of the loveliest lips in the world, if they open but to deceive and betray!"

"I am much surprised," replied Salmoé; "I believed that your royal highness was equally loving and beloved."

"Far from it," returned Patipata; "it would ill become me, plain as I am, to be confident of pleasing; and I am not dupe enough to yield my heart without return. Do not you approve of this?"

"No," answered Salmoé, "your royal highness is too modest; I cannot sufficiently appreciate your humility."

The prince affected to be dissatisfied with this praise, and then moved onwards in order to liberate Papillette, who was very inconveniently cramped, and almost suffocated with anger. Disagreeable truths seldom reach the ear of princesses; her resentment, therefore, was to be expected. Meanwhile, her heart being equally capricious as her understanding, she felt ready to pardon, and even, on reflection, to justify Patipata. But pride soon combated this weakness; and she determined to send him away. She complained to her father; assured him, that by mere chance she had heard the most odious calumnies uttered by a prince who sported with their dignity, by falsely pretending to the hand of her whom he slighted and despised. The king was surprised; but, not having entered into any positive engagements with Patipata, he readily entered into her feelings, and intimated to the prince that his adieus would be well received. This Patipata expected; but, although not naturally presumptuous, he had read sufficiently into the heart of Papillette to feel some degree of consolation.

As no decisive explanation of any kind occurred, he was permitted to take leave of the princess. This he did with much firmness; while she appeared so much agitated, that it was remarked by all the court. The men attributed this to hatred; but the ladies, who knew better,

pronounced it love. They were convinced of the fact, when day by day she began to pine and refused to eat; and had not the chief cook every day invented some new ragout, she would inevitably have died of hunger.

The queen was in despair, and dispatched a billet to the Fairy of the Fountain, fastening it to the tail of a little white mouse, which served as a messenger on this occasion; it was perfectly acquainted with the way, and in a few minutes the fairy arrived at the palace. The late events were mentioned to her, and the melancholy situation of the princess.

“I understand this case,” said the fairy; “but it is necessary that Papillette should give me her confidence.”

The fairy was so amiable and so much beloved by the princess, that she easily yielded; and casting down her eyes, confessed that she loved one who regarded her with contemptuous indifference; and what rendered her choice still more degrading was, its object being equally ugly as insensible.

“I am then to understand,” replied the fairy, “that you wish to be cured of this unfortunate passion?”

“Alas, no!” rejoined Papillette, “for my only pleasure is in thinking of him, speaking to him as if he could hear, and persuading myself that, notwithstanding appearances, he could have loved me, had he believed my heart capable of steady affections. I shall therefore die, leaving him alike ignorant of my regrets and my repentance.”

“I would not advise you to die,” said the fairy “that is the only evil in the world without a remedy. But, my dear Papillette, what can I do to console you?”

“Let me see the prince once more, under some metamorphose in which it is impossible for him to recognise me.”

“Very well,” replied the fairy. “But since you wish to risk it, and that a simple butterfly can scarcely compromise her dignity in following a king, under this form I shall transport you to his court.”

So saying, the Fairy of the Fountain placed on her finger a little emerald ring, and the princess distinctly felt her arms change their shape—expand—become flexible, and form two light wings, clothed in the most brilliant colours. Her little feet quitted the earth, and as the window was open, she flew out, traversing the air, with a degree of rapidity which at first caused some sensations of fear. But soon the eager desire of seeing Patipata urged her forward, although natural instinct so far prevailed, as to cause frequent descents to earth, where she rested on every tempting flower.

At length, entering the prince’s gardens, she beheld him walking on a terrace watering a beautiful orange-tree. Her heart beat so violently, that her first emotion was to hide, but, soon recovering self-possession, she flew forwards and rested on a branch which he had just gathered.

“What a charming butterfly!” observed the king to his chief gardener. “Its colours are truly exquisite; I never recollect having seen any such before.”

“Some new species, come to do mischief, I suppose,” said the gardener, preparing to brush it rudely away. But it took refuge on the bosom of the king, with such caressing and tender familiarity, that only a hard heart could have done it injury.

“Ah, little traitor!” cried Patipata, “thou wishest to win me by thy fleeting charms, and then escape for ever. I already know too well the pain of loving fickle beings such as thou. Yet still I must defend thee, and permit thy return to my orange-tree as often as thou desirest.”

Papillette easily penetrated the thoughts of the prince, and although they uttered a reproach for her inconstancy, she fancied they also breathed the language of love; and returned in better spirits than usual to her father’s palace, where her absence had been unobserved. From thenceforward she never omitted making use of the emerald ring, which transported her in a few moments to her royal lover: she followed him to his palace, saw him give audiences, preside in council, and everywhere prove himself just, great, generous, and worthy of all her affection. It is true that his eyes were still filmy, his body spare, and his hair as red as ever; but what signifies an outside casket when containing a priceless jewel within?

Patipata was determined against marriage; he therefore adopted as heir to the crown the son of a cousin, a young orphan, whom he purposed bringing up beneath his own eye. This prince little resembled his uncle: he had been much spoiled in infancy, and it was impossible to improve him. One day, while conversing with Patipata, “Sire,” said he, “I have a favour to ask your majesty, and I pray you not to refuse me.”

“I shall willingly grant you anything reasonable,” replied the king.

“It is but your beautiful rose-coloured butterfly, which follows you everywhere.”

“And if I were to give it to you, what then?”

“I would run this golden pin through its body, and stick it to a branch of the orange-tree, to see how long it would live. Oh, nothing could be more amusing!”

“Nothing could be more barbarous!” answered Patipata indignantly. “Go, you inspire me with horror; I banish you from my presence during three entire days, and remember, that if my butterfly should receive any injury, you shall be punished with unexampled severity!”

The poor butterfly, who had heard this discourse, knew not how to express its gratitude and joy; it flapped its wings, and sported around its benefactor. The king held out his finger, and it rested there. “Thou shalt quit me no more,” said he. “It is so sweet to be loved, even by a butterfly, that I would not willingly prove myself ungrateful: thou shalt feed at my table; I will serve thee with the finest fruits, the fairest flowers. Ah! if I can only make thee happy!”

On the following day, Patipata went out hunting. In vain Papillette sought him in the park, in the garden, and near the favourite orange-tree. But his nephew, taking advantage of his

absence, began chasing the pretty butterfly. The courtiers knew that he would one day be in power, and, eager to gratify his whims, assisted in the wanton sport: ministers the most pompous, members of council the most profound, climbed on trees, and capered through the meadows,—one would have supposed them mad. But the royal insect, so familiar with the king, was for all others the most capricious of butterflies. It amused itself in leading the court a long chase, and at length rested in the private cabinet of the king, where they never once thought of seeking it.

Papillette, now all alone, could not resist the opportunity afforded of looking over a great quantity of writing which lay on the bureau. What was her surprise and joy, on there finding verses, the most passionate and tender, which Patipata had written in her praise! They indeed revealed that he was proud, and would not risk a second refusal; but they vowed to remain faithful to her, and never to wed another.

The princess was so affected, that two little tiny tears stood in her butterfly-eyes. Well indeed she might shed them, for at this moment, the wicked little prince, her enemy, came behind, and seizing her by her two lovely wings, popped her into his hat.

“Now I have you!” cried he; and it is impossible to say what would have happened, had not the king opportunely returned; when, in taking off his hat to his uncle, he let the butterfly go.

She, recovering from her fright, testified affection by many little endearments; and Patipata, now accustomed to speak to her, exclaimed: “Beautiful insect, how happy art thou!—thou wanderest from flower to flower, without giving the preference to any—thou knowest not love—thou hast not found ingratitude! I, a king, can not boast of such happiness. I adore the lovely Princess Papillette, and am dismissed from her court. I am ugly, it is true; but were I ever so handsome, I should not be more fortunate, for I too well know her fickle—”

The butterfly here sighed so deeply, that the king started.

“Is it possible thou canst feel?” said he. “Oh, if my princess had but as much sensibility, I would know no other care! With her I would live in a hut, far, far from the deceitful splendour of a throne.”

“The Princess Papillette would willingly accompany you,” said a little voice, in tones of the finest and purest melody: and the butterfly’s rosy wings blushed deep as crimson.

“What a prodigy!” cried Patipata. “Ah! butterfly, what dost thou know of my Papillette?”

“Suppose it were herself?” said a voice, which seemed to proceed from a little fountain of rock-crystal which stood between the windows.

The prince turned round; but instead of the butterfly, he beheld the Fairy of the Fountain, holding the fair Papillette by the hand. They were both encircled by a light rose-coloured cloud, which shed a softly brilliant light around the apartment.

Patipata bent one knee to the earth, and kissed the hem of the princess’s garment.

“Come, prince,” said the fairy, “King Merinous is apprised of what passes here. Papillette has overcome her evil destiny. Her affections are fixed and sure; and their object is yourself. And however ready you may both be to live in a hut together, I advise you not to do it. Love is sweeter than royalty, no doubt, but it is not impossible to unite both.”

The lovers, transported with joy, placed their feet on the rose-colored cloud, which instantly carried them to the palace of the king. The Fairy of the Fountain, to complete her benefactions, rendered Patipata as handsome as he was amiable, and the nuptials were celebrated with suitable pomp and festivity. We are informed that Papillette had, at first, some slight returns of her natural disposition; but in one year she became a mother, and from thenceforward never knew frivolity more.

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