

# HOW the MAIDEN saved the EARWIGS.



A FAIRY STORY BY MYRA HAMILTON.



HE Earwigs huddled together beneath a flower-pot in great distress, and though they all talked at once, it was almost impossible to understand what was the matter, for even if you were able to speak Earwig language, what was the good when each word was muddled up with several others? The oldest Earwig seemed most upset, and though he was, on account of his age, given a special leaf chair to sit in, his state of mind was so perturbed that he would have fallen out many times had not his companions held him steady with the tweezers at the end of their tails.

"I shall never settle down in another part of the country," he wailed. "I am sure it will be hateful; besides, for all we know, it may be full of Earwigs already."

"If the King has really given orders to have us destroyed," said a thin, well-shaped Earwig, "we must make up our minds to escape before the morning, or be prepared to die. I don't mind dying myself, but I don't want to be got rid of just to please a Monarch. We have lived in these gardens a very long

time—in fact, I do not believe anybody can say when the royal gardens had not a few select Earwigs residing in it, just to give it a little style. Anyhow, we are better than those people who come here for what they call 'Garden Parties.' 'Garden Spoilers,' they ought to be called, from the way their skirts damage the blossoms and their heels cut up the beautiful grass. And yet nobody interferes with *them*, nor buys patent poisons to get rid of *them*, while we, poor little harmless insects that we are, have to be driven away, just to please—who?—the King!"

"Well, the King issued the order," observed a third Earwig, "but I believe the Queen made him do it. She generally shrieks at the sight of one of us, and when she is in the Palace Garden she always sits near our home, so of course, we are bound to be noticed. But here is Long Back. Let us ask him what he has heard."

"Nothing," replied Long Back. "There is nothing left to happen to us, I am sure. I wonder why we are so unlucky? No mortals like us, and yet we are quite harmless. But listen; I have much to say. I was in the garden near the Palace when His Majesty came out to speak to the Gardener, and as I lingered I learnt that the Royal Chemist was making up some horrible poison, which

is to be sprinkled on the grass. Then the Gardener said he had seen us on the flower-beds, and he knew of a favourite hole of ours where we often ran in and out. Then the King said—oh, what do you think he said ?”

“Go on ; go on !” the others shrieked, dancing on their tweezers with excitement. “Go on !”

“The King said : ‘Pour boiling water down the hole ; that may destroy them !’ While I waited though, too shocked to move, we heard a piercing shriek, followed by another and another, and before I had time to run away, Her Majesty rushed down the garden path with her skirts well off the ground. She was followed by the Royal Nurse, also screaming, while far behind walked the little Princess, looking quite calm. The Queen was crying, and refused to be comforted. It was a long while before she spoke, but when she did, it was to say an Earwig had been found on the counterpane of the Princess’s bed in the Royal Nursery.”

And then a very smart Earwig stepped forward, looking so ashamed of himself.

“I was in the Nursery,” he confessed. “Yes, and on the Royal Cot, too. Oh, it was an accident. I did not mean to go there, but I was playing in the ivy, when I noticed the window was open, and as I had always heard it was beautiful, I crept in just to look about. It was nice, really it was, though I think I would sooner live in the garden than be shut up in a room. However, I thought as I had come so far, I would see what the bed was like, for an Earwig once told me Princesses slept on beds of rose-leaves, and feeling a little tired myself, I decided I would have a nap on one of the leaves if she was not using them all. So I ran up the bedposts of solid gold, only to meet with another disappointment. There were no rose leaves at all, the bed seemed made of some woolly stuff which caught my feet, and a big lace covering all over it, which was almost impossible to walk upon. When I was trying to get off this silly thing, which they call a lace quilt, the door opened, and Her Majesty entered, accompanied by the Princess and the Nurse. Directly they saw me, the Nurse clapped her hands over the little girl’s ears, and dared me to approach. Just as though I wanted to touch anybody’s ears ! Why, I hate all human beings and their ears, too. I wish they had never been born to annoy us. The world would be delightful if it was inhabited only by Earwigs. In the meantime the Queen began to shriek for

the Royal Guard, and directly the door opened to allow them to enter, I am glad to say the draught helped me to escape by the window.

“Well,” said the eldest Earwig solemnly, “perhaps you are not aware that through your foolishness we are to be driven out of the garden, out of the ivy which climbs round the Palace windows ; in fact, we have to leave every spot we have learnt to love. It is very sad,” he went on in tears ; “even an Earwig has his feelings. I believe my heart is breaking. I knew we were unpopular, but I hoped we should be left in peace—at any rate, until I was dead. It will kill me to be separated from the ivy, I am sure.”

And then the Earwig who had brought trouble on the others by behaving stupidly came forward and made a vow.

“I see,” he said sadly, “I have hastened our expulsion by my act, so I will go forth and endeavour to win pardon for all of us. If only their Majesties could realise how harmless we really are, we should be allowed to live unmolested.”

As this brave Earwig drew near the Palace he began to creep slowly, for he was not sure what dangerous trap he might find waiting for him. But all seemed safe enough until he reached the big lawn which started from the Palace windows and covered nearly all the garden, and there he stopped, for he could hear the sound of somebody sobbing, just as though they possessed an unbearable sorrow.

“Well, I shall depart,” he muttered. “This is no place for me if there are tears about. I might easily fall into a puddle of them and be drowned. Why, bless me, it is the dear little Princess whose life should be all sunshine and gladness. What can be the matter with her, I wonder ?”

Now the Princess had the gift, which is only given to the Royal Children who are born on a day when thunder-clouds darken the sky, of being able to understand Earwig language—indeed, with a little study she would have been able to chatter with every insect in the world, and directly she had discovered how nice and gentle they were she would have been firm friends with them all. As it was, owing to the nonsense her Nurse talked, directly she saw this Earwig she was convinced he wanted to wriggle into her ear, and she went hot down her back at the mere thought of it, while her hands became cold and sticky, and her legs felt as though they must fold up and collapse.

In horror she stared at the Earwig as he drew closer and closer, and when he began to talk, she swallowed several lumps in her throat before she could use her voice at all.

"Your Royal Highness, what is the matter?" asked the insect. "I, indeed, have every reason to be sad, but what can have happened to you?"

"I did not know an Earwig could be sad," the Princess said. "I thought you slept in the sun when you were not in—in—well, not creeping into cars."

"It is cruel," replied her companion. "Everybody thinks the same about us, and it is most unfair and quite untrue. We have never hurt anybody in our lives: but it does not matter much, as we shall all be dead in the morning, I fear."

"Oh, you poor thing!" cried Her Royal Highness. "I remember now: Father and Mother want you all destroyed. They have given the order, and perhaps, too, when Father knows that I have failed to find the ring again, I may share your fate," she added, beginning to cry once more.

"What have you done?" And when the Earwig heard, he looked grave, for even he realised how serious it was.

"I took Mother's ruby ring out of its case," explained the child; "for I wanted to see what it looked like in the sunshine, and coming down the garden steps, I slipped, and the ring rolled away. After all, it is only a ring, and Mother has plenty more; but she loved it so."

"Well," said the Earwig, "you sit here, and I will call my friends together, and we will run under every blade of grass and search until we find it. But don't you move, for the lawn will be covered with Earwigs, and you know you hate us."

"I do not," protested the girl, "as long as you do not come too near." But the insect was not listening, for already he had gone to fetch the others. He and his friends hunted diligently, and in less than an hour a large party of them might have been seen rolling the ring towards the Princess, who was delighted to regain possession of it. "Come," she cried; "you have helped me. Now let me see what I can do for you. Tell all your friends to sit on this flower, and let me carry you to the King."

The Earwigs trembled so much with fright that they nearly fell off the rose on which they were perched, for they were sure His Majesty would have them destroyed at once, but nevertheless they determined to die

bravely, so they did not attempt to escape even when the Princess laid them gently at the foot of the throne.

"Are you glad to have your ring again?" asked the Princess, looking into her Mother's face as she spoke.

"Oh, so glad! so glad!" replied the Queen. "Your father gave it to me. It was his first present before we were married."

"Are you glad enough about it to do something to please me?" was the next question this cunning girl put.

Her Mother nodded her head. "I will do anything you want, my darling," she answered. "Tell me what it is."

"Then, Mother," begged the Princess, "spare the Earwigs. Don't let them be destroyed, as they will be to-night. You said you would do anything for me. There is nothing else in all the world I want, except pardon for these little insects."

"I can't do it," the Queen declared. "It is for your own safety I refuse. You don't understand how dangerous they are."

"I know they are kindly disposed towards all human beings," insisted the girl earnestly. "Why, they found your ring for me. See, I can prove to you how harmless they are. Watch closely, and do not move."

The Princess held out her right hand, and called to the little insects who had been waiting patiently for the signal which she had arranged to give. One by one they crawled into her hand, up her arm, on to her shoulder; then without a moment's pause they made their way past her dainty little right ear, and vanished among her curls. But only for an instant, for they quickly reappeared the other side of her head, and began to run down again. Swiftly they crept past her left ear, then hurried along her neck, across her shoulder, on to her left arm, down which they raced until they stood safe among the rose leaves again. The King and Queen watched with breathless interest, and when it was over they gave a sigh of relief.

"You are right, little girl," said her Mother; "they never even looked at your ear as they passed, and as they did not do it then I am sure they will never do it. Go back to your homes, little insects," she cried, bending forward to address them herself. "You are quite safe, and shall live on the land for ever. No, don't thank me, for it is my daughter, the Princess, who is your friend."

And that is the story of the Maiden who saved the Earwigs.