



"BIND THEM  
TOGETHER."  
ORDERED THE  
CHANCELLOR,  
"WHILE WE  
CONSIDER  
WHAT TO DO  
WITH THEM"

## The Green Door

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ONE day when Prince Perivale was a little boy, he was walking with his father the king in the gardens of the palace. There was a high stone wall round the garden so that no venturer from outside could get in; nor was there any way by which those inside the garden could get out, supposing, as was less likely, that they wished to do so. But as the young prince was walking with his father, now leaving his hand and running this way and that, now coming back to it again, he espied suddenly, hidden in a tangle of trees, a little green door in the wall. And he gave a cry and ran back eagerly to his father.

"There's a door there, father. I saw a door, a little green door. Shall we go through that door, father? Where does that door go to?"

His father the king frowned and said nothing. "Did you know that there was a door there, father?" went on the prince. "I didn't. Shall we see where it goes?"

The king tugged at his beard and frowned again. "No, my son," he said at last, "we will not go through it."

"Oh!" said Perivale, and the corners of his mouth began to turn down. "I did want to go through that dear little door."

"If you had gone through that door," said the king solemnly, "you would never have come back again."

"Is it a magic door?" asked the little prince in an awed whisper.

THE king pushed his way through the tangle of trees and stood looking at the door. It was locked, and there was no key in the lock. It looked as though it had not been opened for years, nor could ever be opened again. With a little sigh of relief the king turned round for Perivale's hand and drew him away to another part of the garden.

"What was it, father?" whispered Perivale, now a little frightened.

"It was through that door that King Stephen, your great-grandfather, passed on a summer evening, and was seen no more."

"What happened to him?"

"Nobody ever knew. Some said he was killed by robbers, some that he was eaten by wild beasts. There is a legend

that through that door a man steps into an enchanted forest in which he wanders forever. The king, my father, was of opinion that, as the door is opened, a bottomless pit forms itself on the other side into which one falls headlong. However it be, this is certain—that no one of our ancestors who has ventured through that door has been seen again."

"Perhaps there's a dragon waiting on the other side," said the little prince excitedly.

"Perhaps there is. But we shall do well not to talk of it. We could not unlock the door now if we would, and we would not if we could. The trees will grow over it again, and we shall forget it."

But the little prince did not forget it. Often he thought of it, and told himself strange stories of the wonders to which the green door led. Sometimes it came into his dreams, and then the way was full of terrors, but when he awoke to the sunlight, then the way led by rattle of brooks and twittering of birds to a happiness beyond his understanding.

And as he grew up he heard much idle talk of it by those who had never seen the door; and he noticed that each one who talked of it told a different

story, yet each one pledged his word that his story was the only true story of it; but on this they all agreed, that whoever had passed through the door had passed out of mortal sight forever.

IN DUE time Perivale grew up and succeeded his father as King of Wistaria. At the time of his coronation there was great account in the country of the new king. It was said by those who should have been in a position to know that King Perivale was the handsomest, the wisest, the most manly and the most gallant young king that had ever sat upon the throne. It was reputed that there was no science within the knowledge of the most learned magicians of the country at which he could not better them, no form of manly exercise at which he did not surpass the most talented of his subjects. With his bow he could split a wand at two hundred paces, with his sword he could engage at the same time any three swordsmen in his army. He knew more of the art of fighting than any of his generals, of the art of hunting than any of his huntsmen, and, had only Wistaria been in

possession of a seacoast, he would undoubtedly have been fully qualified to take his country's fleet into a victorious action. All this, and more, was commonly reported of him.

A little later there were other stories told of him. For by this time it had been announced that the beautiful Princess Lilia was coming to Wistaria to wed with the king. And it was told how the king and the princess had happened across each other in the forest, neither knowing who the other was, and how they had met secretly on many a day afterward and had fallen in love with each other, but had feared that they could not marry, because Lilia—as Perivale thought—was not a princess, and Perivale—as Lilia thought—was not a king. How delighted then were they when



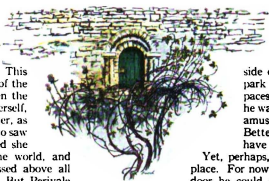
"WELL," HE ASKED, "WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

they discovered that a marriage which would bring everlasting happiness to themselves would also bring pleasure to the people of their countries! This and other stories were told of the king and his bride; and when the princess sent a picture of herself, done by her own court painter, as a gift to King Perivale, all who saw the picture said that indeed she was the loveliest lady in the world, and that His Majesty was blessed above all men in taking her to wife. But Perivale was not reconciled to his happiness. For, in truth, he had not yet seen the Princess Lilia; and though it was the custom of his family to marry in this way, yet he would have preferred to choose for himself the lady whom he would wed.

It had been his father's wish, and the wish of his people, that Wistaria and the country of the Princess Lilia should be united by his marriage, and Perivale was ready enough to do what seemed to be his duty; but, as he wandered through the palace on the day before the royal wedding, he was a little melancholy, feeling that the happy life which he had known till now was over. And, wandering thus, his thoughts in the past, carelessly opening a chest here or a cupboard there, he came suddenly upon a silver key.

NOT for a moment did he doubt. It was the key to the little green door. And as he held it between his fingers all his childish memories of the green door came back to him—the fears, the wonders and the fancies; and suddenly he knew that if ever he was to go through that door it must be now, before his fate was linked with that of the Princess Lilia. As yet she had not seen him. If she never was to see him now, how could she grieve for him?

He hurried through the palace and into the garden. None saw him go save a waiting maid, who watched him idly. The trees had hung new branches over the little door, and he had to force his way through, but in the end he came to it; and with a thrill of anticipation, half fearful, half eager, he turned the lock, and so passed through the green door into the unknown world beyond.



And there was nothing there—no dragons, no robbers, no bottomless pits! Alas, not even an enchanted forest! The door shut with a click behind him, and he was on the outside of the palace wall, with the royal deer park in front of him. He moved a dozen paces away, looked about him and saw that he was still in the world he knew. A little amused, a little angry, he came back again. Better to have gone on imagining than to have found the reality so commonplace.

Yet, perhaps, not entirely commonplace. For now that he looked for the door he could not find it. That was curious. Yet the explanation might be simple enough. The door, no doubt, had been made of stone on this side, the same color as the wall, so that it should not be seen by the passer-by. For a little while Perivale amused himself by searching for it, and then, remembering that in any case he had left the key on the other side of the door, he laughed and set out leisurely on his walk round the palace walls, until he should reach the main gate of the castle.

The waiting maid, watching idly, had seen His Majesty push through the trees which fringed the wall; watching eagerly, had seen him come to a little green door and put a key to its lock; watching fearfully, had seen him open the door and pass beyond her sight. Breathlessly she ran to tell the others.

AS PERIVALE came to the main gate, he remembered that it was on this afternoon that the princess was to set foot in the palace for the first time, and for the first time to see him. Looking down at his clothes, torn and dirtied by the trees through which he had pushed his way, he smiled to think how she would regard him if she met him thus, and he made the more haste to reach the privacy of his room.

But he was never to reach it. A soldier at the gate barred the way. "Well," he asked gruffly, "what do you want?"

"Nothing, my man, but to get to my own chamber," said Perivale mildly.

"Then right about turn and get to it," said the soldier, lowering his pike.

"I perceive that you are new to your duties," said Perivale pleasantly. "I am the king."

Other soldiers lounged up from the courtyard. "What's this?" said one, who seemed to be in some authority.

"The silly fellow says he's the king. What shall we do with him?"

"Fool, I am the king!" thundered Perivale.

At this declaration there was a roar of laughter.

One of the soldiers came and looked at him more closely. "Aye, you're not unlike," he said, "save that a king is a king, and a common man is a common man. Take my advice, friend, and get along home before trouble comes to you."

AT THIS moment one of the women came running into the courtyard.

"The king!" she cried. "The king! He went through the green door! The green door! He will never come back!"

Many of the soldiers ran to her, eager to hear more, but he who was in authority came and looked again at Perivale.

"Aye, he will never come back," he murmured to himself, "but one who is like the king comes in his place, saying that he is the king. My friend," and he put a hand on Perivale's



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"PERHAPS AS LOVERS," SAID PERIVALE GENTLY. "FOR THAT IS AGAIN TO BE KING AND QUEEN"

## The Green Door

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shoulder, "this is very curious. Your tale came past to the moment. Doubtless you will be able to tell us that you knew the king was not in the palace to give you the lie."

He gave an order, and Perivale was seized and marched into the palace. "After all," he said to himself, "that little green door seems not to have been as commonplace as I thought."

And so it proved. An hour later the chancellor was summing up the matter to the satisfaction of all but the prisoner.

"It is clear," he said, "what has occurred. His late lamented Majesty, in spite of all warnings, ventured through the green door. On the other side of that door lurked a fiend, a monster, capable of assuming the shape, and in some measure the appearance, of his victim. To rend His Majesty's clothes, is the work of a moment; and, so garbed, with designs upon the throne itself, this monster gorges himself at the palace gates. But though he can assume, to some slight extent, His Majesty's appearance, he cannot assume His Majesty's great qualities. Can he engage three swordsmen at once? He refuses even to try. Can he surpass in excellence of learning our wisest philosophers? He laughs at the idea of it. How then can he be that most endowed of all monarchs, our noble King Perivale?"

"True," said Perivale grimly to himself. "How can I be?"

**B**UT there came an interruption in the cheers which greeted this pronouncement. Amid whispers which rose to shouts of "The princess! The princess is here!" Her Royal Highness made her way into the hall. And men murmured: "Now indeed we shall know if he be the king, for true love, such as the Princess Lilia has for His Majesty, cannot be deceived."

"What is this they tell me, that His Majesty has been basely murdered?" she cried out. The chancellor explained.

"Then why do none of you follow him through the green door?" she asked scornfully.

The chancellor explained, not only how useless, but also how dangerous it was. "Cowards!" she cried. "Afraid of a little green door!"

"It is rather a mysterious little door," put in Perivale apologetically.

She wheeled round at his voice. "Who is this?" she demanded.

And now each man nudged his neighbor and muttered: "You see? She does not know him. It is not the king."

The chancellor explained that Perivale was certainly an impostor, and that probably he was the wicked monster who had made away with His lamented Majesty.

"And yet he is not ill-looking," murmured Lilia.

"Indeed no," agreed Perivale. "There was a time when I was spoken of as the handsomest man in Wistaria."

"Silence, fellow!" called those nearest to him, and hustled him out of her sight.

"WELL," said Lilia when all were silent again, "who is going through that door to find the king?"

Each man waited for his neighbor to answer.

"No wonder your king left you," she said scornfully. "Show me the door, and I will go."

So they went with her to the garden; and they watched her as she passed through the little green door. Then they came back to their prisoner.

"Perchance," said one, "since we have caught the fiend who lurked behind the green door, she will come safely back."

Suddenly, while they were questioning their prisoner, a commotion arose at the other end of the hall, and people cried, "The princess! The princess! She has

come back to us!" And in a moment all were crowded round.

"What did your Royal Highness see?" they cried.

"THERE was nothing there," she said, and looked long at Perivale, as she nodded at him as if now she understood; and Perivale smiled, and she smiled back at him.

"Did your Royal Highness find the body of His lamented Majesty?" asked the chancellor.

"I found the king," said Lilia, still smiling.

"Where? Where?" they cried.

"Here," she said, and pointed to Perivale.

Then there arose a great uproar of talking, and one said "Yet why did she not recognize him at first?" and another "He has admitted that he is not the king," and a third "But we know that the king is dead." Then, as they talked thus, a whisper ran through them, like wind over corn, and none ever knew who started it.

And the whisper said:

"It is the princess!"

When the whisper came to Perivale he threw up his head, and laughed loud and long.

"What is it?" said Lilia anxiously to him.

"My dear, they say now that you are not the princess, but an impostor like myself. This is indeed a magic door."

And now the certainty grew that this also was a fiend, passing itself off as the greatly-to-be-lamented Princess Lilia.

Then the chancellor was inspired; and to put the matter beyond all doubt, he ordered that Lilia should be taken beneath the portrait of the princess which had been sent to His Majesty as a wedding gift.

And soon as she stood beneath it there came a shout of derision, for all saw that, whereas the portrait was of a surpassingly beautiful lady, with regular features, the girl beneath was of no more than a certain wayward prettiness.

"Bind them together," ordered the chancellor, "while we consider what to do with them."

"I had not intended to give you a wedding ring so rough," smiled Perivale, "but we are indeed joined together now."

He looked down into her eyes, the painter did not do you justice," he murmured. "You are something better than the Princess Lilia."

**B**UT now the chancellor had made his decision as to their fate. Burnings, drownings, stonings, all these happy suggestions of the people had been considered, and rejected as beneath the merits of the case.

"I have," said the chancellor softly, "a prettier plan. These two inhuman monsters have failed in their audacious plot. Think you how that failure will be punished by their brother fiends now waiting for them outside the green door? Let us drive them, then, through the door, and listen, safely on this side of it, to the vengeance which is wreaked on them!"

There was a shout of approval. Perivale and Lilia looked at each other, and a little sob of relief broke from her. Then, bound wrist to wrist, they were driven to the little green door.

"Last time," murmured Lilia, "we went through the door as king and queen, and came out as man and woman. This time we go through as man and woman, and come out—how?"

"Perivale is my lover," said Perivale, gently. "For that is again to be king and queen."

She dropped her eyes, and the color came suddenly into her cheeks. "I wonder," she whispered.

So for the last time they passed through the little green door together, and out into the world beyond.