

# THE NUT TREE.

## A FAIRY STORY.

By M. ALISON ATKINS.



ONCE upon a time, what must happen did happen, and the old astrologer died, leaving a nephew called Lorin to inherit his great wealth and the beautiful estate which stretched from the south wall of King Skinflint's garden down to the road which led to the sea.

Lorin was an orphan, and had lived with his wise old uncle ever since he was a baby, helping with the telescopes, polishing the magic crystals, and working out sheets upon sheets of long sums. Sometimes when he had finished a longer sum than usual, the old astrologer gave him a lump of liquorice for a treat, and let him peep through the big telescope at the moon and stars. But this happened very rarely, as the astrologer said that the stars did not like strangers to look at them closely, and that liquorice was not good for young boys.

And now he was dead, and Lorin was all alone in the world, and so rich that he could have bought the king's crown itself if it had been for sale.

"I'll buy a cricket-bat," he said, looking round his treasure-room, which was full of bags of money. So, untying one of the biggest bags, he took out a handful of gold pieces and put them in his pocket, feeling very happy, for hitherto all the pocket-money he had was a farthing a quarter, and an occasional threepenny-bit from the king's son Rubylocks, who was a generous boy and liked to share his money with his friends.

"That will buy a cricket-bat and some leg-guards and ginger-beer," said Lorin, patting his pockets lovingly. "I will call Rubylocks and Maid Mignonette over the wall, and we can have a jolly game, and Mignonette can field for us."

"Spend us, lend us, give us away ;  
There's a million more left of us  
To use another day,"

sang the gold pieces that were in the bag.

Two days later, the astrologer's heir entered his treasure-room again. "I'll buy a boat in which to row on the lake," he said, filling his pockets a second time. "And I'll buy a big lunch-basket full of pies and custard and ginger-beer, and then I will call Rubylocks and Maid Mignonette over the wall, and we can play at desert islands."

"Spend us, lend us, give us away ;  
There is nearly a million left of us  
To use another day,"

sang the gold pieces, as he closed the door.

Three days more, and he came again. "I'll buy a yacht," he said, filling a large wallet as well as his pockets with the bright gold pieces. "I'll buy a yacht, and take Rubylocks and Maid Mignonette and heaps of people down the river, with music on board and lovely things to eat. I only had Rubylocks and Mignonette for friends before I got my money, and now I have hundreds."

"Spend us, lend us, give us away ;  
There is half a million left of us  
To use another day,"

sang the gold pieces.

Weeks passed, and, not content with his bat, boat, and yacht, Lorin bought an air-gun, a pair of Wellington boots, a pack of hounds, three hunters, a garden-hose, a flying machine, a gipsy van with a goat to walk underneath, a barrel organ, and a knife with six blades and a corkscrew.

"Spend us, lend us, give us away ;  
There's a hundred thousand left of us  
To use another day,"

sang the gold pieces in the treasure-room.

One day, as Lorin, Rubylocks, and Maid Mignonette, the little tomboy princess, practised the long jump, an old, old man looked over the garden fence and asked them if they could tell him the nearest way to the moon.

"Good father," replied Lorin politely, "my old uncle, the astrologer, could have told you without thinking. But I know no more about it than the man in the moon. However, if you will come to my house, we will look in my old uncle's books and see if we can find some road that would take you there."



"An old, old man looked over  
the garden fence."

The old man thanked him, and the four of them entered the house, and, settling themselves in the astrologer's disused observatory, took down book after book till they were quite tired. And all to no purpose.

"It is most veracious," said the old man, pulling his long, white beard, till Mignonette begged him to stop before he hurt himself. "You see, I am the man in the moon—or, rather, the man who should be in the moon—and I walked too near the edge early this morning, and fell over, and have been trying to find my way back ever since. I must be home before dark, or there will be nobody to light up, and then there will have to be an eclipse."

Lorin screwed up his eyes and thought hard. "When my old uncle was alive, he used to let me look through the big telescope sometimes for a treat, and the moon looked very close indeed. Perhaps you could get back that way. But I forgot; we broke the lens the other day, when we dropped down upon it in the flying machine."

"Then there will have to be an eclipse to-night, all out of season, and the tides of the sea will be disarranged, and everything will go wrong," said the man in the moon miserably. "That is what comes of growing old in the service of one's country, and losing one's foothold."

"Please don't be miserable," said Maid Mignonette. "I am sure Lorin will buy a lens if you really want to get home."

"It will take a very powerful one to get me home, I am afraid," said the poor old man doubtfully. "And powerful lenses cost money."

"Oh, that does not matter to me," replied Lorin. "Come on, Rubylocks. I'll get some money from my treasure-room; and we will soon send him home."

"Spend us, lend us, give us away;  
There's twenty thousand left of us  
To use another day."

sang the gold pieces, as the two boys left the treasure-room.

"You are a good young fellow," said the man in the moon, as they fitted the new lens into place, "and I shall give you a present for your pains. I must tell you that when I met with my unfortunate accident, I was on my way to the hillside forest of the southern moon, with the intention of planting two trees in place of some that died during the last eclipse. Consequently I have the seeds in my pocket. I shall bestow the larger of the two on you in grateful recognition of your services.

Plant it in a green tub, stand it near a public footpath, water it well six times a day, and your fortune is secure."

Lorin thanked him and took the seed in his hand. It looked like an ordinary chestnut, such as we cook on winter evenings.

"Don't forget that it is valuable," repeated the man in the moon, peering up the shaft of the telescope. "Here comes my white world, and I must say 'Good-bye.'"

They watched him crawl slowly up the long, dark shaft towards the moon, which looked very near and bright. "I forgot to say," he quavered, as he was about to quit the telescope—"I forgot to say that its name is *Castanea vesca*, and it likes to have it painted on the outside of the tub. Good-bye, my dear young friends; good-bye. It is due to your kindness that I once again set foot upon my native land. Good-bye, good-bye."

The three friends watched the old man creep across the white, hilly fields of the moon, till, entering the dark shadows of a volcanic valley, he disappeared from sight. Then they went into the garden, found a tub, and, after painting it green, printed "*Castanea vesca*" on the outside, and planted the nut. And then Rubylocks and Mignonette said "Good night" and clambered over the wall into the palace gardens just in time to dress for dinner.

Several weeks passed, and Lorin grew quite famous; and King Skinflint, happening to hear from Rubylocks of his wealth and the good fun that went on in the astrologer's house, invited himself to dinner, which, of course, was a very great honour for the old astrologer's nephew.

"I will furnish the house afresh," said Lorin, entering his treasure-room with five sacks and a wheel-barrow. "I will have ivory panelling in all the rooms, and curtains of Chinese embroidery, and golden plates, and a silver fountain of attar of roses, and everything splendid that I can think of."

"Spend us, lend us, give us away;  
There's just five thousand left of us  
To use another day."

sang the gold pieces.

Well, the king's dinner was such a success, and Lorin made so charming a host, that his Majesty promised to dine with him again very shortly, and bring Rubylocks and Maid Mignonette, who had just put her hair up on the top of her head, and was quite a grown-up girl.

"You are a capital fellow," said King Skinflint. "Come up to the palace to-

morrow, to afternoon tea, and I will make you a duke."

"I'll have a white velvet suit with pearl buttons," said Lorin, as he stood in his treasure-room that night. "And I'll take a diamond chain for Mignonette to wear round her neck."

"Spend us, lend us, give us away;  
There's just five hundred left of us  
To use another day."

sang the gold pieces.

The next afternoon, when Lorin had taken tea with the royal family, and King Skin-flint had made him a duke, he and the princess went down the garden to look at the pine-apples and a pretty, new, sweet flower for which the head gardener wanted a name.

"If I were as rich as you, Lorin," said Maid Mignonette, "I should spend my money quite differently."

"What would you do with it?" asked Lorin.

"You must not think me ungracious if I tell you. Although I enjoyed your dinner-party ever so much, I do think it rather a waste to give treats to people such as ourselves, for we can have treats whenever we like. If I were rich like you, I should build a lighthouse to guide the sailors on the sea. Then I should give pounds and pounds to the hospital for poor, ill people. Then I should buy the beggars new clothes, to wear instead

of their rags, and buy a very large steam-roller to smooth the roads for the horses. You don't mind me telling you, do you?"

"Of course I don't," replied Lorin. "It always takes a girl to think of kind things. I shall do everything you say." Then they

looked at the pineapples and the sweet, little, new flower that wanted a name. "All the prettiest names are taken," said the princess, looking at Lorin over her handful of blossom. "It is a pity, for this is the sweetest flower that ever was."

"Let us call it 'mignonette,'" said Lorin.

Poor Lorin! When he reached home that night, he noticed how dreadfully empty his treasure-room looked, and how difficult it was to find enough gold pieces to fill his wallet.

And now comes the sad part of the

story. Lorin sent four hundred and fifty gold pieces to the hospital for poor, ill people, spent the remaining fifty in new clothes for the beggars, sold all the lovely furniture in his house, and built a lighthouse for the sailors at sea. Then he sold his flying machine and the fine, long garden-hose and bought a large steam-roller for the roads; and when all this was done, found himself with an empty house.

So, after a wild six months of splendour, Lorin found himself so poor that no one



"One of the maids of the palace, he guessed."

would come near him nor even bow to him in the street, which made him very unhappy, for he had not yet learnt what an amazing difference money makes to a man.

"I am just as tall and strong as I ever was, and my face has not changed, and I am sure I should be just as merry if only people would talk to me," he said to himself. "They treat me as though I were ill, and they were afraid to come near me."

And in this he was right. For there is nothing some folk fear so much as a poor friend.

But, as being sad and abusing people made him no richer, and gave him nothing to eat, he decided that it was wiser to work. So he worked in his great garden, growing flowers and fruit and vegetables for market, and kept things in such good order that he was able to make enough to live upon. And every day he watered the green tub where the man in the moon's mysterious seed was lodged, and wondered if it would ever show signs of life.

Then came a long, hot summer, when the sun shone all day and there was no rain, and the garden longed for water, and Lorin, try as he might, could not keep the earth from cracking in the intense, dry heat.

"If Maid Mignonette were as sweet as her

namesake," he said mournfully, "she would never have given me up when misfortune overtook me. But as I cannot give her any more diamonds, what is the use?"

Then he sat down amid the mignonette and felt very miserable, because his flowers were dying, and he was tired, and had lost all his friends, and everything was just as wrong as it could be.

That night a dry, brown twig made its appearance above the earth in the green tub, and Lorin, as he watered it, heard a tiny voice sing: "I am *Castanea vesca*. Treat me well, and I will bring you good fortune."

The next morning, as he went round the estate with his big tank of water in a wheel-barrow, he noticed that the ground for at least fifty yards along the wall was dark and moist, as though it had been recently drenched with rain.

"How is this?" said Lorin, wiping his hot forehead. "It will save me at least three

hours' work. It must be an enemy who has done it, for it is not a bit like a friend."

Day after day the same thing happened, and at last, one morning, Lorin determined to discover his benefactor. Creeping over the lawns in the grey of the dawn, he reached a large clump of Jacob's ladder in full bloom,



"My father does not like him now, and we may not play any more."

and, crouching down on his knees, waited breathlessly.

Silence, silence beyond the wall, then a strange, slippery, slithy noise, like a serpent moving along the gravel path, then a soft scrambling and a little sigh of relief, followed by a bonnet appearing over the tips of the fruit-trees which peeped over the wall.

"Sssssss! Sssquish!" Oh, the sweet music of the falling diamonds of water! Lorin's cheeks flushed as he heard the exquisite drip, drip upon the hollyhock leaves and smelt the fragrance of the grateful earth.

And so his unknown friend was a girl of the palace, one of Mignonette's own maids, perhaps, working—oh, delicious thought!—under the command of the princess herself.

Now, just beyond the range of the hose, at the edge of the lawn, was a large bed of pansies and forget-me-nots, covered with blossom, but flagging sadly for want of rain. "I simply cannot reach them," said the girl in the bonnet. "They are so lovely, and they are sure to die if no one waters them."

Then, lowering the hose among the hollyhocks, she scrambled nimbly to the coping of the wall, and, after balancing herself and looking round to see that no one was in sight, hauled a ladder up after her, and, dropping it down Lorin's side of the wall, proceeded to descend to the ground.

"And now I can do much more," she said, dragging the hose towards the lawn. "You lovely pansies, you shall have just as much water as you like. Poor, hard-worked Lorin cannot possibly water such a huge garden all by himself."

Lorin's heart went bump, bump against his waistcoat, till he thought the owner of the bonnet must hear it. One of the maids of the palace, he guessed, when he first saw her over the wall. And he was right, for it was the sweetest maid of all, Maid Mignonette, the princess.

"Once a friend, always a friend,"

sang Mignonette, waving the water in flashing wreaths over the dry grass. "How pleased Lorin would be if I had time to water the whole garden before he got up! He would think it was a fairy. That clump of Jacob's ladder looks very weak. I will give it a shower-bath and make it happy."

This she did with such a will that Lorin jumped out of his hiding-place with the water streaming down his face and dripping from his shirt in such a way that made the princess anxious lest he should take cold.

"You ought not to have been there," she

said, dropping the hose and giving him both her kind little hands to kiss. "If I had known you were there, I would never have climbed over the wall. It is only girls with their hair down their back and short dresses who climb. You must try to forget it."

Lorin held her hands fast in his. "I never thought it was you, Maid Mignonette. I thought you had forgotten all about me."

"I never forget," said the princess. "At least, I forgot I was grown up when I climbed over the wall, but I don't forget friends. I was behind the wall the other day when you were talking aloud to yourself about the mignonette, and I heard all you said. But once a friend, always a friend, Lorin, and I have been seeking some way to show you that. But I ought not to be talking to you, because my father says that poor boys are dangerous—though why, I do not know—and has forbidden me to speak to you. Rubylocks would have come to see you often, only he has gone to college. I am so sorry you found me out, for now I shall not be able to help you any more, because I shall talk to you, and that will be disobeying my father."

"I will help you climb home again at once," said Lorin, who was so fond of the princess that he could not bear to think of her doing anything wrong. "Perhaps, though, you could come again and not talk, just so that we could see each other. It is so lovely to see you, Maid Mignonette."

But Mignonette shook her head. "No, that would never do. If I saw you, I should begin to talk at once. You see, Lorin, there are so many things I want to say to you that I don't want to say to anyone else. But once a friend, always a friend, and when Rubylocks comes home for the holidays, he will come and see you every day."

Lorin, happy in the thought that he and the princess were friends, after all, went about his work with a light heart, watering his flowers, re-potting his chrysanthemums, digging his potatoes, just as happily as though he were a king playing at work.

"I am *Castanea vesca*," sang the twig in the green tub that night. "I have grown five feet to-day, and, though bare and dry as a faggot, will astonish you with my fruit."

The next morning Lorin, to his amazement, found the dry twig grown to a fine branching tree, as tall as the orange trees in the tubs along the terrace-walk of King Skinflint's garden, but without the sign of flower, leaf, or bud.

"I am *Castanea vesca*," it sang. "Treat me well, and you shall have all that you desire."

And then wonders began to happen. People passing at dusk along the road that wound along the boundary of Lorin's garden declared that the astrologer's heir had inherited the wise man's curious knowledge, as well as his estate and treasure-room. For directly the sun had set, and twilight deepened into night, the bare tree in the tub which stood on the grass glowed like white fire, with stars amid the naked boughs in place of leaves. Others passing later still, when night was at its depth, spoke of a sweet voice singing among the stars, and a thread of light which fell in soft festoons from the moon into the woven branches.

"I am *Castanea vesca*," sang the tree, as Lorin lay on the grass gazing up at his treasure. "I am *Castanea vesca*, the tree of the moon, with no leaves but the stars. Once, long years ago, one of us came to earth and grew as I grow, bare in the daylight, but starry at night. Her master was not obedient, and kept her close within his gardens, where none could see her beauty. So when at last he could no longer contain his wonder and delight, and told people of his tree, they could not believe him, and called him lunatic, and shut him up away from the world; and the moon tree, deprived of his care, died. But that is too sad a story for a moonlit night. I am *Castanea vesca*, and I bring you all that you can desire."

Two days later, two of the branches blossomed strangely, and a strong wind blowing the petals away, disclosed a silver nutmeg and a large golden pear.

Now, up at the palace great festivities were in progress, for Rubylocks was home for the holidays, and the King of Spain and his daughter had come to spend a month with King Skinflint, and everyone was as busy as could be making them enjoy themselves.

The two kings were old schoolfellows, and very fond of each other, though at times the King of Spain was apt to laugh at King Skinflint's careful economy.

And as for the princesses— Well, Maid Mignonette fell head over ears in love with the Spanish princess, and said that she was the dearest child in the world, and that she would like to keep her for ever.

"My loyal highness will be velly pleased to stay wiv you," said the Spanish princess, who was not very old, and could not talk quite plainly. "You are velly plitty and velly kind, and you play games with me so

nically. Have you anyone to play games wiv when I am not here?"

Mignonette sighed. "No, sweetheart. Now that Rubylocks goes to college I have no one. I used to have a very nice play-fellow. But my father does not like him now, and we may not play any more."

"Vat is velly sad," said the Spanish princess, stroking Maid Mignonette's cheek with her fat little hand. "When you get malled, you will be able to play wiv anyone you like, so you must not mind velly much."

Then they started a game of fox and geese in the garden, and the Spanish princess, who always had her own way, made the two kings play with them, and the councillors and equerries, till any stranger coming into the garden would have said: "Dear me! what a very odd party!"

"And now," said the Spanish princess, when she was tired and did not wish to play any more, "you may go, and Mignonette and me and the plitty big boy wiv the led hair will sit on the glass and say fings to each uvver."

"What shall we say?" asked Rubylocks.

"We will say quite new fings," declared the Spanish princess, settling herself on the grass: "and I will begin. When I went for a walk, I saw a white horse wiv a pink and blue tail, and a fairly man on his back. What did you see, Mignonette?"

"When I went for a walk, I saw a bird fly down from the clouds with a flower in his beak, which he gave to your fairy man on the white horse with the pink and blue tail. What did you see, Rubylocks?"

"When I went for a walk," said Rubylocks, "I looked over a fence and saw a little nut tree with nothing on it but a silver nutmeg and a golden pear. And that is a fact, Maid Mignonette, for it is growing in the green tub in Lorin's garden, where we planted the nut that the man in the moon gave Lorin when he went home through the telescope."

"To-morrow morning," said the Spanish princess, "my nurse and me will go for a walk and see the nut tree. Will you come too, dear Mignonette?"

Mignonette shook her head. "No, sweetheart. My father will not let me."

"Vat is velly sad," said the Spanish princess. "But never mind. When you are malled, you will be able to walk where you like."

The next morning as Lorin watered his garden he was surprised by a soft thumping at his gate. Opening it, he found the

Spanish princess and her nurse standing outside. "We have come to see the little nut tree wiv the silver nutmeg and the golden pear," said the princess. "Please show it us."

So Lorin led the way to the green tub by the fence where *Castanea vesca* dangled its curious fruit in the sunshine, and the Spanish princess clapped her hands and laughed with delight. "Please sit on the glound," she said to Lorin, who was too tall for her to talk to comfortably, "and tell me all about the tree."

"I had a little nut tree,  
Nothing would it bear  
But a silver nutmeg  
And a golden pear.  
The King of Spain's  
daughter  
Came to visit me  
All for the sake  
Of that little nut tree,

sang Lorin, smiling at the princess, who clapped her hands again and said that it was a velly plitty tlee, and that Lorin was a velly plitty boy, and that it was a velly plitty song, and that she would go home and tell Maid Mignonette all about it. So Lorin picked her a rose for herself and a large bunch of forget-me-nots for Maid Mignonette, and then she went home.

"I am *Castanea vesca*," sang the tree, "Good fortune is on your track. Treat me well, and you shall have all that you desire."

That night the Spanish princess, who always did as she liked, told her nurse and Mignonette that she was not going to bed

yet, but was going to take the kings to see the nut tree and the boy who sang so nicely.

"Had you not better go to bed, my pet?" said the King of Spain, when she told him of her plan.

"Go to bed like a good little girl, my dear, and I will give you a whole threepenny-piece for yourself," said King Skinflint, who did not want to see Lorin.

But no, that arrangement did not suit the Spanish princess at all.

So off they went, and found Lorin in the garden, watering the nut tree.

"It is the eighth wonder of the world," declared the King of Spain, looking at it through his single eyeglass. "My dear Skinflint, I envy you having a subject who can grow

such a tree as this. I should like a cutting, if he could spare me one."

"I am *Castanea vesca*," sang the tree. "Sell me if you will, but do not wound me."

"What will you take for it?" asked

the King of Spain, more delighted than ever when he heard it sing.

"I am *Castanea vesca*," sang the tree. "I come from the moon, where I and my sisters live on the steep hillsides amid violet shadows. I am *Castanea vesca*, and am worth



"She told him of her plan."



more than the coffers of kings can hold. Buy me with ten thousand golden pieces, each stamped with your august Spanish head, and ten thousand silver coins as pure and white as moonlight, and ten thousand copper pence as red as the sun at sunset."

"Done!" said the King of Spain to Lorin. "And, what is more, I will make you a grandee and give you four of the richest islands in the Pacific. How is that?"

"Done!" said Lorin.

Then the King of Spain took an old letter from his pocket, and scribbled the agreement on the back, and signed it himself, and made King Skinflint witness it, and gave it to Lorin.

"That will make a rich man of you, as rich men go in this country," he said, shaking hands heartily.

"And I shall be pleased to see you any day at the palace when you care to drop in to tea," said King Skinflint, also shaking hands.

"And I will have the plitty tee in my own garden!" cried the Spanish princess, holding up her face for Lorin to kiss. "And now you can come and play wiv Mignorette."

Lorin played with Mignorette till he was twenty-one. And then they were married.

And *Castanea vesca* lived for years and years in Spain, growing taller and more

wonderful every year, till one day a tiresome, disobedient gardener's boy took a little cutting of the marvellous tree, just to see if it were possible to grow another. And being wounded, *Castanea vesca* died, though the cutting grew splendidly.

But the strange and disappointing thing was that it did not grow like its parent tree, but had a quantity of long, shiny leaves and little tails of flowers, something like the lambstails that grow on poplar trees; and instead of silver nutmegs and golden pears, it bore brown nuts in prickly cases, which were found to be very good to eat, and were called chestnuts.

Sometimes in the autumn, when the green leaves turn to brilliant gold, and the sun touches them through the early morning mist, *Castanea vesca* shines forth with a dim reflection of her ancient glory. And sometimes on a summer night, when the moon glides across the sky after rain, the glossy, green leaves catch a tender radiance softer than the starry splendour with which they glowed in days gone by. But even without her wondrous leaves and strange fruit and magic song, *Castanea vesca* is always beautiful; and when you see her in the garden with her graceful branches bowing to the green lawn, you can think that through her Lorin became rich enough to marry Maid Mignorette.

