Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Nardo and the Princess

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Once there lived a king who had two sons, and, though they were twins, they were as different as if they had been strangers.

Nardo was kind and good, while his brother Stephen was greedy and selfish, never doing any one kindness.

One day there came to the King's gates an old beggar man who asked for a night's lodging and food.

The brothers were standing near and Stephen told the servants to close the gates, that a palace was no place for beggars.

"Stop," said Nardo to the servant; "a palace is just the place for beggars. Brother, we have a plenty and to spare; let the poor man enter."

The beggar thanked Nardo and said: "You shall never regret your kindness. Wear this ring, and whenever you wish for something money cannot buy you shall have your wish."

Nardo put the ring in his pocket and forgot all about it until he fell in love with a beautiful princess, and, like all lovers, he was afraid she did not love him.

Then he remembered the old beggar man and the ring, and put it on and wished for the love of the beautiful Princess.

It happened that Stephen also loved the Princess, but he knew she did not love him, and, seeing the ring the old beggar had given Nardo on his hand one day, he remembered what the beggar had said when he gave his brother the ring.

"I must have the ring," said Stephen. "Then I will have the love of the Princess; besides that, her father, the King, is old, and when he dies I shall be king in his place."

But it was no easy matter to possess the ring, for Nardo was as big and strong as Stephen. There was no way to get the ring from off his finger unless he took it by force or could get some witch to weave a spell over him.

And all this time the beautiful Princess was in love with Nardo. Had he only known it, he needed no magic ring to win her love for him.

One night after trying in vain to get the ring Stephen went to an old witch who

lived in a cave by the sea and asked her to get the ring for him, promising to make her rich if she would get it.

The witch was greedy for gold, so one night while Nardo slept she crept into the palace, aided by the wicked Stephen, and cast a spell over Nardo, which made him forget the ring and also his love for the beautiful Princess.

Stephen, with the ring on his finger, felt that all was easy now, and he promptly forgot all about the old witch and the gold he promised her.

The beautiful Princess looked with sad eyes upon the now cold and indifferent Nardo, and, while she did not love Stephen, she felt each day that she was being drawn to him, though she knew well enough she did not love any one but Nardo.

The old witch, however, helped the Princess out of part of her troubles, for when she found that Stephen did not intend to give her the gold, she waited for him one day in the palace grounds, hidden behind a clump of bushes, and when he came out for a walk she pointed her lean fingers at him and placed him under a spell which made him follow her to her cave by the sea.

Here she chained him to a rock and put a dragon to watch that he did not escape; but while the Princess escaped marrying Stephen, he still possessed the ring which kept Nardo from remembering he had ever loved the Princess.

One night when the Princess was sitting in her window looking at the moon and sighing over her lost lover and his love she saw a nightingale caught by its wing in a tree.

The tree was so close that the Princess had only to reach out and rescue the poor bird and set it free.

The nightingale, in gratitude for its life, began to sing so sweetly that the Princess exclaimed, “Oh, sing each night by my window, beautiful bird, that I may for a little while at least forget my sorrow.”

The hour of midnight was just then striking, and as the last stroke of twelve died away the nightingale changed into a fairy.

“I am powerless to use my magic until the hour of midnight strikes,” said the little fairy. “I have chosen to become a nightingale until then, and the Queen will not give me the power of a fairy until I change my form to one.

“If it had not been for your kindness I might never have become a fairy again, for the nightingale’s wing would have been broken, and no imperfect creature can reclaim its form, once it has changed from a fairy.

“If I can help you, tell me and I will go to the Queen and ask to remain a fairy, and then no matter how hard the task you set I am sure I can make you happy.”

Of course, the Princess did not know about the magic ring, and she could only tell the fairy how once she had felt sure that Nardo loved her and then suddenly he had changed and would not notice her at all.

The fairy listened to the Princess and told her not to worry; that she was sure there was something wrong; that Nardo still loved her, and at midnight the next night she would return, and away she flittered in the moonlight, leaving the Princess happier than she had been for many a day.



It took the fairy but a short time to unravel the mystery, and the next night when the Princess went to her window she found the little fairy waiting for her, perched on the sill.

“Do not grieve, my Princess,” said the fairy. “Nardo still loves you; it is all the work of his wicked brother Stephen, who loved you, too.”

Then she told the Princess the story of the ring and how Stephen had got the old witch to get it for him, and that if he had given her the gold he would have married the Princess in spite of all she could have done.

“But if Nardo still loves me, why does he keep away? Why does he not tell me of his love?” asked the Princess.

“He will, my dear Princess, when he remembers,” said the fairy, “and there is where the difficult part comes in.

“We must get the ring or the stone. It is only the stone that holds the charm, but that is still on Stephen’s finger, and to get near to him the dragon must be overpowered.”

“Oh! I will send all my father’s soldiers,” said the Princess; “they can kill the dragon, I am sure.”

“Not a dragon that belongs to a witch,” said the fairy, “and if my plan works, and I think it will, we shall not need soldiers. I will be back before the sun rises. Wait for me.”

Away went the fairy to her Queen and again asked to be changed into a nightingale. “It is to help some one in trouble, dear Queen,” she said, “and never again will I ask to change my form.”

The Queen granted her wish and away flew the nightingale toward the sea, where lived the witch and the dragon.

When she was near the cave she began her sweetest song, and as she flew nearer she sang more sweetly and softly until she alighted on a tree right over

the rock where lay the dragon and the sleeping Stephen.

The eyes of the dragon were wide open, watching on all sides for any one who might dare attempt to rescue Stephen.

When he heard the sweet tones of the nightingale the dragon raised its head and looked around, but, seeing only a bird perched over his head, he had no fear. Softly, sweetly, the nightingale trilled and sang its soothing song until at last the dragon began to nod its head, and after a while it dropped to the ground, fast asleep.

The poor nightingale was so worn out with singing so long that it hardly had strength to fly down to where Stephen was sleeping.

Very carefully it did so with only a soft waving of its wings, and then its bill plucked from the ring on Stephen's hand the red stone, and off it flew with the stone held tightly in its bill.

Only once did it stop, and that was to sip a drop of dew from a rose-bush where it alighted to rest, and then on it went to the palace where Nardo was sleeping and flew through the window of his bedroom.

Nardo's hand was open on the pillow beside his face, and into his hand the nightingale placed the red stone and flew away to the Princess.

"Your lover will be here with the sun," she said, "and as it is not far from that time I must fly to my Queen.

"Farewell, my kind Princess. May you be happy with your Prince, and if you are as good and kind as a Queen as you were when a Princess I shall never regret my night's work."

The Princess thanked her again and again, but the fairy was away before she had finished, and just then the sun peeped through the trees and at the same time the sound of horses' hoofs was heard coming along the road.

The Princess's cheeks grew red, for she knew it was her lover, and when she reached the palace door there he was just riding up.

When the spell was broken for Nardo it released poor Stephen from the power of the witch; the sea rolled in and the wind shrieked among the trees and the next thing Stephen knew he was running through the forest toward his home.

Of course, he was too much ashamed to tell of all that had happened to him and said he had been hunting in the forest and lost his way; and Nardo and the Princess kept his secret and did not let him know they were aware of his treachery, and as he grew to be a better man as the years went by, they were glad they did.

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