

The Storyteller

MY LADY HOPE

He was a great and mighty monarch. His subjects numbered millions, and his palace was the most magnificent since the time of Solomon the splendid. Daily he walked through stately corridors, where the floors were of beaten gold, lined on either side with courtiers clad in velvet and silken trappings, who prostrated themselves, faces to the earth, at his approach. His robe was of royal purple and rich ermine; his jewelled crown glistened above his brow, and when he waved his sceptre, so great was he and so mighty that even his counsellors trembled.

Yet he was the wisest and most peaceful king the world had ever known. He would have men at his feet because he was their sovereign—but only to raise them, to place them at his royal side, to rejoice with them, to sorrow with them, to counsel and advise them.

He was the conqueror of the world. Not by fear, for he abhorred it; not by trickery nor artifice, since before being a king he was an upright and an honorable man. But by the law of love—the universal love—the law God-given, God-imposed, nations from near and from far came to him, each after the other, yielding homage, for never, in the history of the universe, had there been united in one mortal so many graces of presence and of mind. Majestic in his power, lovable in his personality. His words were hung with wisdom as the vines bend under the burden of fruition. And the people hearkened. When he spoke his phrases were taken up and whispered from one listening courtier to the other, until the whisper grew and the murmur swelled, and, in a trice, a mighty roar from the echoing hills proclaimed the fact that the inhabitants of the earth were repeating his speech, rejoicing at it, blessing him.

And oh! the good he did; and oh! the wonders he accomplished. There was neither sin nor shame—each worked for the other's welfare; kindness to all was the motive of his schemes. On every side were evidences of his benefit—and the people were glad of heart, and their faces shone with the very joy of living.

One thing was to him a great annoyance—and this one thing perplexed him and disturbed him—like a thorn in the flesh it stung, and its pain would not be eased. It was a woman—a beautiful woman, with a white face that looked as if the moonlight were shining from within it, so luminous was its waxen pallor. And she was always weeping. He saw her very often. And being so tender-hearted, he felt sorry for her, and sat beside her, forgetful of his kingly dignity, forgetful, too, of the pain she caused him—allowing her to hold his hand in her little fingers. And at such times she put her arms about him and cried more bitterly than ever. And that was when the pain came, for her tears hurt him. She said she was his wife, but that was absurd, he told her gently. She was a beautiful woman—yes, he could see that, looking at her. But who had ever heard of a king marrying beneath his royal station. If she were indeed the queen, why did she not reign with him in this, his palace, and wear the robes and the crown of gold? All this he said to her in the tenderest of tones, trying to show her wherein she erred. But the woman would not be convinced. She clung to him still, with sorrowful little sighs, and he was silent out of pity for her until she went away.

There came a day, however, when she made him angry—even he, and he lost patience. He had just heard that morning the reports of his Ministers on the condition of the outlying provinces. These had been highly gratifying, but he was much wearied, and he had called to his jester to while away an hour or two. At his feet he lay, a misshapen little being indeed, but wittier and wiser in the king's eyes than any of his courtiers. There came word, just at that moment, that the woman craved audience. He rose at once forgetting his fatigue, and went to her, his jester following—the ugly being whom the kindly king had taken so much pains to instruct. He rolled into the room and stood before the beautiful pale woman, grimacing. And at the strange sight of him she cried out and covered her face with her hands. The king looking at them both felt that her emotion was disgust, and in mighty wrath ordered her from his presence.

She went, but she came again. For his sake, she told him meekly, she would try to like the jester—Prank, they called him. Yes, she would like him, and here was a bright ribbon she had brought. Wasn't it pretty? And now would he not please her also by trying to remember her? Did he not know Eleanor, his Eleanor? And dear old Callingsford, and the long lane

behind the little church where they used to walk on summer evenings—when he first told her he loved her and asked her to be his bride?

The court physician approached just then. The king, with her hands clinging to his arm, turned to him pitiingly.

'Poor creature, poor creature!' he said. 'She is really crazy, is she not? Take her away and do what you can for her.'

The physician held out his arm to the woman, and she leaned heavily upon it, sobbing as if her heart would break. The king and his jester stood staring after her. Then the jester made the guttural, grunting noise which meant with him superlative enjoyment.

But the great king felt something wet on his cheek, and put up his hand to wipe away the tears. And he was very quiet and melancholy all that evening, and forgot his grand dreams for his people.

He had been a sculptor of no mean attainments in the world of sense, this poor fellow who played at mimic king, and wore his gilded, pasteboard crown. The day came when he finished his life-work—a glorious creation in marble. He called it 'My Lady Hope,' and it was a splendid, strong-limbed, noble, female figure, upon whose face, under the magic of his fingers, had grown an expression at once uplifting and pitiful. He had put his soul into this, and the love of his soul, too—for he was wedded to a beautiful girl, and he had idolized her. When it was finished the critics viewed it, and it was too mighty for them to understand. They laughed at it and at him. They mocked it, and tore it to pieces, tearing his heart also with their bitter words. Startled, he lost confidence even in the beautiful thing he had wrought. His body, enfeebled by much labor, grew weak; his brain, enfeebled by much thinking, gave way under the strain. Dr. Morrison, the head at the sanatorium, had known him before his misfortune, and took a keen interest in him now. Every one was kind to him—no one could help being so—for he was an inoffensive fellow, full of spontaneous good nature, which cropped out in spite of his disorder. Visitors, when they passed, turned again to look at him the second time, inquiring who he was. He had a handsome, melancholy dark face, and his carriage befitted the royal part he felt himself called upon to play in the shadowy world he knew. And wherever he went the misshapen little being he called his jester rolled after him; as hideous in appearance as his master was imposing. The great head sunk into huge shoulders; the eyes devoid of intelligence; the hair matted across a low forehead; the under jaw resting on the breast; the tongue protruding. People shivered when they saw him, poor, discarded offshoot of humanity, and some of them, sensitive like Eleanor Satterlee, grew sick or afraid. It would have fared ill indeed with him had it not been for the deranged young sculptor. The sanatorium was not a public one in situation, and he was kept there through the doctor's charity only. Knowing this, the attendants paid but scant heed to him. His friend, however, showed infinite kindness toward the poor creature, who had no power in hands or brain—no sense to direct the dormant power, rather. If still living, those who were responsible for his being had long since gone out of his life, and if any one vouchsafed him a passing glance it was curious or filled with aversion. He had no wit to feel this, happily. His one recognition of things material was in evidence only at the sight of food, and of this he never seemed to have sufficient. At meal times the mimic king placed him at his right hand, and it was touching to see him lay aside his gilded crown patiently to feed the poor little being who sat beside him looking up at him helplessly, but with eyes of perfect trust. Privileged visitors who chanced to come among them turned away with tears of pity. The physicians, used to sights as curious, pointed to this combination as one of the dispensations of Providence.

'There is no hope for the child,' they said. 'None. The man is likely to recover his senses at any moment—or never. It is one of our strangest cases. Tomorrow may find him a raving lunatic—fit for the straight-jacket. Once that happens his death will be but a question of a few days. Or his sleep to-night may restore reason to him fully.'

'Is that so?' the visitor invariably exclaimed anxious to hear more.

'No telling what Prank will do without him,' the speaker would continue. 'No hand but his dare touch him—he bears no human voice but his. It will be a good thing the day the man sees light again. We are very much interested in the case—for we wonder what will happen to Prank.'

'How can he bear him—how can he bear him!' moaned Eleanor Satterlee, wringing her hands in agony. 'He loved beautiful things so, he was so refined, so