

she could not define the feeling that followed, but it was neither sorrow nor fear. She knew he could not return until the sea went down; how long would that be? She knew the storm was not at its height; it would be worse when the tide turned and ran north against the wind.

She was again at home in Queensland, hearing the roaring rain of the broken drought; hearing her father and Roger;—she was out riding on the bare plain, looking for something, she could not think what;—but longing and longing; she rode on and on, but the plain seemed never-ending. She awoke, quietly crying.

The storm was still raging, but less fiercely. How long had she slept?—she could not say. The sun was hidden; the clouds had gathered; it seemed late afternoon, but she could not say.

She went down to the beach; the wind and sea were falling quickly. It was not so cold, though the sun was hidden. She sat looking in the direction in which Roger had gone in the morning; how long she sat, she did not know—the tide had begun to run north, but as the wind was dying the sea was not nearly so fierce. The boat with Roger seemed to spring from the sea; there he was, rowing against the tide but with the wind; he was returning. He had come, in spite of the still dangerous seas! That was a joyous thought.

Had she known the bitterness that was in his heart—and why he was returning! But she did not know.

“Roger!” she cried; “Roger!” The longing of her dream welled up and urged her. She struggled to the water-side to meet him. But he had held too near the rocks; a wave threatened him, and in avoiding the wave he struck the rock and overturned.

“Roger!” she cried, and waded into the water; to her knees; to the waist; to her breast; she swam—swam wildly, with broken sobs.

She reached the place where he disappeared—she felt a stirring within her.

Her sobs ceased; for a moment she stayed her strokes; a thought came with a warm surge of blood; a crooning laugh. “Oh, my darling, my darling,” she murmured; “it is too late; but at least we can go together.” And she swam on, and on—and once she glanced back, fearful lest someone should be swimming in pursuit—on, and on—

The Nest of Balls.

AMONG the many marvels brought from foreign lands, there is one that I regard above all others—the curious and beautiful nest of balls carved by the Chinese; several hollow balls, one within another, carved with the delicacy of lace-work out of one sphere of ivory, and each ball free to move around inside the others—a wonder of beauty and patience. “Of what use are they?” I have been asked; and I could not answer that they were of any use at all. “Just a waste of time,” I was told. But thinking of it, I cannot but imagine they really are of some use, though the use was during the making of them; they taught the maker care and patience: and if he had beautiful thoughts to express, was not this expression of them worth the care and patience he gave? And I am sure that the human mind that could exercise such care and patience, and produce such delicate beauty as the result, must be capable of far greater and nobler things. So it would seem that there is, after all, a use even in beauty, even though that use does not minister to our physical needs or desires.

But all this sounds like the moral that ends a tale; so perhaps, if we look, we may see that a tale is hiding near by; and, indeed, the name of Rama is murmuring about me this very moment. She was the brown-eyed Maori maid who lived quite close to the wonder-caves, and the wonder-woods, and the wonder-sea, full, as she well knew, of all kinds of wonder-folk.

That morning she had been watching the long trails of white-flowered clematis lying like great stars on the trees; and well might it look like those twinkling lights; for was not the lovely flower the child of two of the brightest of the stars? Could she but reach it, she was certain she would hear the quiet flower-voices singing of the old sky-home, and of the drifting through the air to the earth like star-mist. Yes; there must be sky-fairies as there were wood-fairies; and they would call singing through the sky-mist as the wood-fairies called through the mists that trailed, morning and evening, down the ferny valleys. At such times she knew well that she must not wander from her home, for the fairies sang softly in the mist, calling, and calling; and those who followed the call—and who could resist their sweet singing—were lured away and away into the woods, who knew whither?

There was no fear of their calling on this morning, sunny and clear as it was; so she went on slowly, murmuring charms and singing lullabies, watching the flowers and the fluttering fantails, and wishing as she went that she too might fly among the open-eyed flowers.

But if there were no fairies to draw her onwards with their singing, it would seem that her own murmured lullabies and low-breathed singing had drawn a stranger to her; for as in an open dell of silver tree-ferns she stood gazing with bright eyes, a girl appeared; not suddenly, but as a sunny glimpse of woodland appears when a heavy cloud of mist is carried away. She appeared as the first woman, child of the sweet-voiced echo and quivering sunlight, must have appeared to Tiki, drifting down the air like a falling leaf, and alighting as softly on the sheeny mosses. And as she appeared, Raina saw above the trees the pale narrow curve of the moon, and a fading rayed pathway through the air, dim as a dispersing pollen-cloud.

"I heard your singing, Rama," said the stranger; "far away as I sailed above the cloud-seas I heard it; and it lulled me to sleep, so that I surely must be here in dream; for I felt a longing to tread again the paths of the glimmering woods. And indeed I am Rona; and I sail through the pleasant wide skies above the driving clouds; but often I long for the singing glades, and the ferny cool depths of the earth-woods; and to-day your singing quickened the longing, and the wings of dream have carried me here."

"Are you then from the very moon?" asked Rama.

"From the very moon," laughed Rona, "and if you will, you shall hear how the day sped before the fairy lord of Marama, the shining moon, lured me away in the long ago. I had been wandering, even as you have been wandering; and on a rugged totara I saw a butterfly, but lately crept from its narrow grey home, fluttering and drying its wings, beautiful with colour that seemed to pulse with light as the new life ran through them; and as I watched, I wondered how the creature knew it could fly; how it knew the flowers had honey-wells; and which flower would be the first of whose nectar it would sip.

"Presently off it flew, about and about; towards a red-flowering makomako, where it hovered, but did not stay; to the scented white-flowering punaweta, where it paused, but did not alight; and so here, and there, about, and about, as if its very pleasure was but to behold the beauties of the world to which it had been so newly born.

"I followed, as fascinated by the butterfly as it was fascinated by the flowers; till in the midst of a bower of yellow clematis it fluttered and fluttered in a dance that seemed to dazzle my eyes. They tired of watching; I scarcely could tell

if it was a butterfly, or a bright flower; it seemed to change in shape, in colour; it seemed a flower, a bird—and before my very eyes bird, flower, butterfly, all were gone, and to the swaying clematis clung a laughing fairy—and I had thought the laughing fairy a warbler, a little grey riroriro.

"But who could fear her?—sprung from butterfly, and flower, and bird, what could there be in her to cause fear?—and as she laughed, I laughed, and joined in the song that afterwards lilted from her lips.

"If you know the fairy song, you must also know the fairy home," said she.

"Neither the one nor the other," I answered.

"If the song falls from your lips, the home must be in your heart," she persisted; so of what use was denial? "Come then, we shall see," she went on; "follow the pathway you know so well"; and on we went, through glades and by ways I knew my feet had never trodden, and which yet they seemed to follow unfalteringly. Yes, it was her witchery that led me when I appeared to go of my free will—yet I did not know it then. If my steps had hesitated before she appeared, they hesitated no longer; even in the deepest shadow my heart was light.

"As we went, we chattered like two fantails. 'Long since,' said she, and she said her name was Rau, 'long since I strayed as you, seeking I knew not what, and finding it at last. Under graceful young rimu; between tall boles of matai; under banks where ferns poured down their cool-fresh masses of frond, and where oozing water seeped and tinkled; past great bosses of rock, soft and green with mosses, or grey-green with lichens; on, and ever on. In one of the dusky dells a bird floated by, and sat on a ragged kohutuhutu above the pathway; and as I passed he thrust out and drew in his head, peering and peering, a great-eyed solemn ruru. I must surely be near the fairy village, I thought, since the dim-eyed ruru knows not day from night. For you must know that in those glades, night and day have twined tresses; stars and sunbeams are mingled; darkness and light have met; dreaming and waking are one and the same. And as I walked, singing, my voice seemed the voice of one far away, and my footsteps fell on the earth as wing-beats fall on the air, softly and noiselessly. And as my heart sang, I heard as it were echoes, filling and augmenting; and even in the pauses of my song, there were no pauses in the echoes. Then, indeed, I knew they were no echoes, but the soft voices of very fairies. And the orchids on the ground—were they orchids, or tiny gnomes, with long horns, as it were, springing from their shoulders?—and were the flowers no more than flowers?—or had they not, at least, laughing fays in the hearts of them?—the sober leaves themselves trembled and fluttered as if laughing with the laughter of the little folk behind and among them.

“The village itself, I thought in delighted dismay; and so it was: through the interlacing vines, or under, or over, suddenly I had come into their very midst.”

““So, Rau, you have come?” cried one of them, the brightest of them all.

“I have come, I replied, not knowing whither I was going, yet longing to go; hoping and fearing to find you, yet joyful now I am with you.

““It is ever so,” said she, “with those who seek their heart’s desire—yet many are disappointed when at last they find; but that is not the fault of the heart’s desire.”

“They danced about me as the gleaming white-winged midges of the wood dance in the green-banked pools of sunlight—bewilderingly fast, in beautiful mazes—till I must shake free newly-felt wings and dance too; and we wheeled, and danced, and intermingled, till all, laughing, lay on the dell-side like fallen flowers.

“Many a trilling song was sung; and who could ever tire of the singing, the dancing, the sipping of honey, the tales? For the fairies were free to come and go as they would through all the wonder-world of Tane; not prisoned, like mortals, in a penurious land, where they ever strive against the cruel ogres called Cold, and Hunger, and Fear, and Sorrow.

““Not long have I come from the sea of Tane’s living waters,” said the one who had spoken to me. Rohe, her name was, and she was beautiful as the drooping, glistening toetoe but lately shaken free from its sheath. “Not long have I come from the sea of Tane, that lies far and far above the blue arch of sky. Past the great hosts of white and billowy cloud I sped, with no such labour as fell to the lot of Tawhaki when he climbed the hanging root to the upper world; past the abode of Tama the magician; past the shining path of Ra, the great light-pouring sun—away among gentle hills where no fear is, the quiet lake lying marged with ever-flowering trees and sandy sloping shores. There sat the mothers of the Haku-turi, chatting quietly among themselves; and they spoke of some great voyager, warlike seeming but of gentle heart who had come among them in their d’stant island home of Otea, teaching them great things of life and death. And, indeed, now no longer need the fairy mothers come for healing to the waters of life, for the voyager, by some called Wairangi, and by some Tura, had brought them the gift of life. I sat at the side of one of the mothers, a gentle being. ‘The day he came,’ said she, ‘he found us dwelling among the drooping leaves of the kiekie; and our young maiden Turakihau he seized, and made her his wife. “Where is your fire?” he cried; “for I need food.” She did not understand his talk of fire, but she brought food. “It is uncooked,” he cried; but

she did not understand, saying, “We have no other.” And she trembled; and we too trembled, for so fierce seemed the man. “Eaters of uncooked food,” he muttered; and he gathered dry branches, and dry leaves, and dry moss, and he rubbed two sticks, one upon the other, until a white puff arose, and he kindled fire, unknown to us until then; and from the fire arose a cloud, and it was a marvel that so great a cloud could come from so small a fire; and in that cloud dwelt a fiend; for wrapping his folds about us he seized our throats and stung our eyes, so that we fled, gasping and afraid. We fled,’ said the mother, ‘but he seized Turakihau. “Remain at my side,” he commanded. “But the fiend in the cloud,” said she. “Close thine eyes and thy lips; breathe not, and he can do no hurt,” said he; and she found that it was so. Then he laid food on the red glow, and a pleasant smell arose; and soon he gave of it to Turakihau, and she cried out with pleasure. She brought a bite to us and we too cried out with pleasure, for the food was good. And we returned, and we found that the fierce man was gentle. Ay, ay, and we loved him,’ continued the mother; ‘for greater things he taught us: he taught how a child might be born and the mother live—for until then mothers brought life and death together into their world; life for the babe, but death for themselves; he drove away the midwives, and the mothers lived—but I died, and alas, that I might return to my dear child.’ And she rocked to and fro; and a keening arose among the mothers; a soft but sorrowful keening, because of the longing to go again to their loved land, to Otea, and to behold again the dear children they must leave behind when coming for healing to this untempestuous realm of Tane. “As I listened,” said Rohe, “from the low sky there appeared a pale thin form, coming slowly down, the hill that glimmered about her feet as though glow-worms lit the path she trod. It was Marama; it was the great moon-fairy whose path lies among the multitude of stars. She was thin and weak with the waning of her shining world, and had come to bathe in the living waters so that she might be filled with new strength and new beauty. Then would her world wax again, till the sun-lord, setting in the western cave of night, would see, as it were, a graceful kowhai tree, overladen with shining flowers, away yonder in the dusk of the starry east. And as she floated in the water, as a petal of clematis might float in a quiet pool, the wood-fairies, the Hakuturi, chatted of her, and of her great brother Maui; he who could at will assume the shape of a dove, or a fantail, or whatsoever bird he would; he who rode upon the winds as the clouds ride upon them; he who dared his great ancestress, Mahuika, the mother of fire; he who for mankind dared his more dread ancestress, Hine, the mother of death.” Rohe paused; and at the name of the sorrowful mother of death

NEW ZEALAND TALES.

a shadow seemed to pass across the pleasant world; and as the hum of insects in the woods dies away as a cloud comes between the world and the sun, so the chatter and the laughter of the fairies failed for a time.

“ ‘ Thus I heard Rohe,’ said Rau, ‘ a fairy among fairies, a princess among princesses. Now we will clamber among the trees and flowers; and you shall see the many haunts of my companions among the wells of nectar. You shall see the nesting birds, watching us, unalarmed, from their nests, or from the boughs where they sit, sweetly singing—tui, korimako, and robin. But there is a tugging at your heart, Rona; for all the beauty around you there is in your heart a wish to be away. Your heart is not yet altogether with the fairies—your thoughts are elsewhere;’—and as her words faltered, her form changed, quivering, quivering—was it bird, or flower, or butterfly?—a butterfly indeed it was, fluttering up, and up, and up, till lost in the heights of a towering totara.

“ Then, indeed,” said Rona, “ I knew I had almost been with the wood-fairies; and I knew it was the far calling of the lord of Marama that had tugged at my heart; and Rau had known it; had known that that call was stronger than the call of Rohe and all her joyous companions. Back I went through the woods, the thought of what I had seen and heard chasing wild dreams through my heart, until in very truth I could not say if I moved waking or sleeping.”

And, coming to an open glade, there above them, as it were resting on the tree-tops, there lay the thin form of the moon, far in the sky, pale, for night was not yet fallen. And lo, as she had appeared, so now Rona faded away; and Rama, seated under the ponga, gazed upwards, and saw the beaming trail as of pollen, that again dispersed as a flash like a star-ray glowed along it, up, and away from the pleasant-gladed woods.

Had she slept?—she could remember neither falling asleep, nor waking from sleep; had she seen Rona, or Rau, or Rohe, or had she seen none of them? Whether dream or waking, she felt no fear, but thought with pleasure, as she sat there, of the delight that had been hers. Wonderful if she had seen them; had spoken to them; yet more wonderful if she had not, for then all these, and their songs, and their tales, and their laughter, lay closely in her own heart. And why not so?—for did she not know that in the young fern frond lay coiled, one within another, the many fronds and frondlets that made the one great frond that arched above her, beautiful against the blue sky?

And what has the nest of ivory balls to do with Rama? Nothing, except that in the heart of Rama lay concealed a wonderful nest of tales, one within another, more bewildering and more beautiful than can ever be told.