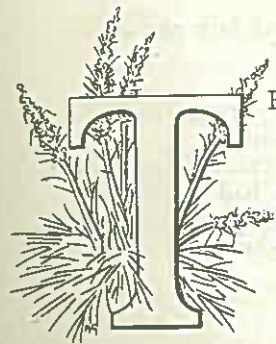


Illustrations,  
by  
ALISOUN GRANT.

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## The Prince and the Witch.



THE Princess was gone; there was no doubt of that—and no one was more forlorn than the little Prince — for had not these two arranged, weeks beforehand, what they were to do? He was seven—a wonderful age; for are there not seven days in a week, and seven parts in a daffodil, and seven stars in the cluster of the Princesses?—and now there was not even one princess to share his joy. Not one to share it; and it seemed to him as though she must have taken the whole of it away with her.

Meanwhile, the little Prince had been standing in the middle of her room, lost in wonder, and very dejected. "It is of no use looking through her wardrobes again," he thought, glancing at the heavy, richly-coloured curtains hanging before them; "I have looked twice already, and I am sure she is not there."

At his feet moved her cat; and as he stood there it rubbed against him, purring. "Of course she is not there," it said, as if reading his thoughts.

The Prince was not surprised; he merely bent down and said, "Where is she, then, you clever puss?—for I daresay you know."

Now a cat is very cautious, very careful; that is why she is supposed to have nine lives; she takes such very good care of the one that she has. She therefore did not answer the Prince's question at once, but said to him, "Was not the door shut when you first came?"

"Yes," answered the Prince.

"And the window open?"

"Yes," he again answered.

"Then is it not clear that she did not go out by the door, but by the window?"

The Prince went to the window, and looked down, for it was an upper storey. The first thing he saw was her little garden, close under the window, and her name blossoming in

spring flowers—"ANNETTE." "It was always easier for her to plant her name than for me," he thought, "for all her letters are straight, but most of mine are crooked; the stupid 's' always looks like breaking, and the lower jaw of the 'c' will stick out like a witch's." His name was ROSCOE.

As he thought of the "c" and the witch, the cat said "Miau," and sprang on to the window ledge.

"Well, puss," said the Prince, "I don't see how she could go out by the window unless she could fly."

"She did fly," said the cat.

The Prince smiled; he knew cats were clever, but . . . and again he smiled as he gently pulled her tail.

"You think you know better," said the cat, sitting down and tucking her tail out of the way; "but I had a talk with a friend of mine this morning, and I not only know that she went out by the window, but I also know where she is now and who took her there."

"Will you tell me?"

"Are you afraid of witches?"

"No . . . not very," said the Prince, hesitating;—"No, I am not," he said, remembering he was seven.

"Because if you are, it is no use your thinking of rescuing the Princess," said the cat, looking even wiser than usual.

"Has a witch taken her?" he asked.

The cat nodded, and as she turned her head towards the window, her eyes shone like green fire.

"You have heard of the witch of the hill in the wood?"

"Yes," answered the Prince.

Many a time had he heard of her. Had not his old nurse told him what others had told her of what they had heard of this old witch?—and the Princess, too: they had heard of her together. The Prince had thought that though witches were old, they must have been young once; but never remembering hearing that this was so, he supposed that they must have been born old. He had asked that of the nurse once, but she had laughed saying: "You will find that out for yourself some day; yes, I daresay you will find that as there are old witches so there are young witches, too; only they never seem so dreadful."

"Is she with that witch?"

The cat awoke from a half-sleep with a start. "I thought you had forgotten all about it, you have been thinking so long. I believe she is there at this very moment."

"If I took along a regiment of soldiers—"

"She would wither them all up before they came near her."

"But the Princess would expect me to try and deliver her?"

"Certainly she would expect you to do no less than try."

"Even though I should be withered up?"

"That was to happen to a regiment of soldiers."

"But if a regiment could do nothing, what could one Prince?"

"Is he not seven?"

"Seven years," answered the Prince, "but not seven princes."

"Miau!" said the cat, and looked as if she had found her milk was vinegar; and, curling round, she lay down as if no more interested in the matter.

"Don't you go to sleep yet, but tell me what I can do," said the Prince, uncoiling her.

"Well, you know the tiny bridge over the lake to the island in the palace gardens?" asked the cat.

"I would rather learn about the Princess."

"Indeed?—well, you know the bridge?"

"Yes, yes; but—"

"Well, then;—supposing a regiment of soldiers should try to cross it?"

"How wet they would get!" said the Prince, opening his eyes and smiling. "Why, I believe even two soldiers would break it."

"Ah!" said the cat, "that is like the bridge to the witch's cave."

"There is no bridge there . . . but I think I see what you mean; one alone might get there when a number could not?"

"I believe you really are seven," said the cat.

"Will you come with me?"

"My friend may not be receiving visitors," said the cat, arching her back, and throwing green fire at some thought that passed before her.

The Prince did not at all like the appearance of the cat then; it made him feel very uncomfortable;—not at what he saw, but at what he thought he might see.

"Should I take any weapon?" he asked.

"You might take one of the big cannon at the gate."

"But you know I could not carry it."

"Then I think perhaps you had better take no weapon"; and off they went.

Now the Prince was in too great a hurry to reach the witch's haunt for us to stay and describe the way leading to it. We can only say that he crossed the drawbridge, and the

sentries saluted him seven times as he passed—"once for each year," whispered the cat. The moat under the bridge was well filled with water, but he did not even stay to think how he could float a whole fleet of boats there. No; he turned up the path to the left, passed the great iron gate with the lion-topped posts, and the scrolls, and the twisted gold-gleaming tips, into the park that lay on one side of the palace beyond the moat; under the great oaks where squirrels looked down at him as they sat with an acorn in their forepaws and their bushy tails curled up over their backs; past the deer that scampered a short distance and stood watching him; past the rooks that flew off with "Caw-caw," and then settled on high branches and looked down on him. "They are all watching us," said the cat; "bravery always commands attention." But he had no time to reply. On he went, up and down as the path over the rolling surface of the park led him; past a thicket of thorn from which flew a thrush with its quick cry of alarm, until at last he reached the wall that divided the park from the wood beyond. He knew that there was a gate in the wall, and through this he went, up the gentle slope on which the wood grew. Here the wild flowers gleamed more thickly than in the park—wild roses clustered in scrambling bushes, from which long, drooping branches reached out, bending with the weight of blossoms; and foxgloves stood boldly in open spaces. But the Prince went so quickly that the open spaces grew fewer and soon disappeared; the hill became steeper; wild birds cried as he passed; linnets whistled, finches twittered; but of these the Prince and even the cat took no notice. A rocky crag appeared above the trees before them, and the cat, that up till then had boldly run before, now ran at the Prince's heels. Strange, too, he felt as though the desire that had pushed him on, now pulled him back. But on he went; for he knew that under that crag the witch sat in her dark cavern. Yes, he even fancied he could see, curling over the trees and up the face of the crag, trails of faint smoke . . . as if she were burning magic powders. Perhaps, indeed, it was the power of the magic powders that began to push him back from his adventure. He heard a low rumble as of thunder in the mountains; and the cat said: "I believe we have come to the bridge."

"Do you think it strong enough for two?" asked the Prince.

"Strange water makes me giddy," answered the cat.

"Supposing I carry you?"

There was no reply. The Prince repeated the question,

but as there was still no reply, he glanced back just in time to see the cat disappear round a thicket.

"Running away!" muttered the Prince. "Coward! . . . But why was her tail so angry?" and he glanced round anxiously. He could see nothing; but, remembering that cats can see in the dark when human beings cannot see at all, he thought that they must be able to see far more in the light than human beings can.

"Perhaps that was her friend growling," he thought, feeling very much tempted to go back and try to catch the cat. But he thought of his seven years—began to think, too, that there were disadvantages in becoming a man so soon.

But, indeed, those trails of smoke may have been from a charm that was intended to harm the Princess, and that thought renewed the Prince's courage, though it increased his dejection. On he went, the trees overhanging more and more as he neared the cliff, and the dense leaves shutting out more and more of the sunlight. There were now no song-birds; owls and bats began to flit about him. There were no cheery crickets; but fierce-looking beetles lumbered from the path, then halted as though they were doubtful if they would not turn into fire-breathing dragons and attack him on the spot. The branches coiled above him like snakes, and the coils of the roots at his feet were yet more like snakes; and lizards peered from the coils as if they really were young serpents. On the Prince went, and soon it was so dark that had it not been for the glow-worms he certainly could not have seen the pathway. But presently a dim light glimmered through the trees, and soon he saw the rocks of the cliff, hollowed into a cavern lit with flickering, smoky light. Many a time he wished to turn; but he thought of the Princess too, and on he went.

How startled he was when a pleasant voice said, "Good morning, Prince."

"Good evening," answered the Prince, and he found himself standing before the witch herself.

"Ah, the darkness perhaps makes you think it is evening, and the candles."

"Yes, though it was morning when I left the palace to fetch the Princess."

"To fetch the Princess?" asked the witch.

"Yes," answered the Prince.

As he spoke he noticed the candles, as the witch called them. They stood in a wide half circle before her, and he was now within the circle, so that the candles burned either side of him and behind him. But never had he seen such great

candles—they were almost as thick round as his own body. They were almost burned to the sockets, and the Prince hoped as he looked that they would not splutter out before he was far away again. They were guttering terribly, too, on one side, and on the other stood high fantastic shrouds. They badly needed snuffing, and smoked as much as they burned. Yet the Prince could not be sure if the smoke did not come from the shrouds—it hung about the wavering flame, and, indeed, it seemed to take the shape of creatures—not human beings, yet like human beings—that swayed backwards and forwards in the gusts, at times reaching out draped arms, at times half uncovering but never actually showing their faces, for which the Prince was glad. He did not at all like these candles; and they burned in changing colours, too, as if the spirits hanging over them threw powders into the flame.

But he forgot the candles for the moment when the witch said to him, "And who told you that the Princess was here?"

"The cat," said the Prince, and at once he felt that most people would think that a foolish answer. But no sooner did he say "The Cat" than—"Tff!"—at the side of the witch suddenly appeared a great black cat, that sat with shoulders hunched up, like a bison, head down, eyes glaring, and mouth grinning. "Tff!" it said again, and the candles flickered, the floating shapes wavered, and the Prince's heart sank.

"One of your friends?" said the witch to the great cat.

"She was afraid to come here and say so," was the answer.

"And were you not afraid?" said the witch to the Prince.

"No," said he; "you see, I am seven to-day."

"And so you came here for a present?"

"Indeed, no," he answered with some indignation.

"But you want me to give you the Princess."

"She does not belong to you; she belongs to —"

"You?" asked the witch.

"She is my playmate."

"Have you thought what you would give me if I allow her to return with you?"

"No," answered the Prince, after thinking a moment; "I have no idea what you would like. What do you want for her? I have a ship with sails that can furl up, and a rudder that turns, and I have a big rocking horse with stirrups and reins —"

"Tff!" said the black cat suddenly.

"You are right," said the witch, stroking it, with a hand the Prince thought must be very hot. "He says," she con-

tinued turning to the Prince, "that I have no use for ships unless they are old, nor for horses of any kind."

The Prince wondered why old ships would have been of any use; but ordinary people could easily have guessed why. The cat knew very well that the older ships are, the more rats they carry.

"They are the best things I have," said the Prince. But I daresay you know as well as I do all that I have, and you know a good deal better than I do what you want."

"That is cleverly said," remarked the witch; "and there is one thing you have that I should like very much—or some of it, not all."

"What is it?" he asked, as she paused.

"I am sure you would not miss a little of it."

"But what is it?" he asked again, beginning to think from the way she spoke that he should miss it very much.

"A little of your happiness."

"My happiness!"

"Just enough to fill that jar before you," and, as if it had grown from a shadow, a crystal jar appeared at his feet as she spoke.

"And how can I fill it with my happiness?"

"Just hold your hand over the opening, wish your happiness to flow into it, and I will repeat a charm to help you."

The Prince did as she bade him, and she muttered a charm. Soon a mist seemed to leave his hand, float down the long neck of the jar, forming in a clear, bright, sparkling liquid at the bottom. As the liquid increased, so his joy seemed to decrease, and there was little enough before. He felt more and more hopeless and miserable, and before the jar was quarter full the mist from his hand ceased.

"Well," said the witch, "is that all you are able to spare me?"

"I am afraid—I am afraid," said the Prince, "it is all I have"; and a most forlorn and desolate little Prince he looked.

"All?" said the witch. "Why, the jar is not quarter-full, and is not half as big as you are. You should have enough happiness in you to fill it at least twice over. Come, I must have more than that;—or the Princess—"

She said no more; but the prince imagined what she left unsaid. He wished hard for more happiness to flow into the jar, and a little came. He thought of the Princess, but that was the very worst thing he could have done, for now not another drop would flow.

"Well?" said the witch

The Prince's lips trembled as he said, "I think—I have not a drop of happiness left." And if he had not been seven he would certainly have cried—indeed, his eyes shone quite as brightly as the happiness in the vase; but alas! it was not with happiness they shone.

There was a pause. Then the Prince spoke again. "I think," he said, "if you would allow the Princess to stand beside me I might be able to give you a little more."

"You think so?"

"Yes," said the Prince, "I think so;" and at the very thought a few more drops fell flashing into the jar.

"Shall we try?" said the witch to the cat.

Like a shadow the cat disappeared, and like a shadow the Princess appeared in its place.

"The Prince thinks he might be able to fill the jar if you stood beside him," said the witch to her.

The Princess smiled, and stepped towards him—stood at his side, and put her hand in his.

"I did not say you might do that," said the witch. But really she had no cause for complaint at the result—that is, if she wanted the happiness as she had said—for now it poured into the jar more and more quickly. Soon it was half full—three-quarters—it bubbled and sparkled up the narrow neck.

"Stop, stop," cried the witch. "There's as much as I want; there's enough; quite enough."

But the Prince did not hear her; for, strange to say, as the jar filled, so his breast filled too, and the more happiness he gave away, the more he seemed to feel within him.

"Stop, stop," cried the witch again; but the jar overflowed. The happiness in bright, sparkling drops splashed on the ground; flowers sprang up where it fell. It spread around; it extinguished the witch's candles—the floating shapes; the shrouds and darkness disappeared,—the owls, hooting discontent, were gone—the trees waved in sunshine, birds fluttered and sang in the branches, butterflies hovered about the flowers—the whole world seemed changed, as if night had broken into day. And the witch—where was she? Gone; and the jar was gone—all had disappeared. But the Princess had not disappeared, for the Prince had kept firm hold of her hand.

"She has gone!" said the Prince; and now his eyes were indeed bright with happiness.

"And as she has taken the jar with her, I suppose we may go too?" asked the Princess.

"Certainly," said the palace cat, rubbing against the Prince as though she had never left his side.

## The Islet.

### 1.

**B**ACK and forth run the tides, along the rocky shore beneath us; and over this steep hillside the wind blows cool and fresh from the sea, and fragrant now, in summer, with the honeyed scent of the woolly-flowered tauhinu. The sun lights up the blue water; and green in the distance lies the tiny islet where for a time they lived—they of the story.

With a light wind from the north we sailed towards it; and in less than an hour the islet lost its blurred outline, shaping into rock, and scrub, and waving tussock. We made for a little bay, its narrow curve of sand lying between the cusps of rock, jutting in broken, jagged, and diminishing fragments from two reef masses on the shore. A few yards from the water's edge—it was nearly high tide—the bare sand ended at a step—the storm water-mark, above which the surface was clothed with wiry, dry, beach grasses, and great rounded clumps of silver-plumed toetoe, and stiff-bladed flax. Within twenty yards of the beach the islet rose in a rounded hummock, some thirty feet high, clothed with tussock. A straggling belt of glossy taupata encircled the hummock at its foot, and on the extreme right of the islet, beyond the rocks from which sprang the lesser of the two cusps, grew one leaning and twisted ngaio. Other trees there were none. The islet is indeed a tiny one; but a jewel need not be great to have beauty; and this is as a jewel cut by an arm of the sea from a greater.

On such a blue day as this, not more than two years ago, had they approached the islet under a white sail. She, accustomed to the dry, bare expanses of northern Australia, was delighted with the greenness of the bush clustering in the many-folded hills of the mainland, and covering the sides of the larger island lying to their right, and half a mile away.

It is of these two that the story speaks; and theirs is but one of many stories that the sea-spirits whisper as you sit by the ngaio. You may hear them in the caves, as you look across the wind-swept waters.