

## THE PUDDOCK AND THE PRINCESS

### THE GOOD QUEEN MARGET

A long time ago there was a Kingdom called Alba, where the sun shone golden, and the blue waters of the western sea lapped softly on the silver forelands, and the sweet birds sang the livelong day. And all the folk living in this kingdom were happy and well content, every man the friend of his neighbor. It was a little kingdom all by itself in a corner of the world. And in Alba there were many magic places among the mountains and lochs, and by the sea shore. They have now been forgotten, but they are still there, if only we knew where to look, or had eyes to see them.

But at this time, Alba had no King, for the King had died fighting the Vikings. But he had left behind him a Queen and three bonny daughters: Nanse, Eilidh and Morag. Nanse, the elder sister was tall and fair and very proud. Eilidh was tall and dark and thoughtful, and Morag, the youngest sister was a laughing brown lass who never walked when she might run, and never ran without singing like a linnet in the sun. And the Queen stood in for the dead King and ruled over the Kingdom with great wisdom. Her name, was Marget and everybody said what a good Queen she was. Everybody was proud of their wise Queen and the three bonny princesses, and everyone was content, with never a woeful thought by day or by night.

But woe was like to come for all that. One day the Queen fell sick, and nobody, it seemed, could make her well again. Men wise in the art of medicine came to Alba from faraway places, but though they tried this thing and that, Queen Marget grew no better. And in the end, each one of them shook his head and went away mumble-mumbling to himself. There was no betterment in any of them. It seemed that the good Queen must die.

And nobody, it seemed, was likely to marry any of the three bonny daughters, for they had no time to spend in dalliance with suitable young

men. The Queen was a difficult patient and in the royal palace at Abernethy, the three princesses took turns to watch lovingly by Queen Marget's bedside night and day.

The sun rose and the sun set and the Queen, in her illness, slept a great deal in her great, golden four-poster bed, so it was perhaps not surprising that the princesses, while they sat patiently embroidering, sometimes spoke of matters other than their mother's state of health. So one day, while the Queen lay fast asleep when Nanse and Morag were in attendance, Nanse, the elder sister, came out with the remark: "Me, I'm going to marry a King. I rather fancy the King of Norroway, but I'm not all that particular—even the King of Ulster would do me if he had his heart set on marrying me."

"Mercy on us!" said Morag. "Are you not the proud one? Maybe there won't be a King that will want you, for you're just too proud altogether, so you are!"

Nanse rose and stalked to the looking glass which stood by her mother's bedside and gazed with satisfaction at her beautiful reflection. She clearly did not regard the possibility of her rejection by any King as a serious possibility.

"Princesses have a right to be proud," she asserted. However, she knew very well that sometimes in life we have to make do with a little less than we would like, so she added: "Mind you, I might bring myself down to marry a prince, if he were wealthy enough and well-favored. Maybe I might even take to an earl, if he were a great one, and handsome and quite desperate for my charms."

Having settled her future to her own satisfaction, Nanse was generously prepared to consider her sister's fate.

"And how about you, Morag, who would you like to marry?"

"I'm not proud at all," answered Morag, laughing. "I don't think I have any pride in me. Perhaps I am lucky. I don't think men like proud wives. I think they would rather have wives who will do as they are told.

"Rubbish—!" said Nanse. "I've often heard men say they like a woman with a bit of spirit. If you give a man a good slap in the face

sometimes, he will like you better for it. In any case, what makes you think YOU always do as you're told?"

"I think I'll just wait until I'm asked, before I make up my mind whether or not I want the man that asks me," said Morag. "If he had a good heart, that would be the main thing. I would marry a cobbler, if he had a good heart and he took my fancy."

Nanse had now taken a seat before the looking glass, where she started to brush her long blond tresses vigorously. The prospect of marrying a cobbler had little appeal for her.

You'd better watch what you're saying. You'll remember that Belle Thomson, that was my servant lass, left me last year. Well she up and married an old cobbler that works in the Cowgate, and now he licks her every day with a leather strap. It was a case of marry in haste and repent at leisure. The poor girl can't do a thing right for him, and she just stands about his shop weeping all day."

"Maybe, she's too sore to sit down," said Morag, brightly.

"I daresay," said Nanse, tossing aside the hair brush, "if that's where he leathers her. I would like to see the man that could leather me. I know who would get the leathering in the end."

Nanse was certainly a spirited girl and Morag had little doubt that this claim was no less than the truth. Although still in her teens, Nanse had quite definite views on most matters. She went on:

"The sensible thing to do is to make sure you pick somebody of high degree for a husband. That way you will always have something in the way of money and property to fall back on, if you are disappointed and can't stand the sight of your man,"

This was a view of marriage that Morag had never even considered.

"There's surely more to life than gathering gear," said she. "But here, I don't think we should be sitting here speaking like this and the Queen, our mother, lying there ill in her bed. "She's no better, you know."

At this point, perhaps because she sensed her daughters were discussing her, the Queen stirred in her bed and moaned. Between her moans there was an occasional sound of chattering teeth.

Nanse shook her head gravely, "I think she's taken a turn for the worse today."

"Well maybe," said Morag, "but she's better than she was last Saturday."

"Ah yes," countered Nanse, "but she's definitely worse than she was last night."

Now Morag knew better than to pursue an argument with her elder sister and decided to look for common ground.

"Whatever, she's not well at all and I don't like this color in her cheeks--- she's sort of green about the gills. She has three hot pigs in the bed beside her, but she still lies there chattering most of the time."

"This trouble is an awful worry to us all," said Nanse. Our mother just seems to be pining away before our eyes, and for myself, I don't know what I'll do without her. She'll be a great miss. There are things I wanted her to do. She hasn't finished teaching me to crochet yet."

Nanse was always inclined to look on the practical side in every situation.

"Mercy, she's not dead yet," protested Morag. "Don't speak like that, Nanse!"

At this point, there was a loud knocking on the door of the chamber, and this may have disturbed the Queen a little, for she turned restlessly in her bed.

"Who is it?" exclaimed Nanse in a loud voice.

The door half opened and a boy's voice was heard: "It's me, Ringan, your Highness."

"Come you in, then," commanded Nanse.

A tall awkward-looking pale youth, who appeared to be all knees and elbows, entered the room and addressed Nanse in a timid fashion.

"There's a Master Rintoul at the outer door, your Highness. He says he is a mediciner and that the Queen wanted him to call and see her this morning. He says he has come all the road from Cupar."

"Fetch him into the Great Hall, give him some whisky and tell him to wait, Ringan," said Nanse. "The Queen will call him when she's good and ready to see him."

“Very well your Highness.” Ringan bowed in a servile manner and left the room.

“This will be another of these infernal leeches,” said Nanse. “I’m sure they’re not doing her any good at all with their poultices and potions: not that that hinders them from wanting a lot of money for what little they do do. She’s seen four of these useless creatures already and they have all been ill to pay.”

Nanse was firmly of the opinion that the medical profession should be paid by results and that in the event of failure, they should not be paid at all, if not punished for incompetence.

“I’m sure none of them has any notion of what’s wrong with her,” said Morag. “They pretend they know, but I don’t think they know very much at all. But maybe she’ll have better luck with this doctor than with the others. Will we call him in, do you think?”

“Yes, I think we’d better,” answered Nanse. “Mother will be very angry if we send him away.”

Nanse moved towards the great golden bed and shook the Queen gently.

“Mother, waken up, there is a man to see you!”

Queen Marget seemed reluctant to waken, but she eventually stirred and yawned.

“Oh dear me! Oh Mercy me! Leave me alone, will you? I thought I heard somebody knocking at the door.”

“There’s a man to see you,” Nanse repeated loudly in her ear.

At this, the Queen sat up straight in her bed. She was suddenly all attention..

“A man---! Who--? Who is it?”

This excessive interest in the possibility of a visit from a member of the opposite sex seemed rather offensive to Nanse, even for her mother. Perhaps it was a sign of her illness?

“A Master Rintoul,” she announced. “He is out in the Hall. He says you wanted to see him.”

“Master Rintoul---! Yes, so I did. So I did.”

“He’s been hanging about the Court for a while,” said Nance. “He’ll be like a knotless thread by now.”

“You’d better call him in then!” I must have dozed off when you were chattering away about men. I had a funny kind of dream.”

The Queen yawned again hugely to clear her head before receiving her visitor. Nance pulled the bell rope which hung at the head of the bed.

“I think, “ she said, “we’ll just leave you to see Master Rintoul by yourself, Mother. He’ll maybe want to examine you.”

“I’m sure that’s best,” said the Queen, who had no doubt that her examination should be a private affair. “I daresay he’ll be aiming to sound my chest. You can always come back after he has done with me.”

“Very well, then,” said Nance. “We’ll leave you to Master Rintoul.”

Nance then left the chamber, followed by Morag, but before Morag reached the door, the Queen cried:

“Hold on, Morag! See if you can tidy up this bed a little! It’s not presentable. The bed covers are all rumpled up.”

Morag obediently returned to the bed and together they beat and tugged the bed clothes into an acceptable state of respectability.

“That’s more respectable, Morag,” approved Queen Marget. “That boy is an awful long time in coming.”

A cloud began to gather on the Royal brow. However, she went on to tidy up her hair. She was still so engaged when Ringan entered the chamber and approached the bed nervously.

“You rang, your Highness?” he ventured.

“I did indeed,” replied Queen Marget grimly. “You’re a long time in coming, Ringan. I doubt you are asking for another thrashing. Do you think I’m so near being dead you need pay no heed to the bell? Is that what you think?”

“Or are you deaf?” She pulled the bell rope demonstratively.

Ringan made no answer to these questions but hung his head. He knew very well that no answer was expected and that any given would be a further affront to the Queen.

She pointed to a stout walking stick which stood by the bedside.

“Do you see this stick here?”

“Ringan saw the stick very well. He was only too familiar with the sight and feel of it.

“Y-Y-Yes, your Highness,” he stammered.

“Well that’s what you’ll get on your back the next time you pay no heed to the bell.”

Ringan heard this with some relief. The stick was evidently not going to come into action on this occasion. Perhaps a soft answer might turn away the Queen’s wrath.

“Perhaps if I were to box your ears for you it would improve your hearing?”

I hear you fine your Highness, but I was down in the yard with the p-pony. P-Please---! I’ll not do it again.”

“From what I hear tell,” said the Queen menacingly, “you’re never away from that pony.”

“I was just patting him, your Highness. I wasn’t.....”

“The pony can’t get peace in his stall for you pat-patting at him.”

It seemed to Ringan that somehow the pony had succeeded in making a personal complaint against him to the Queen, despite the fact that it had appeared to welcome his attentions at the time.

“Now you remember well what I say! The pony is all right. The pony is fine. He’s not wanting you to pat him.”

Although it seemed that the stick was not going to be used, there was no escape from the Royal tongue. The Queen went on.

“You’d better not go near the pony again! Do you hear?”

“Yes, your Highness.”

To Ringan it appeared that Queen Marget had the ability to sound progressively more threatening, so that there was no limit to the growing menace in her endless voice. Her anger could start quite unexpectedly, like a tiny cloud which burgeoned until the cloud blackened the whole sky. Ringan was always on the lookout for possible danger signals.

“Just you leave the pony alone! The pony is fine. He’ll do very well without your pats. I’ll not speak to you again, remember!”

At this, Ringan thought it wise to to hang his head again.

“I’ll slap you ears for you!”

Suddenly her mood changed and her tone became almost pleasant.

“All right then---! I’ll see Master Rintoul now. Go and fetch him in at once!”

Greatly relieved, Ringan escaped from the chamber muttering and repeating to himself the while, “Go and fetch him in at once!” It would be dangerous to misunderstand the Queens’ instructions.

“Sometimes you are very hard on Ringan, Mother,” said Morag, who had witnessed this little scene with some disapproval. “He’s not a bad boy.”

“He’s spoilt,” proclaimed the Queen. “That’s what’s wrong with him. But I know how to sort him.”

The door opened again and Ringan ushered in Master Rintoul, a small animated man with a prim pretentious manner and a pot belly. He looked rather like an outsize pixie. Ringan announced him, then bowed and left, followed by Morag, moving discreetly. The Queen beckoned Master Rintoul to her bedside.

“Master Rintoul,” she said sweetly. “I’m really vexed you have been kept kicking your heels so long outside, but I didn’t really know you were here. I’d fallen sound asleep and my daughters didn’t like to disturb me. I’ve just this very minute wakened from my sleep.”

Master Rintoul bowed deeply with a flourish.

“Your Grace, how can I serve you?”

“That’s a good question, Master Rintoul,” answered the Queen, favorably impressed by his manner. “You will know that I haven’t been well at all for a while. It all started with a bad dose of the bile, and I haven’t been myself ever since. I have been examined by four different and I am not a bit the wiser what ails me. Two of them bled me, one of them poulticed me and the other one smoked out the chamber by blowing burning sulfur up the chimney. At one time I thought he was going to set the whole palace on fire.”

Rintoul was astonished. He had never heard of this last treatment and was not impressed by it, but he did not like to criticise a fellow physician.

“Was that all he did? Put burning sulfur up the chimney?”

“That was all! No, I’m telling a lie. He left me a jar with four leeches in it and told me to make use of them when I felt bad, but I could hardly keep the first one down.”

She pointed to a jar of red-colored liquid on a table by her bedside. Rintoul’s eyes opened wide with amazement.

“In the name of goodness,” he cried. “You don’t mean to tell me you ate the leeches?”

The Queen reached for the jar and held it up to examine its contents.

“Was that not what I was supposed to do?” she replied. “The first one kept wriggling about in my throat when I was trying to swallow it. It fairly made me retch, I can tell you. I couldn’t stomach any more raw ones, so I had the others fried. They weren’t so bad when they were well crisped.”

“This beats all!” exclaimed Rintoul. “The leeches were for drawing out bad blood – not for swallowing. They’re the very thing for boils or festering lumps, or gatherings of any kind.”

“I wish I’d known that before,” said the Queen, making a horrid face. “I was never so disgusted in all my life. Ugh! Ugh! It made me quite sick.”

Master Rintoul hastened to comfort her.

“Well, your Grace, I daresay you’ll not be much the worse for swallowing one raw leech. But I don’t think you’re needing to lose any more blood. You’re a bit white about the gills, I see. I doubt, I doubt, you’ve fallen into the wrong hands. It’s a good job you asked.....”

“Don’t I know it?” interrupted the Queen. “None of these fellows has done me a bit of good. There was one thing they did know, though: they all knew how to charge. To tell you the truth, Master Rintoul, I don’t know where to turn now. I’m just about my wits’ end.” .

But Master Rintoul was sure he had the answer to that question.

“Had you sent for me in the first place, your Grace,” he suggested, “you might have spared yourself all this trouble.”

Queen Marget fervently hoped this was true. Although she liked to dominate, she did not like to think of herself as a dominating woman. Spirited perhaps, but still attractively feminine. She also like to think

there was always a man somewhere in whom she could repose complete confidence.

“Well, you came here well recommended,” she confided. I doubt I’ll just have to put yourself in your good hands, Master Rintoul.”

As she said this, she took hold of Master Rintoul’s wrists and pressed his hands to her.

“That’s the thing to do!” said Rintoul, nervously, returning her hands firmly.

The Queen was not in the least discouraged, but gazed at him, examining his features carefully.

“It’s a funny thing,” she reflected, “in a certain light sometimes you bring me in mind of my father, bless him! He was always very fond of the women, did you know? Oh what a man he was! No woman was safe from him. He just couldn’t leave the women alone at all. Sometimes he couldn’t eat his dinner properly for thinking about them.”

“Oh indeed!” said Rintoul.

“Yes, they used to call him ‘ Romantic Andrew’ when he was young.”

The Queen continued to peer intently at Rintoul

“Hold your head to the side, Man!”

Master Rintoul was clearly embarrassed at this treatment, but held his head awkwardly to one side. He did not really see what else he could do. It was a Royal Command performance.

“A bit more,” commanded the Queen.

Rintoul tried to obey, but Queen Marget was not satisfied and motioned him to move his stance.

“Come round a bit to this side. You’re standing in your own light.”

Rintoul altered his position in the direction indicated, and the Queen continued:

“Yes you have the same style about you. I like a man with style. Oh, I bet you’re a real devil when you get started!”

Rintoul was covered in confusion at this and hardly knew what to say. However, he thought of something.

“Well, I have Royal blood in me, I believe.”

“Is that a fact, now?” enquired the Queen. She was always interested in the distribution of Royal blood, however attenuated..

“Yes, my grandfather on my mother’s side was a MacAlpine.”

“Do you tell me?” said the Queen. “That’s more than I can say. My grandfather was a fishmonger. Hogg the fishmonger and poultryman. You won’t remember him! He kept a shop up the Nethergate at one time. He had a bit of a limp.”

Rintoul certainly did not recall any Hogg the fishmonger in the Nethergate and thought it now time to change the subject. He coughed, rather deliberately.

“Well, your Grace, how do you feel in yourself, this morning?”

“Utterly exhausted!” answered the Queen. “I’m quite worn out! I’m shivering cold all the time and I’m so weak and depressed, I’m sure I’ll die soon unless somebody finds out what ails me.”

Master Rintoul now quickly recovered his composure. He was now back in his own territory.

“Would you like to let me see your tongue, your Grace?”

The Queen obediently put her tongue out a little.

“A bit more--- put it right out!”

His tone was commanding, so Queen Marget obliged.. Master Rintoul peered closely at her tongue, depressed it with a spatula and commented: “Uh huh, I don’t like the look of that. How long’s your tongue been like this?”

The Queen tried to reply but could only gurgle helplessly.

“I don’t like the look of this at all! You could plant potatoes in there.”

Rintoul removed the spatula and the Queen swallowed hard. He now felt he was well in charge of the situation.

“You’d better put it away again!” he ordered, with a wave of his hand.

“What was wrong with my tongue?” the Queen asked anxiously. “It has always looked the same to me as long as I can remember.”.

“It was a kind of brownish-gray color,” answered Rintoul. “It wasn’t right. It should have been redder-looking.”

He then took the Queen’s wrist portentously, in order to take her pulse.

“You’re looking pretty peaked, right enough, and from the color of you, your Grace, you’re lucky your’re not dead from the want of blood already.”

His expression grew grave as he listened to her pulse, and he shook his head significantly.

“Yes, Yes, I doubt, I doubt..... You called me in just in time. Do your teeth chatter at all?”

“Yes, sometimes,” admitted the Queen. “Do you not want to sound me, Master Rintoul?”

The Queen started to unbutton her nightgown, but Rintoul hardly appeared to notice. He was evidently deep in thought.

“Eh no, not today---! Any trouble with your bowels? You haven’t been choked up with diarrhoea?”

“Not so bad as that,” replied the Queen, but I’m a little loose in the mornings.”

“Uh-huh, Uh-huh! That’s to be expected. Now before we go any further forward, let’s have a look at what’s in your chamber pot! That often tells a story.”

The Queen was taken aback by this. She felt disappointed that her examination had taken such a disagreeable turn.

“My God!” she exclaimed. “I’m sure I don’t envy you your trade, Master Rintoul, but if that is what you want to see, you’ll find it down below the bed behind my slippers.”

“Is it not behind the wee chest!” asked the Queen, leaning over the side of the bed. “I know it was there first thing this morning.”

However, at this point, Rintoul discovered the pot and pulled it out from under the bed.

“It will not have been emptied today at all,” he enquired.

“Not yet..... Not as far as I know,” answered the Queen.

Rintoul slowly rose to his feet with the chamber pot and inspected its contents.

“MERCY, WHAT’S THAT” he exclaimed loudly.

“There is an old wig in there,” answered the Queen calmly. “Nanse told Ringan to put it in the pot to deaden the tinkle when the pot was

being used. I believe that's what's done at the French Court anyway. It's taken to be the height of gentility over there."

"No doubt, no doubt---!" said Rintoul. "it certainly gave me a shock just now when I saw it. I had no idea where it had come from. I 'm not up with these foreign fashions. The French are too precious for me altogether. I hear the folk at the French Court eat puddocks for their dinner.

"I daresay," said the Queen. "I don't fancy them at all, but it would never do if we were all made the same. Some folk like porridge and others like puddoks. Nothing I hear about the French would surprise me." She was tolerant of differences in eating habits.

Master Rintoul resumed his inspection of the contents of the chamber pot, making allowance for the presence of the fashionable wig.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "Just as I thought! I was sure of it! No doubt about it your Grace--- I know now what ails you. I have seen two or three other cases like this in my day."

Rintoul laid down the pot and shook his head sadly. His grave expression began to alarm Queen Marget.

"What is it?" she cried. "What is wrong with me, then?"

"I am not sure," he replied, "that you should be out of your bed at all. You will need all the rest you can get from now on. You may sit in your chair for an hour in the afternoons. No more---! That will be quite long enough."

"But what's wrong with me?" pleaded the Queen.

"I'm afraid, your Grace, you are suffering from..... from Gregory's Ill."

Queen Marget did not like the sound of this at all.

"Mercy Lord, whatever is that?" she moaned.

Rintoul often had to be the bearer of bad tidings to his patients. This was a cross that medical men had to bear in those far-off days, and he was never one to shirk his duty, however painful. There was no avoiding it. The good Queen would have to be told what he knew about her illness. It was a question of being cruel to be kind., and Rintoul was a martyr to any kindness imposed on him by his calling.

“Gregory’s Ill,” he began, “is a rare complaint that must always end up in a gruesome death, wanting the right remedy. I believe it came from Spain in the first place. It starts with a looseness of the bowels first thing in the mornings and vomiting turns. Then a feeling of cold and weakness comes over you, sometimes with chattering of the teeth.”

“My teeth have been chattering a lot, right enough,” interrupted the Queen. At times they’ve been rattling like a pair of castanets.”

Rintoul continued: “That’s to be expected. The gums become tender and all the teeth and the hairs of the head fall out.”

Here, he paused dramatically, for the full effect of his words to sink in. The Queen, ashen faced, moaned softly to herself.

“And at the end,” he went on, there is always a throbbing headache which becomes worse, and worse, and worse, until you cry to God, in His Infinite Mercy, to take you to Himself. A terrible way to die---! Terrible! Your Grace, I’m well used to seeing people leave this vale of tears, but I don’t mind telling you, it always gives me a heavy heart to see anybody go down with Gregory’s Ill. That’s not a death I’d wish on my worst enemy.”

The Queen was distraught at hearing this and the tears welled up in her eyes when she thought how little she deserved such a fate as Master Rintoul had described.

“I’m not perfect.” She moaned. I never thought I was, but I’ve done nothing to deserve this! What can I do? Please tell me what I can do!”

“I’m afraid, your Grace,” said Rintoul, “there is very little you can do, yourself. Rest will certainly delay the progress of the disease, but normally, the end is always the same.”

The Queen’s face fell even further and she wrung her hands on hearing this.

“Sadly,” confided Rintoul, “It is beyond my power to cure you myself, but I can tell you where to find the remedy. There is but one cure and that is....”

Here, to the annoyance of the Queen, Master Rintoul fell into a prolonged fit of coughing, so that he was unable to continue, and she was left hanging on his words.

“For Pity’s sake, Master Rintoul, tell me,” she implored, when he finally appeared to have cleared his throat.

“The cure is..... the cure is a sip of water from the Well at the World’s End. This is a Magic Well --- The Well of True Water --- and the water must be brought to you by somebody that loves you well.”

On hearing this, hope sprang again like a beautiful flower in Queen Marget’s breast.

“Somebody like that shouldn’t be hard to find,” she said, for everybody knows what a good Queen I have been. I can’t think I ever did anybody any harm all my days. I remember hearing about this well a long time ago. It is at the other end of the Kingdom, is it not?”

“Yes, it’s a long way off,” answered Ringan. “A place called Ardnamurchan – a very difficult road too.”

Since any one of her loving subjects could be dispatched to bring her the cure for Gregory’s Ill, the difficulties of the road to Ardnamurchan were no real problem to the Queen. It seemed to her she was as good as cured already.

“Ardnamurchan, is it?” she cried. I’m much obliged to you, Master Rintoul. We won’t take up any more of your valuable time this morning, but I’ll expect to see you again after I have drunk some of this special water. There will be a gift of gold for you when I’m cured, and, no doubt, you’ll be sending in your account for this visit.”

“Her Grace is too kind,” said Rintoul in his polite way. “The honor of serving her Grace is more than enough.”

The Queen had little time for soft soap, but she understood the practicalities of life: that the servant was worthy of his hire, or should be treated as such.

“Tut, Man,” she said, “you’re far too blate. Don’t hesitate to send in your account, and I won’t be slow to pay it! And don’t forget to allow for your travel! Allow something for your horse’s upkeep on the road!”

It was now clear to Master Rintoul that this interview was at an end, and he retreated walking backwards towards the door.

“You can rely on me, your Grace,” he said, and bowed formally.

“At this, the Queen pulled the bell rope vigorously, but there was no immediate response.

“Where’s that knave?” she bellowed angrily. “Open that door for a second, Master Rintoul!”

Rintoul went to the door and opened it widely, and the Queen shouted again: “ARE YOU THERE, RINGAN?”

Ringan’s voice was then heard in the distance, crying, “I’m just coming your Highness!”

After a few seconds, Ringan entered, but by this time the Queen was purple with anger.

“Come here, Ringan!” she ordered.

Ringan hesitated. He tried to obey, but it seemed to him that flesh and blood could stand no more, and that his legs were refusing to carry him.

“It wasn’t me, your Highness,” was all he could think to say.

“COME HERE THIS MINUTE!” roared the Queen, pointing imperiously to a spot on the floor beside the bed.

Little by little, Ringan managed to approach the bed.

“Hand me that stick,” commanded the Queen, pointing to the walking stick at the bed head.

Again Ringan tried to obey. He put out his hand uncertainly to grasp the stick, but then withdrew it again. However, the Queen was seldom troubled by feelings of uncertainty. She quickly grasped the stick and tried to belabor Ringan with it, but he retreated nimbly and she succeeded in landing only one blow.

However, that must have been painful enough, for Ringan began to hop round the chamber rubbing his arm, exclaiming: “Ow---! Ow-wow! Mercy, that was sore!”

The Queen, being confined to her bed on Master Rintoul’s orders, felt frustrated in having failed to land more blows.

“I meant it to be sore,” she said angrily. “What do you mean, it wasn’t you? What have you been up to? You haven’t been at the plums again? I’ll find out whatever it is, never you fear. I’ll give you such a thrashing when I rise out of this bed. I’ll beat you black and blue!”

The Queen suddenly caught sight of Master Rintoul who had been stranded as a silent witness to this little drama, so she quickly dropped her stick and made an effort to compose herself.

“Master Rintoul,” she said, using what she believed was her most pleasant voice. “You’ll pardon me? I’m not like myself just now.”

Master Rintoul was certainly always willing to be indulgent to a member of the Royal Family.

“That doesn’t surprise me in the least, your Grace. It’s just another sign of your trouble. A lot of ill nature always goes along with Gregory’s Complaint. I never thought for a moment that that was you, your real self, speaking. You’ll be up and down like this the whole time until we get you cured.”

The Queen was now certain that her faith in Master Rintoul was fully justified. She felt she had done well to discover him, and smiled gratefully at him

“You are so right, Master Rintoul,” she said. “I can’t deny I’m not my usual self.”

Here she turned to address Ringan, who had retreated to the door.

“Come here, Ringan, my boy!” she smiled.

Ringan hesitated, for he had not forgotten the blow from her stick. So the invitation was repeated.

“Come over here to me, Son!”

His position appeared to be safe for the moment, so Ringan approached cautiously and received a little affectionate pat from the Queen.

“Kindly see Master Rintoul to the outer door, Ringan. Then ask the Princess Nanse to come and see me! There’s a good lad, now!”

Ringan hardly knew what to make of this change in the Queen’s attitude, but he moved with Master Rintoul to leave the chamber.

“Remember now,” said Rintoul at the door, “only a true loving heart can fetch you water from the Magic Well.”

I’m not likely to forget,” replied the Queen.

At this, Master Rintoul bowed, took his leave, and left with Ringan.

“The Well of True Water---! The Lord be praised!” the Queen muttered to herself, and she poured the water from the leech jar into the chamber pot. She then took a drink of water from a carafe at the bedside. “The Well of True Water---!” she repeated with satisfaction.

At this point, Nanse entered the chamber. In she came. Tall and fair she was, with cheeks as pink as the petals of roses, a mouth that was as red as rowan berries, eyes as blue as the summer sea and hair as golden as the sunlight itself. And she made a courtesy before the Queen.

“Your Grace wanted to converse with me?” she said respectfully.

“My daughter, I have to tell you, I have gotten Gregory’s Ailment,” said the Queen, sadly. “My complaint, it seems, is mortal, and no mediciner in all this Kingdom can cure me.”

“I’m really vexed to hear that, Mother,” said Nanse. “I hope it’s not catching.”

The Queen had really expected more sympathy from her eldest daughter than this.

“You hope it’s not catching! You’re never done thinking about yourself, are you? Does it mean nothing to you that your own mother is lying here dying? I always knew you were selfish, but I never thought you were callous.”

Nanse had not really meant to say what she had said, but the words had slipped out in a moment of inattention. She hastened to repair the damage.

“Mother, I meant to say I hope it’s not fatal.”

“ I was just going to tell you about that. It *is* fatal, right enough, but Master Rintoul has just told me that if I might have one drink from the Well of True Water, then I should be well again. I am not able just now to travel to this well myself. Do you think, Nanse, you could be so good as to fetch some of this water to me?”

The beautiful princess regarded the Queen. Never, in all her born days had she heard tell of the Well of True Water, so how was she to find it?

“And where might it be, this Well of True Water, for I have never heard tell of it?” she asked. “Never that I can remember.”

But the good Queen knew of it, and she told her daughter where it might be found.

“It is away, far away, my daughter, at a place called the World’s End, at the furthest corner of the kingdom, in Ardnamurchan.”

“Ardnamurchan!” exclaimed Nanse. She had certainly heard of Ardnamurchan. “That is at the end of the world right enough.”

“It is a long and weary trek to win there,” said the Queen. “You must go on foot over hills and dales and across marshes and moors and through dark woods before you come to it.”

The Princess did not like the sound of this at all. She thought to herself that she would not like this kind of journey for herself, so she answered her mother, saying, “Well then, Mother, let us send a servant body to this Well at the World’s End straight away. Many a one would be glad to go for gold or silver, and have we not gold and silver enough and to spare. Such a dour journey as this is more for a servant than a princess, surely?”

You may well think that, my daughter, but this must be a journey made not for gold, but for love alone, or no good will come of it. There is magic in it, and magic has its own ways.”

“Really, Mother!” “I’m not one for hearkening to old wives’ tales and such like.”

Here the Queen thought she had better impress upon her daughter the seriousness of her condition, so she held her side and groaned pathetically. The signal was not lost on Nanse.

“But,” she continued, “since your heart is really set on water from this place, I must go and fetch it for you myself, long trail or no. There are other things I’d rather do, but let none say I’m not a good daughter to you.”

“I’m greatly beholden to you, my daughter,” said the Queen. You have always been a good daughter to me in your own way, though we all know you are too proud altogether.”

Nanse now saw that she was committed to a long unpleasant journey, so that she might as well make a virtue out of necessity.

“Mother, think nothing of it! It is the right thing for me to do, I’m sure. What would folk think if I couldn’t do my own mother a service? It would not be genteel in me.”

The Queen rolled over on the silken bolster of her great golden bed. She was much less concerned with gentility than her eldest daughter. There were times when Nanse actually made her dislike the notion.

“Ah yes, you were always one for gentility – even when you were a little girl.”

“Well, there is nothing wrong with that,” said Nanse, “but I must away now and have a good sleep, for I intend to set out first thing tomorrow morning.”

Sometimes Queen Marget felt that the defects she now saw in Nanse’s character were somehow her own fault: that she had failed to nip them in the bud in her child’s infancy. But it was now too late!

“You have a long trail ahead of you Nanse,” she said. “So you had better tell them to make up some mutton sandwiches for you in the kitchen. Will you be taking the pony with you? He would be the better of some exercise.”

“From what you say, Mother,” replied Nanse, “the road will be much too rough for the pony. I will have to go on foot long before Ardnamurchan.”

“It will be a long road to walk, but never mind, it should be worth it in the end. Just remember Nanse, this is my last chance! I feel it in my bones I’m a dead woman without this water, so be sure you don’t let me down!”

“I won’t let you down, Mother,” answered Nanse. “Just you put your mind at rest!”

What was her mother blethering about? The journey would obviously be tiresome, but there was no possibility that she would let her mother down. However, she took her mother’s hand and kissed it.

“Farewell, Mother!” She moved gracefully towards the door to leave.

“Hold on a minute, Nanse,” cried the Queen, and as Nanse returned, she lifted a bag of apples from the chest of drawers at the bedside.

“Here, you’d better take this poke of apples along with you. Morag brought them in last night, but I’m not able for them at all. You’ll maybe be glad to have them on the road?”

Nanse was not really interested in Morag’s apples, but she thought she had better accept them to please her mother.

“All right, Mother, thank you.”

Nanse left the chamber and the Queen looked anxiously after her for some time. She then had a thought to herself and pulled the bell rope. On this occasion, Ringan arrived almost immediately and walked up confidently to the bed.

“What was it , your Highness?”

To his astonishment, the Queen grabbed him by the arm, picked up the stick and belabored him with it.

“Ow! Yow-wow-ow! Mercy! Ow!”

“You young devil that you are, when I rise from this bed, I’ll break every bone in your body. I’ll teach you a lesson you’ll never forget. I’ll thrash the skin off your back!”

Ringan, with a mighty effort, suddenly succeeded in wrenching free from the Queen’s invalid grasp and made his escape through the door, and as he ran away, he heard the Queen shouting angrily after him: “THAT’S FOR GIVING ME A RED FACE BEFORE MASTER RINTOUL.”