

SOME PUDDOCK

“I don’t care who you are, you’re not coming in here at this hour!” somebody cried.

Princess Morag awoke with a start when she was suddenly disturbed by angry shouting below the window of the Queen’s chamber. She had been sleeping peacefully for several hours, but she sat up in bed when she heard voices bellowing in the courtyard.

Morag rose and went to the window to find out who was causing this disturbance. She opened the window and cried down into the courtyard:

“What’s up there, Tam?”

The only answer which came was some angry shouting, in which the word, ‘puddock’ could be distinguished. The princess then thought she recognised the voice of her Goodman shouting in anguish.

“LEAVE ME ALONE! LEAVE ME ALONE YOU DEVILS THAT YOU ARE!”

“Who’s that?” she cried. “I can’t make you out! Hold on! I’ll come down.”

Morag moved from the window and put on a robe. There was then a knock at the door. “Come in!” she cried, and Ringan entered in a state of great excitement, carrying a stout stick.

“I heard you were in this chamber tonight, your Highness,” said Ringan. “There is a great huge puddock at the outer door wanting to come in. It can speak, too, and it says it knows you, your Highness. It says you are expecting it.”

“Oh dear!” she exclaimed. This was not good news for Morag, for she had hoped that the puddock would not arrive for several days. She even had a faint hope that he might never arrive at all.

“Tam gave it a good hard smack on the head for its impudence. Then he grabbed it and turned it over on its back, and he is holding it just now. Will I go down, your Highness and take my stick to it?” He brandished the stick, enthusiastically.

“One blow with this and it will bother you no more. Two blows and it would be DEAD. He struck the stick on the floor with great relish.

“It’ll not come back here in a hurry, I can tell you. I’ll not show its ugly face back her again---! I could kill it for you, your Highness, if you like. I ‘ve killed puddocks before,” he added, proudly.

“Oh Mercy! No Ringan, leave him alone. I don’t want him spoiled,” cried Morag, who felt she would be failing in her duty as a wife if she allowed her Goodman to be beaten to death with a stick on his arrival at the palace. This was certainly not the reception he had hoped.

“Does the Queen know he is here, Ringan?” she asked.

“Not that I know, your Highness,” Ringan answered.

“Then don’t you tell her, Ringan!” she ordered.

“Not me, your Highness! No fear!” Ringan answered. “Not likely!”

“I think,” said Morag, “you’d better tell Tam to let the puddock in through the gate and show him the way up here. And I don’t want him marked!”

Ringan did not quite know what to make of this. It was clear enough to him that the only proper way to treat a frog was to beat it with a stick.

“Do you want to play with the puddock, your Highness?” he asked.

“Ringan, that’s none of your business. Just do as I tell you!” repeated Morag, sharply.

“Very well, your Highness,” said Ringan, reluctantly, “if that is your will.”

As Ringan left, pulling the door after him, he looked puzzled. He could not for the life of him imagine what Morag wanted with this frog in her room. But Morag was not concerned with his problem, and she paced up and down, muttering and wringing her hands. After a few seconds, there was a quiet knocking at the door. Morag opened the door and in hopped---yes, the puddock, looking fatter and uglier to Morag than ever.

“Oh Mercy,” exclaimed Morag, “it’s yourself! You h-h-haven’t been long. How did you ever get here so soon?”

“Yes, yes, Wife!” said the frog. “Did I not say I’d not be far behind you? Here I come! Bestir yourself now, and help me in, my bonny lass!”

“Oh yes, of course, G-G-Goodman!” said Morag. “C-C-Come inside!” She took the puddock’s hand and led him into the room. There he sat on his haunches and looked around him with interest.

“That’s a vicious knave you keep here,” he said. “We’ll have to be quit of him. For a while I thought he was going to bash me on the head with his big stick. A very poor welcome---! What a way to treat a Royal Prince!”

He held the side of his head ruefully. “I can see there will have to be a number of changes here. The door guard and that nasty malevolent boy will have to go for a start. We can’t keep servants like that. We can’t live surrounded by hooligans and riff-raff.”

“Goodman, are you wanting anything to eat?” asked Morag. “A bowl of hot brose, maybe? And there is some cold mutton in the kitchen.” Perhaps he might feel a little less grumpy with a full stomach, she thought.

“No, No,” said the puddock, “I’m feeling rather sick. My poor legs are awful sore, too. Lord, I’m a bit stiff at the knees with all that hopping. For a while, I thought my knees were going to give up completely. Preserve us, I’ve been jumping so long I’m not sure I know how to stop myself!”

At this point, the puddock started to do some convulsive hopping. “Help!” he shouted. “My legs have started to jump on their own account! I can’t stop them working,”

Here, the door burst open and the Queen entered with Ringan, brandishing his stick. At this, the puddock forgot about his legs and tried to cower behind Morag.

“What’s this I’m hearing from Ringan that the puddock is in this chaumer?” demanded the Queen. She looked quickly round the room and her eyes fell on the frog.

“So you’re the puddock!” she exclaimed, contemptuously. “It’s little wonder Nanse wouldn’t marry you. What an impudence you have to propose to anybody! Mercy, what a sight---!”

“Mother, please---!” implored Morag.

“What’s that on its mouth?” asked the Queen, peering at the puddock. “It hasn’t been eating anything in here, has it? You know I can’t do with meat in the bed chambers. I will not put up with that.”

At this, the puddock put his fingers to his mouth to discover what was supposed to be there.

“Mother---!” cried Morag indignantly.

“It looks like it has been eating treacle,” suggested the Queen. She then looked directly at the puddock.

“HAVE-YOU-BEEN-AT-MY-TREACLE-DUMPLING?” she demanded. The frog made no reply to this. He had eaten nothing in the palace, but somehow he could not help wiping his mouth guiltily with the back of his hand.

“I thought I’d put that treacle dumpling away in a safe place,” the Queen added.

“Don’t be daft, Mother!” said Morag. “He hasn’t been near your treacle dumpling. He doesn’t eat that kind of meat. He hasn’t been anywhere in the palace but in this room, since Ringan let him in.”

The Queen looked enquiringly at Ringan.

“That’s right, your Highness!” he nodded.

“Well, it’s a good job! I thought this beast is supposed to speak. I haven’t heard it speak yet. Could you not get it to speak, Morag?”

The puddock gathered himself. He could see by now that he hadn’t made a good impression on his mother-in-law, and he knew very well it might be to his advantage to please her.

“I am you goodson, your Royal Highness,” he said, politely. “Your Royal Highness, I am very glad to make your acquaintance.”

He bowed deeply, with a flourish, but Queen Marget simply glared at him.

“Huh---!” she grunted at Morag, “it can speak right enough.”

She then addressed the frog: “That’s more than I can say to you. Just what are you doing in this chamber with Morag?”

Although the puddock was prepared, in his own interest, to defer to the Queen, this remark annoyed him. “I have every right to be here,” he insisted. “I’m her husband.”

The Queen considered this reply and walked round behind the puddock and looked down at him.

“I see its backside is clean anyway,” she observed to Morag. “And it can speak quite well.”

“All right,” she said to the frog. “You may stay here the night, if that’s what Morag wants, but no mischief, mind!

“No mischief---! Don’t you dare meddle with Morag! Don’t you dare! Just you stay on the floor where you belong or I’ll get Ringan to take a stick to your back!

“Morag, my lass, I doubt you’ll have to make a kirk or a mill of this. I can make nothing of it. I’m going back to the dancing! And you can tell your puddock, it will be toad-in-the-hole for dinner tomorrow, and it will be that or nothing.”

With these words, the Queen stalked out followed by Ringan, who made a threatening gesture with his stick towards the puddock as he passed him.

“Your mother doesn’t seem very pleased to see me, after all I’ve done for her,” said the puddock. “Ingratitude is sharper than a serpent’s tooth, they say.”

“Mother hasn’t been very well, Puddock,” said Morag. She’s not herself just now. I think she’s maybe worrying about something.”

“That must be it, I suppose,” suggested the frog, “though I can’t see what she has to worry about. Maybe she drank too much of the magic water. That would make her excited, right enough.”

“See, Goodman,” said Morag, “here is a cushion at the door for you! You can sit down there on your haunches until the morning. It is late now and you must have hopped far today. You will be glad to have a seat after all your travel. I daresay you will be wanting to sleep now. I know *I* did after such a long journey. Tomorrow morning we will talk together, you and me.”

The puddock shrugged his shoulders, and the princess left him next to the cushion. She then climbed back into bed and sat up. The frog stared at her with unblinking eyes.

He now made a small hop onto the cushion, squatted on it reluctantly and continued to stare at her for several seconds with his glowering eyes, until she lay down and hid her face in the soft pillows of the great golden bed. His legs twitched convulsively from time to time.

“I am rather tired right enough.. It’s a long way from Ardnamurchan to Abernethy.”

“I know how long it is,” said Morag, raising her head. “I’ve had to walk the whole way twice.”

The puddock shook his head. “I felt the strength draining from my legs before I won the length of Loch Rannoch. Once or twice I nearly conked out altogether, and I ended up having to swim the length of Loch Rannoch and Loch Tummel, but here I am, safe and sound,” he announced.

“That’s a long swim,” yawned Morag.

“A heron tried to nab me at Loch Tummel and I had to swim to the bottom and hold my breath for more than five minutes before it flew away. It’s a good job I’m an amphibian or I would never have been able to do it.”

“There are lots of fish deep down in Loch Rannoch,” the puddock added. “Lots of different kinds and there were some things I could eat. Nothing very tasty though---mostly muddy sort of stuff. I did see a great, big nasty pike down there, but he didn’t see me. He was busy chasing another fish. I didn’t want to tangle with him. I suppose I was lucky.

“Do you know that down there at the bottom of the loch there are all kinds of bonny water flowers of different colors, swaying this way and that in the movement of the water. It is very interesting.”

Now Morag was a kind girl and she had always been fond of animals, but she badly wanted to sleep. She was ashamed for thinking that if the heron, or perhaps the pike, had been successful in nabbing this particular puddock, a great burden would have been spared her.

“Goodwife,” said the frog, “I’m not used with cushions. The likes of them is a hot and fousty thing for a puddock to sit on, and there’s a cold wind blowing on my legs from beneath the door.”

Morag made no answer to this. She did not really know what she could do to help him.

“Woman.....! Do you hear me when I’m speaking?” said the puddock in a heavy voice. “How many times do I have to speak?”

“Yes, I hear you Goodman. I’m sorry you aren’t comfortable. You see, I don’t know much about puddocks. The other day was the first time I ever spoke to one.”

“Well, well, you needn’t fret,” said the frog. “It is never too late to learn, my girl, never too late....”

“No, I’m sure it’s not. I’ll try again,” said the princess.

She looked around the chamber for something which might be useful, and her eye lit upon a large flower pot near the window. So she climbed out of bed, took the cushion from the puddock and put the flower pot over him.

“See now, there you will be cool, but sheltered from the draught. Go off to sleep now, and tomorrow we’ll speak together, you and me.”

She then climbed back into bed, but it was soon clear that this did not please the frog either.

“Wife!” he complained, from inside the flower pot. “I’m not used with flower pots either. There is no air in them for me to breathe and I’m held in and can’t jump about. Puddocks have to breathe through their skins. Do you not know that? Do you hear me, Woman?”

Morag was in no doubt that she heard him all right.

“Yes, Puddock -- I mean, Goodman – I hear you.”

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” he demanded. “I hope I am not going to have to raise my voice to you again!”

Morag began to wonder if this was what married life was really like. She had hoped for something better. It was only a few hours since she had completed her trek from Ardnamurchan and she was now very tired. She badly needed her sleep.

“Mercy, what will I do now?” she muttered to herself. “I know, I will rise and take off the flower pot.”

So she got out of bed and lifted the flower pot off the frog and put it back again in its place.

“There, now---!” Is that not better, Goodman?”

The puddock gasped and breathed deeply several times. “That’s a little better, my love. At least I can draw breath.”

“My, but what a grand place is this!” he said, looking around him. What a fine place, indeed! It would take me quite a while to hop round it all, but now I am weary, and woeful and woebegone, for have I not travelled far and fast to be with you?”

“So you have!” replied Morag. “To tell you the truth, Goodman, I had hardly expected you this soon. You did say you would follow me after several days.”

“Ah well, I changed my mind,” said the puddock. “I didn’t think it was right that a newly-married couple should be separated for any length of time on their honeymoon. “

“If I’d had more time to prepare a proper welcome for you---? I’m not really ready for you,” said the princess.

The puddock waved his hand dismissively. “It’s all right, Wife--- you needn’t bother your pretty head about that! I’ll make allowances for you your first night.”

Morag was about to reply to this, but thought better of it. She fought back the angry words which rose in her throat, remembering

her mother's wise advice that if you can't say anything nice, you shouldn't say anything at all.

"Isn't this just great?" exclaimed the puddock. "Here we are together, just our two selves. Just give me a little time to gather myself! If you would just be patient, I'll be in better fettle for you in a minute."

"In better fettle for what?" asked Morag, apprehensively.

"Well, there is a full moon tonight and it's rather romantic. Since we are now married, I thought that you and I----you know what I mean--!"

Although Morag did have some idea, she had no intention of admitting this.

"I'm sure I've no idea what you're talking about. You must be very weary after all the leaping you have done.....I know, I'll make you a small bed all to yourself, on the floor beside my big one, and you'll sleep there until tomorrow morning, and tomorrow we'll have a long talk together."

"All right, I'll give it a try," said the frog. Perhaps it was wise to sleep now. He certainly felt very very tired, and his feet were in bad shape.

So Morag hastened to make a makeshift bed with the cushion and one plaid taken from the chest. The frog lay down stiffly under the plaid and she tucked him in gingerly, returned to bed and lay down to sleep. There was silence for several seconds, and then the puddock slowly sat up and started to sing softly in a language she didn't understand.

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment;
chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie.
J'ai tout quitté pour l'ingrate Sylvie;
elle me quitte et prend un autre amant.

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment;
chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie.

His singing voice was surprisingly pleasant and Morag quite liked the sound of his song, whatever it might mean. However, she pretended to be asleep.

“Wife,” whispered the puddock, “Are you awake?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“I’m awfully cold,” he grumbled. “Can I come in beside you?”

Morag was certainly not going to have a cold frog in bed beside her, so she bounded out of bed, took a second plaid from the chest and put this over him.

“There now---! That should be fine and cosy.”

Morag returned to bed, buried herself in the bed clothes and tried again to sleep. There was silence for several seconds, but there was no rest for Morag.

“Wife!” he exclaimed again.

“What is it now?” answered Morag wearily.

And when she looked down from the bed at the frog, she saw he was sitting up in his makeshift bed.

“I can’t lie comfortably in this bed at all. I’M TOO HOT!” he bellowed.

Morag threw aside the bed clothes and exclaimed, “For the love of Goodness---!”

She bounded out of bed, pressed the puddock firmly into a reclining position and turned down half of the second plaid.

“Try to settle down, Goodman!” she begged. “I think you must be over tired.”

Again Morag returned to bed and lay down. And again there was silence for several seconds.

“I’m awfully dry,” whined the puddock. “I can’t swallow properly. You haven’t a drink just to wet my throat? I could do with some leaves as well.”

The little princess was growing weary of the puddock. There seemed to be no end to his demands and she made no reply. There was silence once more for a few seconds.

“I WANT A DRINK OF WATER!” ROARED THE PUDDOCK.

To Morag, this was the last straw. She leaped out of bed and stood over the puddock.

“What an awful thirst---“ he went on.

“GOODMAN,” interrupted Morag, angrily, “it seems there is no pleasing you at all. Am I never to be allowed to sleep tonight? You’re too cold! You’re too hot! You want water. You want leaves!

“There is no water in here, and no leaves either, and if you are wanting any, you had better go outside to the pump in the courtyard. There is water in the duck-pond as well. You’ll find some docken leaves down there too, growing round the drain, if that is what you are after.”

While she delivered this tirade, the puddock cowered before her under the plaid. When she had spoken, he cast his plaid aside and stood up from his bed to his full height before her. A new note came into his voice.

“Wife---! My brown lass!” he said kindly. “You needn’t be angry. I will trouble you no more. I can see very well that I can’t live with you, nor you with me. You are the kindest-hearted lass in the whole world and you have kept the pact you made with me. Few maids would have done that. You have tried your best to give me everything I asked of you. But there is no living together the way we are now. “

Now, although Morag felt she had had more than enough of this puddock, she did not like the idea very much that she might be deserted by such a creature.

“You are not going to leave me”, she wailed----- “On my wedding night?”

“I daresay you wouldn’t break your heart if I did, but I’m not going to leave you,” said the puddock, generously. “I’m not such a curmudgeon as you might think. I was just testing you out, and you will be glad to hear you have passed the test.”

Morag had no idea what the frog was talking about. What test did he mean? What was a curmudgeon? Perhaps it was another kind of creature that lived in the well? This was all very confusing.

“What do you mean, Goodman? She asked.

“I’m not going to leave you,” replied the puddock,” but we can’t go on like this any longer.”

I still don’t know what you mean,” said the princess. Does that mean we’re “incompatible?” She had heard her mother use this word about her father. “What else can we do?”

“Please trust what I’m about to say to you,” a said the frog. “Behind your bed there hangs a sword. Do you see it there?”

And he pointed to a large Celtic broadsword suspended on the wall.

“That belonged to my father,” answered Morag. “He used it sometimes for fighting the Vikings. Father was really skillful with that sword. He once killed three Norsemen in one day with it.”

“Is it still sharp?”

“Indeed it is!” replied Morag. “Father always liked to keep it sharp in case he might need it for chopping off somebody’s head. It’s like a razor.”

“Good! That will be the very thing for what I have in mind,” said the frog, and he hopped up to the wall below the sword.

“It was to have been given to my husband,” said Morag sadly, “but how I can give a sword to a puddock, I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Oh but I know, Wife. You can give me the edge of it.”

“The edge of it---!” Exclaimed Morag. “Goodman, I can’t make you out, indeed I can’t.”

“Then I’ll tell you, my girl.” The puddock pointed to the back of his neck. “Give me the sharp edge of it on my neck, here, for I am the saddest puddock in all the world. Cut off my head with your father’s sword and free me from my sorrow!”

Morag was completely dumfounded at this request, for by this time, she had grown quite fond of the frog. At any rate, she couldn’t bear to hurt him and she was sure she could never kill him.

“I could never do such a thing,” she replied, passionately. “I made a true bargain to marry you and I have been your goodwife ever since. It wouldn’t be right or natural for me to chop off your head.”

“Indeed yes,” said the puddock, “you are my goodwyfe, and a wife must do as her man tells her. You surely know that? Any woman knows that. You promised me as much when you married me.”

“I know I did, but a wife mustn’t kill her goodman, surely? I’m not used with doing such things. I can’t stand the sight of blood. I just can’t bring myself to do it. Please don’t ask me to!”

A wife shouldn’t have a gabbling tongue either,” said the puddock. “Just you do as I bid you, Wife! Surely you haven’t forgotten your marriage vows already. Do as you’re told and don’t think much about it.!”

But Morag was not convinced that she was capable of doing such a deed, and stood there hanging her head dejectedly. She begged, she argued and pleaded.

“When all is said and done,” he argued, “I will never be missed. What’s one frog, more or less, in all the world? Besides, you’ll be doing me a good turn, for I am weary with my life as a puddock. So weary---! One good stroke and the thing is done.

“Nobody knows how weary I am,” he sighed deeply. “Heart weary-- I can’t go on like this any longer.”

At this, he reached up and removed the sword from the wall, and felt the cutting edge of it with his thumb. He removed one of the silken sheets from the bed and with one deft stroke of the sword severed the sheet in two.

Morag was astonished at his skill with the sword. “Mother will not be pleased when she sees that,” she said. “Her good sheet---!”

“She can be as displeased as she likes,” said the frog. “I’ll not be here to hear her. I can tell you, I’d rather suffer the edge of the sword than the edge of her tongue.”

He then took the sword by the blade and handed it to Morag.

“I don’t know about this at all,” she protested, as she examined the blade. “Will it not be sore?”

Morag was a sensitive princess who disliked pain so much herself she could not bear to inflict it on others.

“Don’t bother your pretty head about it being sore!” said the frog. “I won’t have have much time to think about it being sore after my head’s off. Don’t put off any longer now! Just do it!”

Morag was finally convinced. If there would be no pain, she could do her duty and obey her Goodman.

“Very well then, if that’s your last word. But remember, it will be past ducking when your head’s off. It will be too late then for to change your mind.”

“I know, I know,” said the puddock, gravely. “Just hold your tongue and get on with it!”

Morag now raised the sword sadly and the frog bowed his head before her. But as she was preparing to strike, she was dismayed to see that he had fallen into a fit of trembling.

“Hold still just now, Goodman!” she cried. “I can’t make a good job of chopping off your head if you waggle it about.”

With a great effort of will the puddock steadied himself.

“That’s better!” said the princess, encouragingly. “You get ready and I’ll count to three.”

“Farewell Princess! Chop away!” he cried, bravely.

“Remember, this is just to please you!” said Morag. “One, two, THREE!”

Morag now brought the sword down quickly, with all her strength, and struck off the puddock’s head with a single blow. At once, there was a brilliant flash of light, the air was filled with the sweetest music, like the sound of tinkling bells, and there stood a prince, who was the most handsome man the princess had ever seen. The Prince and Morag stood gazing at each other for several seconds.

“Who are you?” she cried.

“Well Wife?” the man replied. “Well my bonny lass? You never guessed I was a prince all the time, did you now?”

But this man appeared to be a complete stranger to Morag.

“WHERE’S MY PUDDOCK?” she cried sorrowfully. “I never meant to kill him. I never meant to do him any harm at all.”

“Neither you did! You didn’t kill him, Morag,” the man said. “I am your puddock, or rather, I WAS your puddock.”

“How could you be?” asked Morag, “I don’t understand you. I’m all confused.”

“Morag,” said the Prince, “you have freed me from an evil spell that was cast on me by a witch long ago. I have been held in the puddock’s body these many years and now I am free at last.”

The Prince now rubbed his chest with great satisfaction.

“The Lord be praised! It’s wonderful to be myself again! I’d almost forgotten what it feels like to be human. I can’t tell you how marvellous it feels.

“But how am I to be sure it’s you?” asked the Princess. “You’re not a bit like yourself.”

“This is me --- myself,” said the Prince, pointing to his chest. “I wasn’t like myself before. This is the way I was always meant to be.

“I’ll give you proof. Didn’t the Queen, your mother say, ‘Be patient, we haven’t seen the end of this yet!’”

“I remember her saying something of the kind,” said Morag, full of wonder. “But how do you know that? My Goodman – I mean the puddock – wasn’t there at the time.”

“That’s just part of the glamourie,” said the Prince. “Did your sister not tell you I have the second sight? Do you remember the day you were married?”

“I’m hardly likely to forget it.”

“Do you remember when we linked thumbs together below the rowan tree?” he said, looking deeply into her eyes.

When she heard him say this, the Princess gazed at him, wide-eyed. His voice was different, his skin was different, his whole shape was different, but there was something about him that reminded her of her puddock. There was something familiar about his manner.

“Do you remember, Morag?” he said. “Under the rowan tree---?”

It was then that she recognised him.

“It was YOU I linked thumbs with?” She gasped. “It was YOU! You must be him right enough. Your voice has changed a bit, but I know your manner. I know your style. It IS you!”

“My voice has changed because I no longer have a frog’s throat.” said the Prince.

“But how could such a thing as this be?” asked Morag. “I’m completely bamboozled!”

“It is a long story,” answered the Prince. “And I cannot tell you all of it today. Ill magic put me into the form of a puddock and condemned me to guard the Well of True Water. You will know that there is ill magic as well as good?”

“But how did you get back into your right shape?” enquired Morag. “At least you must tell me that.”

“I could never be freed from the spell I was under,” answered the Prince, “until the day should come when a maid would marry me as a puddock of her own free will and cut off my head when I asked her to. Before you came along, I was at my wits’ end. I thought I was going to have to remain a puddock at Ardnamurchan for the rest of my days.”

“You poor man---!” exclaimed Morag, and she moved towards the Prince to embrace him. “My puddock! All this time this is what you were really like. My own frog!”

“Here, steady on!” said the Prince. “Less of the frog---! My name is Andrew. I would rather you thought of me as a man now.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Morag. “This will take some getting used to. ‘Andrew’, I like the sound of that name. Andrew.....! That was my father’s name!”

“You can never tell what folk are like by first appearances,” said the Prince.”

“You have a good heart and that’s what matters most.” said the Princess. “Andrew my love---!”

Here the frog prince and the little brown princess kissed, and in that kiss they both discovered the true meaning of glamourie, which has to do with the meaning of the universe and the life that lasts for ever. And when that kiss was over, the princess asked one question.

“Andrew, will you promise me one thing?”

“And what would that be, Morag?” Prince Andrew answered.

“Promise me you will never go back to being a puddock again?” pleaded Morag.

“Wet thumbs!” he ordered.

Again Morag and the Prince licked their right thumbs together and hooked them high in the air, firmly, but briefly.

“No fear! This will do for me”, he declared, and he kissed her again.

“This is the way it was weired,” he said, “since before the world began.”

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And you can well imagine how blithe was the little brown princess then, and how everybody in the whole land of Alba was delighted. The prince and his lass had a second wedding in public for everybody at the palace to sing and dance at, and nobody danced at their wedding more joyfully than good Queen Marget, the very picture of health. And even Morag’s sisters, Nanse and Eilidh, appeared to be well pleased, for had they not the finest goodbrother in the whole world, with a kingdom of his own? But what Nanse’s thoughts were when she was an old woman nodding by the fireside, who can tell?

And as for the little brown princess, she lived with her prince without strife and in gladness and content all her days. And for all I know, somewhere they may be living so yet! The Prince was very happy with his Princess, but for years after, sometimes in the still of the night, he would find himself awake in the dark and it would seem to him that he was again the puddock at the Magic Well, hopping

slowly round and round, in the dripping rain, and that he could still hear the endless thunder of the ocean waves against the rocks at Ardnamurchan.

The Well of True Water is still there in Alba for anybody to find, but nobody now knows exactly where to find it. There is now no puddock to guard its water, so if you ever come upon it, you will surely be blessed. You will be able to help yourself to the Magic Water and drink your fill, below the rowan tree.

THE END