

The Witty Princess

You yourself compose beautiful tales; your style is so smooth and pure, and there is such pleasantness and naturalness in your verses, that you have awakened in me a strong desire to write you a little story, though I do not know whether it will deserve your approval. I shall assume the guise of a noble citizen. — I do not wish to tell it either in verse or in prose; I shall not dig up lofty words; in short, I wish to write a tale without any embellishments and seek only moral instruction.

My tale provides quite enough examples for this purpose, and therefore I hope it will be pleasing to you. It is based on two proverbs instead of one; such is the custom nowadays, and I gladly adapt myself to the manners of the present age. You will see that our ancestors wished to express by this proverb: idleness is the mother of vices; you will undoubtedly also like their other mode of proof, which commands us always to be cautious, or, speaking in their language: that distrust is the mother of safety.

During the Crusades, a king of some European state resolved to travel to Palestine and fight against the infidels, but before undertaking this distant journey, he arranged the affairs of his kingdom so well and entrusted its governance to such a skillful minister that on this side he was completely at ease. Yet his family matters troubled him greatly; the queen, his spouse, had died some time before, leaving behind three daughters, all of whom were already of marriageable age. My chronicle does not mention their names; I know only that in those happy times the people simply gave names to persons of rank according to their good or bad qualities, and thus they called the eldest Nonchalante, or the Careless One; the second Babillarde, or the Chatterbox; and the third Finette, or the Witty One; these names perfectly corresponded to the characters and dispositions of the three sisters.

Rarely could one find such a careless maiden as Nonchalante. Every day she did not wake before one o'clock in the afternoon; she was led to church in her sleeping robe, her head uncombed, her dress unfastened, her belt torn off, and very often she wore mismatched slippers; during the day she corrected this disorder, yet she never took the slippers off her feet, saying that shoes pressed her feet terribly. After dinner, she sat down at her toilet and remained there until evening; the rest of the time she spent playing, and afterwards sat down to supper. When going to bed, she needed as much time to undress as to dress, and therefore she always fell asleep at dawn.

Babillarde led a completely opposite way of life. This princess was lively, agile, and spent little time on her attire; but she had such a strong inclination to talk that from morning until late at night her mouth never closed. She knew everything that happened at court: tender liaisons, flirtations not only among the nobles serving at court, but even among footmen, cooks, stokers, and all working people. She knew precisely how much had been given as a gift to the maid of such-and-such a countess, and how much the steward of such-and-such a marquis had stolen. All these tidings were told to her by her nurse and seamstress, whom she listened to with far greater pleasure than the speech of any ambassador. Such fine stories she recounted tirelessly to everyone, beginning with the king, her father, down to the very last footman, and thus she was compelled to repeat each one a hundred times a day.

This chatter produced very bad consequences, despite the princess's high birth; such familiar intercourse gave courage to certain courtiers to lavish amorous declarations upon her. Babillarde willingly listened to their passionate expressions merely for the pleasure of replying; at any cost, she absolutely had to listen or speak from morning till evening. Babillarde, just like Nonchalante, never had the habit of thinking, reasoning, reading, still less of occupying herself with women's handiworks; in short, these two sisters, always leading an idle life and having reached almost full maturity, possessed no knowledge whatsoever.

Their younger sister Finette was of a completely different character: she applied every possible effort to cultivate her mind, to sing, to play many instruments; with remarkable skill she mastered all handiworks suitable for women; she established order in the palace and did not allow the courtiers to rob her father, because at that time this was customary.

But her talents were not limited to this alone: she was extremely sensible and possessed such wonderful presence of mind that she immediately found means to extricate herself from the most difficult situations. This young princess, through her utmost perspicacity, discovered a dangerous net which the ambassador of a neighboring sovereign had spread for her father the king in a treaty he was about to sign. Intending to punish the treachery of the ambassador and his master, the king, following his daughter's advice, altered an article in the treaty and thus deceived in turn the very deceiver. Finette also uncovered the treacherous conduct of a minister who sought to deceive the king; by giving prudent counsel to her parent, the princess caused this man's faithlessness to recoil upon himself. In many other cases too she demonstrated her perspicacity and sharpness of wit, for which reason the people called her Finette. The king, loving her more than her elder sisters, was so confident in her prudence that, had he no other daughters, he

would undoubtedly have set out on the impending journey; but unfortunately he was as uncertain about the conduct of his elder daughters as he was reliant upon Finette. Thus, wishing to spare himself sorrow concerning his daughters' behavior, he adopted the following measures.

Lovely Countess! You have undoubtedly heard hundreds of times about the wondrous power of sorceresses. The king was on terms of closest friendship with one of these cunning women. Coming to her, he explained how deeply he was troubled by the fate of his two elder daughters. "Not," said the king, "that they would ever do anything contrary to their duty, but they are so foolish, so imprudent and careless, that I fear during my absence, out of amusement or idleness, they might undertake something improper; as for Finette, although I am confident in her virtue, yet in order to give none of my daughters any advantage, I intend to treat her exactly as I treat her elder sisters: therefore I beg you, my good friend, to make for them three glass spindles endowed with such a property that if any of my daughters does anything contrary to propriety, the spindle belonging to her shall shatter into tiny pieces."

Since this sorceress was among the most skilled, she immediately fulfilled the king's wish and made three magical spindles, crafted in the most excellent manner; yet His Majesty was not satisfied with this precaution. Having conducted the princesses to a high tower built in a remote and secluded place far from the capital, he said to them: "I command you to live in this tower until the very day of my return, and I expressly forbid you to admit a single person." Dismissing all their servants and maids, he gave each of them a magical spindle, explaining its property; then, taking leave of the princesses, he locked the tower doors, took the keys with him, and departed on his journey.

Perhaps one might think that the princesses, locked up without servants, were in danger of dying of hunger? Not at all. To one of the tower windows a pulley with a rope had beforehand been attached; to this rope the princesses tied a basket, which they lowered down every day; into this basket various dishes and drinks were placed for them, and when they hoisted it up, they immediately untied the rope.

Nonchalante and Babillarde fell into despair at this solitary life; they were so bored that it is impossible to describe; but what could be done? One must endure it; moreover, the unbearable magical spindles frightened them so much that the princesses constantly feared that not only from some improper act, but even from an evil thought, their spindles might shatter.

As for Finette, she was not bored at all. Sewing, music, and reading provided her with continual new pleasures, and besides

According to the minister's order, the ruler of the state, letters containing both internal affairs of the kingdom and foreign news were daily placed in a basket; the king had permitted this upon departure, and the minister, wishing to gain the favor of the princesses, executed his command with utmost precision. Finetta, so to speak, devoured these reports greedily; as for her industrious sisters, they deemed it beneath them to occupy themselves with reading such scraps, saying it was tedious to burden themselves with such trifles, and that the minister would have done much better to send them cards for entertainment.

Thus, leading a sorrowful life, they complained against fate, and I believe they repeated more than once the proverb: Be born not rich, but happy; they constantly sat beneath the windows at least to see what was happening in the fields. One day, while Finetta was busy working in her chamber, her sisters, sitting by the window, saw below at the tower a poor woman in rags who, in a pitiful voice, begged their help; clasping her hands and with tears in her eyes, she asked permission to enter the tower, claiming she was an unfortunate foreigner, knew many trades, and would serve them with the greatest diligence. At first the princesses remembered their parent's command not to admit anyone into the tower, but Princess Nonchalante grew so weary of serving herself, and Babillarde's tongue suffered so much from having no one else to speak with except her sisters, that without hesitation they resolved to accept this poor woman: Nonchalante because someone would then dress her, and Babillarde in hope that an extra person would be added with whom she could converse incessantly.

"Do you really think," said Babillarde to her sister, "that our parent the king's command extends even to this unfortunate woman? I believe we may admit her without any danger to ourselves."—"Do as you wish, sister," replied Nonchalante. Babillarde, awaiting only her consent, immediately lowered the basket. The poor woman stepped into it, and the princesses easily hoisted her up with the pulley.

As soon as this woman climbed out of the basket, the terrible filth of her garments aroused strong disgust in the princesses; they wished to give her other clothes, but the beggar said she would change them tomorrow, and for now would begin her service. As soon as she stopped speaking, Finetta came from her room and saw with astonishment an unfamiliar woman conversing with her sisters. They told her how they had lifted this woman inside, and Finetta, seeing the deed was already done, concealed her displeasure. Afterward, the new servant ran through all the rooms under the guise of serving, but actually to learn their layout. I think the

reader already suspects that something extraordinary lay hidden within this poor woman.

But so as not to leave you longer in uncertainty, let me say in one word that this creature covered in rags was none other than the son of a powerful monarch, neighbor to the king, parent of the princesses. This young prince, being the most cunning man of his time, completely controlled his father; moreover, he did not even need to employ cunning, for the king, his parent, was of such gentle and mild temperament that he was called Mult the Meek; as for the prince, due to his cunning and treachery, everyone called him Riche-Cotel or Rich in Cunning; he also had a younger brother who was as kind and honest as Riche-Cotel was cunning and wicked. Nevertheless, despite the difference in their characters, they loved each other so much and lived in such harmony that everyone marveled exceedingly. Besides superior qualities of soul, the younger prince possessed perfect beauty; the charm of his face and graceful figure earned him from all the name Belavoir or Handsome; it must also be said that the snares laid for Finetta's parent by the neighboring king's ambassador, which I mentioned earlier, and which she so skillfully turned against him, were nothing but schemes devised by Riche-Cotel. Seeing failure in his intentions, he hated the parents of the princesses, and felt even greater hatred toward them; learning of the measures taken concerning their daughters, he formed the vile intention to nullify the suspicious father's precautions. Finding a pretext for travel, Riche-Cotel obtained permission from his father the king and employed the means already known to us to enter the tower.

Having examined the tower's layout, Riche-Cotel noticed that the princesses could easily call for help from passersby, so he deemed it wise to remain until evening in his beggar's attire, since during the day they might notice his trickery, summon people, and punish him for his audacity; therefore he refused to change his clothes. In the evening, when the sisters sat down to supper, Riche-Cotel cast off the rags covering him and appeared in rich knightly garland adorned with various precious stones. The poor princesses, seeing this, fell into such amazement that at that very moment they jumped from the table and fled; Finetta and Babillarde, being nimbler, immediately reached their rooms, while Nonchalante, who could hardly move her legs, was instantly overtaken by the prince.

Throwing himself at her feet and revealing his rank, Riche-Cotel said that the fame of her beauty and a portrait of the princess he had seen compelled him to leave his parent's court and, meeting her, declare his passionate love. Nonchalante was at first so frightened she could not utter a single word to the prince, who still remained on his knees, singing tender words and swearing about a thousand oaths

of eternal fidelity; he fervently implored that from that very moment she consider him her spouse. The princess, being by nature soft-hearted and trusting, without thinking carefully, told Riche-Cotel she believed his oaths and accepted his proposal. The marriage was concluded immediately without further ceremony, and the magical spindle shattered into pieces.

Meanwhile, Babillarde and Finetta were in terrible anxiety. Each running to her own room, they locked themselves in. Their chambers were rather far apart from one another, and thus, neither knowing anything about the fate of the others, neither closed her eyes all night. The next day the treacherous prince led Nonchalante to the lower chamber located at the end of the garden. There the princess told Riche-Cotel she was extremely worried about the fate of her sisters, although inwardly she feared showing herself to them, dreading reproaches for having contracted marriage. The prince answered she need not worry, assuring her the sisters would approve this marriage. Having spoken a few minutes more, he departed, locked Nonchalante so she did not notice, and went to seek the rooms of the other sisters. For some time he walked without success in his intention and could not discover in which rooms they had locked themselves; but since fear had not at all extinguished Babillarde's desire to talk, sitting in her room she conversed with herself. The prince, hearing a voice, approached the door and saw her through the keyhole; Riche-Cotel knocked at the door and began singing to her the same things he had told her sister: that precisely to offer her his hand and heart he had dared to enter the tower; he praised her beauty and wit to the heavens. Babillarde, being fully convinced she possessed all the virtues the prince described, began chattering and spoke incessantly for half an hour, despite having eaten almost nothing for nearly a whole day, because there was not even a piece of bread in her room. Being extremely lazy, she thought of nothing so much as chatter, and if she ever needed anything, she asked Finetta. This lovely princess was as industrious and prudent as her sisters were lazy and careless; her room at all times abounded with dishes, pies, and jams of various kinds, which she prepared herself; Babillarde, however, as I have already mentioned, having not a scrap of bread in her room and feeling intense hunger, moreover hearing the prince's tenderest assurances, opened the door to the seducer, who just as skillfully as before played before her his pre-learned role.

Then both left the room and went to the pantry, where provisions were always kept ready, since the food delivered in the basket was abundant for them.

Babillarde first began to worry about her sisters, but it suddenly occurred to her, I know not why, that they had surely locked themselves in Finette's room, where there was no lack of anything; Rich-Cotel, employing all his strength to confirm her

in this opinion, said that in the evening he would go to the princesses; but Babilliarde incessantly repeated that they must go to them immediately after the meal.

Then Rich-Cotel and the princess sat down and ate; after the meal, the prince asked Babilliarde to show him the finest chambers in the tower; he offered her his hand, and the princess led him into the drawing room; having arrived there, he began again to declare his love to her, proving eloquently that she would gain great advantages from such a marriage; he also told her, just as he had told Nonchalante, that she must become his spouse before meeting her sisters, alleging as reason that they might prevent her from doing so. And since I, continued the prince, am the son of the most powerful sovereign, your elder sister will say that it is more fitting for her to marry before you, and certainly will not consent to our union, which I so ardently desire. Babilliarde, being beguiled by the flattering expressions of the cunning Rich-Cotel, resolved to become his wife, without properly considering either the imprudence of her action or the magical distaff, which at that very moment shattered into tiny pieces.

In the evening, Babilliarde returned with the prince to her room, and the first object that struck her eyes was the broken distaff; she fell into such stupor that the prince was obliged several times to ask her the cause of such amazement; having somewhat recovered from her terror, she immediately recounted to Rich-Cotel the nature of the magical distaff, and the treacherous prince felt a malicious pleasure upon learning that the father of the princesses would become fully convinced of his daughters' misconduct.

At once, Babilliarde felt the desire to search for her sisters; she now had good reason to fear that they would not approve of her conduct; but the prince himself volunteered to go to them, assuring her that he would employ every means to obtain their consent to the marriage.

This assurance somewhat calmed Babilliarde, and as she had not slept for an entire day, she soon fell asleep; Rich-Cotel, intending to treat this princess just as he had treated Nonchalante, quietly left the room and locked the door.

Is it not true, dear Countess, that this Rich-Cotel was a great villain, and the princesses weak and imprudent maidens? I am so angry with them that if it were in my power, I would severely punish them; I know that you too are angered, but be calm; no one shall remain unpunished.

Triumph was reserved for the wise and resolute Finette.

When the treacherous Rich-Cotel locked up Babilliarde, he went through all the rooms and, seeing that they were all open, concluded that the one locked from within concealed Finette; therefore, having prepared a cunningly woven speech, he knocked at the door and began to say to her the same things he had said to her sisters: but this princess, being more cautious than they, listened for a long time without answering anything. Finally, seeing that Rich-Cotel certainly knew she had locked herself in that room, Finette began to speak; if it is truly so that you love me passionately, as you say, then I humbly beg you to go out into the garden, where I may speak with you from the window. Rich-Cotel did not accept this proposal; and as the princess likewise refused to open the door, he became enraged, dragged a large log, battered down the door with it, and entered the room. He encountered Finette armed with a large hammer, which by chance remained in the princess's wardrobe beside her room; from intense confusion, the princess's cheeks were covered with blushes, and although her eyes expressed the greatest anger, she appeared to Rich-Cotel a thousand times more beautiful. He wished to throw himself at her feet, but she, stepping back, said proudly: "If you approach me, I shall crush your head with this hammer."—"How, lovely princess!" exclaimed Rich-Cotel, concealing his fury beneath a gentle voice: "Does true love indeed deserve such terrible hatred?"—and then he again began to explain, however standing at a distance, the fierce passion inspired in him by the fame spread everywhere concerning her beauty and extraordinary wit; he added that solely for this reason had he disguised himself, in order to have the happiness of respectfully offering her his hand and heart, and that she must attribute to his strongest love the fact that he dared to break down the door. In conclusion, he strove to assure Finette, just as he had assured her sisters, that it consisted in both his and her interest that she acknowledge him as her spouse as soon as possible; afterward he asked the princess where her sisters were, asserting that he had seen none of them. Nor did I have any need to seek them, Your Highness, said he; occupied solely with you, I could think of nothing else.—The witty princess, pretending to be softened, said: very well, Prince, go bring my sisters here, and we shall speak together and see whether your proposal can be accepted.—Ah, no, replied Rich-Cotel, I cannot by any means agree to this, being beforehand certain that your sisters will never consent to our marriage. I know that by right of their primogeniture, they will oppose this. Although Finette had previously distrusted the treacherous prince, his last words doubled her suspicion; she trembled for the fate of her sisters and, not doubting their misfortune, resolved to avenge them, and at the same time to escape a similar calamity. And so, she said to Rich-Cotel, I agree to marry you; but as I know that marriages concluded in the evening are not always fortunate, I beg you to postpone the wedding ceremony until tomorrow morning; I assure you that I shall not speak a word about this to my sisters; for you

I shall prepare a good bed in a separate room; I even give you my honest word not to leave my bedroom until tomorrow morning. Rich-Cotel, who by nature was somewhat cowardly, seeing that Finette did not release the hammer from her hands, turning it like a fan—Rich-Cotel, I say, agreed to fulfill the princess's wish and departed to give her some time for reflection. Hardly had he gone out when Finette immediately made a bed over the opening of the privy, located in a nearby room, which was as clean as the others. Into this opening flowed all manner of filth; and as it was rather large, Finette placed several thin sticks across it crisscross, laid a featherbed and pillows upon them, covered them with a clean sheet, and immediately retired to her own room. A minute later, Rich-Cotel arrived, and the princess, still holding the hammer in her hands, escorted him into that room and then went away to hers. Rich-Cotel, having not slept for an entire day, threw himself fully clothed onto the bed, but scarcely had he lain down when suddenly the thin sticks beneath the featherbed broke, and he plunged into the opening; unable to hold himself, he fell headfirst and struck so violently that he was utterly shattered. The prince's fall occurred with a tremendous noise; moreover, this room was not far from Finette's; she immediately guessed that her trick had achieved the desired success. It is impossible to describe the pleasure she felt hearing how he writhed in the filth. Rich-Cotel deserved this punishment, and the princess had reason to rejoice. Afterward, her first concern was to find her sisters; it was not difficult for her to find Babilliarde; Rich-Cotel, having locked her, had left the key in the door; and as Finette hastily entered her room, she immediately awoke. Seeing her sister, Babilliarde became confused; Finette related to her how she had freed herself from the deceiver who had come with the intention of dishonoring her. This news struck Babilliarde like a thunderbolt; despite her loquacity, she at first remained silent about her marriage to Rich-Cotel, and, hiding her grief deep within her soul, went with Finette to search for Nonchalante; they ran through all the rooms and found her nowhere; finally, Finette thought to look whether she might be in the garden room. They indeed found her there, half-dead from weakness and despair, because Nonchalante had eaten nothing throughout that entire day. The princesses, having provided everything necessary, began to relate in detail what had happened to each of them. This mutual explanation plunged them all into profound sorrow. Having mourned their misfortune, they went

to rest.

Now let us turn to Rich-Cotel, who spent that night and the following day most unpleasantly. He had fallen into such a pit that no daylight ever penetrated it, and therefore he could not yet see all its vileness. Nevertheless, Rich-Cotel found an exit from there into a conduit through which filth flowed into a river situated at a

considerable distance from the tower; spotting fishermen in boats, he began shouting, begging for their help, and they, seeing him in such a pitiable condition, pulled him out.

He ordered himself to be taken to the palace of the king, his father, in order to have his wounds treated there. The misfortune that had befallen him rekindled in him such intense hatred toward Finette that he thought less of healing than of revenge.

Meanwhile, our ingenious princess led an exceedingly sorrowful life. Honor was a thousand times dearer to her than life, and the shameful conduct of her sisters drove her even to despair; furthermore, the frail health of Nonchalante and Babillarde, resulting from the consequences of marriage, grieved Finette still more. Rich-Cotel, who had always been the greatest deceiver, summoned all his wit to accomplish his vengeance. Neither his fall into that foul place, nor the wounds on his head and throughout his body, nothing pained him so much as the fact that a woman had outwitted him; knowing that the consequence of his double marriage would be the whims of the princesses, he ordered trees bearing the finest fruits in large jars to be placed beneath the windows of their tower. Nonchalante and Babillarde, often sitting at the window, soon saw these fruits; they desired so strongly to eat them that they incessantly begged Finette to descend in a basket and pick the fruits, since neither of them, due to illness, could do this herself. The kindness of the beloved princess extended to such a degree that she willingly agreed to fulfill her sisters' wish. Having descended in the basket, she picked the fruits, brought them back, and the princesses ate them with the greatest delight.

On the next day, fruits of another kind appeared; again the princesses requested; again Finette complied. But scarcely had she descended when suddenly servants of Rich-Cotel, who had hidden themselves and who on the first occasion had failed to capture the princess, seized her and led her away to Rich-Cotel before the eyes of her sisters, who from sheer dismay tore at their own hair.

The vile executors of the treacherous prince's abominable orders conveyed Finette to a country house where Rich-Cotel resided for the better recovery of his health. Upon seeing the princess, he could not conceal his anger; he uttered many unpleasant things to her, to which she replied with such noble firmness and greatness of soul as might be expected from a heroine like herself. After keeping Finette prisoner for several days, Rich-Cotel ordered her to be taken to the summit of the highest mountain, whither he himself arrived a few minutes later. There he declared that she must die in retribution for the insult she had inflicted. Then the treacherous prince showed Finette a barrel, inside of which razors and knives were fastened to the sides, and nails were driven all around; he said that, as punishment

for her mockery, he would place her inside this barrel and roll it down the mountain. Although Finette was not a Roman woman, nevertheless she feared the prepared execution no more than once did Regulus, who had found himself in similarly dire circumstances. The young princess retained all her firmness of soul and did not lose her presence of mind. Instead of admiring her heroic intrepidity, Rich-Cotel flew into an even greater rage and longed to see her death forthwith. With this intention, wishing to inspect with his own eyes whether enough deadly instruments had been prepared inside the barrel, he leaned over the opening; Finette, seeing that her persecutor was diligently occupied with examining, lost no time, but with the speed of lightning rushed up to him, pushed him into the barrel, and sent it rolling down the mountain, not allowing the prince even time to recover his senses. Afterward, she took to flight, and the prince's bodyguards, who had watched with profound regret the cruelty with which the prince intended to treat the lovely Finette, made no effort to detain her; moreover, this unexpected event threw them into such terror that they thought of nothing else but saving Rich-Cotel, hastening to halt the barrel's precipitous descent; but all their efforts were futile: it rolled all the way to the bottom of the mountain, and the prince was drawn out thereof entirely cut to pieces.

This unfortunate occurrence plunged King Mult the Gentle and Prince Belavoir into despair; as for the subjects of his realm, they almost rejoiced, because they hated Rich-Cotel and even wondered how the younger prince, possessing such noble and magnanimous feelings, could love his unworthy brother; but such was Belavoir's character that he was deeply attached to his blood relatives, and Rich-Cotel, for his part, always knew so skillfully how to show him friendship that good Belavoir would never have forgiven himself had he not responded with the tenderest affection. The misfortune that had befallen his brother deeply moved the young prince, and he employed every possible means to expedite his recovery: nevertheless, despite all efforts, nothing could alleviate Rich-Cotel's mortal ailments; on the contrary, his wounds became hourly more dangerous and caused him to endure terrible suffering.

Finette, having happily escaped great peril, safely reached her tower. Her sisters were excessively glad to see her; but new calamities awaited the princess: Nonchalante and Babillarde gave birth to two sons, and this event threw Finette into great confusion; nevertheless, she did not lose her firmness. The desire to conceal her sisters' shame compelled her to resolve once more to expose herself to great danger. To ensure the success of her intention, Finette devised a measure such as only prudence could suggest: she dressed in men's clothing, placed her sisters' children in little boxes, in each of which, just above their mouths, she had cut two small openings for breathing; then she mounted a horse and, taking with

her these as well as several other boxes, set out for the capital of King Mult the Gentle.

Upon arriving in this city, Finette learned that the prince, scattering gold generously for medicines administered to heal Rich-Cotel's wounds, had attracted to the court charlatans from all over Europe: among them were many vagabonds who, possessing neither merit nor talent, pretended to be the most knowledgeable people, claiming they had acquired the knowledge to cure every kind of disease.

These vagabonds, whose entire science consisted solely in brazen deception, always found great trust among the common people. Such individuals never live in their native land, and by recounting that they have come from afar, they induce the simple folk to believe them all the more.

The ingenious princess, having learned all this in detail, called herself Sanatio; she announced that Chevalier Sanatio possessed miraculous medicines for healing even the most dangerous wounds. Belavoir, learning of this, immediately invited the supposed chevalier to his presence. Finette arrives, skillfully assumes the role of a doctor; she used five or six Latin words in conversation, and furthermore, her free and noble demeanor confirmed her knowledge. The princess was very much pleased by Belavoir's handsome appearance and agreeable manners. After speaking with him for some time about the methods by which Rich-Cotel might be helped, she said that she would bring a flask of healing water, and furthermore, she added, she had left behind two boxes containing an ointment that would be very beneficial for the prince's wounds.

The doctor departed and did not return, while meanwhile his reappearance was awaited with great impatience. Finally, they were about to send for him, when suddenly crying was heard in Rich-Cotel's room, sounding as though it came from a tiny infant. All present were extremely astonished, since there could be no children in the room, but they soon guessed that the crying emanated from the physician's boxes.

It was the crying of Finette's sisters' children. Before departing for the palace, the princess had fed them; but as considerable time had passed since then, they wished to eat again. Opening the boxes, to the extreme astonishment of everyone, they found within them two most adorable infants. Rich-Cotel immediately guessed that this was one of Finette's tricks; such mockery threw him into such violent fury that his pain intensified to such a degree that everyone expected his death from hour to hour.

Belavoir surrendered to excessive grief, while Rich-Cotel, being treacherous to the last moment of his life, thought of nothing at his final end except vengeance, and for that reason resolved to exploit the fervor of the virtuous prince.

"You have always loved me, dear brother," he said to him, "I feel how much my approaching end distresses you; but the limit of fate is inscrutable: I must die; if my memory is precious to you, then fulfill the last request of your dying brother." Belavoir, seeing him in such a terrible condition and fearing to increase his suffering, did not wish to refuse him anything. He swore an oath to fulfill his desire. As soon as Rich-Cotel received the desired promise, pressing his brother to his breast, he said: "Now I shall die peacefully; you will avenge my death. My request consists in this, dear brother, that after my death you ask for Finette's hand in marriage; I am certain that you will obtain the consent of the king, her father, without difficulty; as soon as you are laid upon the bridal bed, at that very moment plunge a dagger into her breast." Hearing these words, Belavoir shuddered with horror and inwardly repented the rashness of his oaths; but since what had been spoken could no longer be changed, he mentioned not a word to his brother, who a few minutes afterward expired. King Mult the Gentle was sensibly moved by his death; as for the subjects, instead of lamenting Rich-Cotel, they rejoiced that his death had delivered the inheritance of the throne to Belavoir, whom everyone loved and honored.

Finette, having returned safely once more to her sisters, soon learned of Rich-Cotel's death, and after some time all the princesses were informed of the arrival of the king, their father. Upon his arrival, the king immediately went to the tower to his daughters, and, embracing them, ordered the crystal spindles to be brought. Nonchalante, taking Finette's spindle, showed it to the king, then bowing respectfully to him, carried it back; Babillarde did the same, and finally Finette; but the king, being somewhat suspicious, wished to see all three spindles together; and since only Finette's spindle remained intact, the king became so angry with his elder daughters that he immediately sent them to the sorceress, his friend, who had invented these spindles, begging her to keep them with her for life and punish them severely for their crime.

Wishing precisely to fulfill the king's request, the sorceress led them into a gallery of her enchanted castle and commanded them there to draw images of famous women renowned for their virtues and diligence. By means of the miraculous action of her magical gift, all the figures they depicted received motion and were active from morning till evening. On all sides trophies and inscriptions were visible in honor of these great women. Such punishment for the princesses was very cruel, especially when they compared their triumph with the contemptible position into

which their unfortunate imprudence had plunged them. But most of all, the words of the sorceress grieved them, who said with great solemnity: "If you too had conducted yourselves as well as these women whose images you see before you, you would not have fallen into ruinous error; idleness is the mother of vices, the source of all your misfortunes, and therefore, so that henceforth you do not expose yourselves to similar calamities and atone for past sins, I shall give you work." Indeed, the sorceress made the princesses undertake the lowest labor; she sent them into her gardens to pick peas and weed grass. Nonchalante, being unable to endure such a way of life, which was exceedingly different from her natural inclinations, died in sorrow and exhaustion, while Babillarde, who some time afterward found a means to escape at night from the sorceress's castle, in the darkness broke her head against a tree and died from this wound in the arms of peasants.

Finette, out of the goodness of her soul, sincerely lamented the fate of her sisters and, to her greater grief, learned that Prince Belavoir had asked the king for her hand in marriage, to which he agreed, not even informing Finette beforehand, because in those times little regard was paid to mutual inclination. At this news, Finette trembled, not without reason, fearing that the hatred of Rich-Cotel might easily pass into the heart of his brother; she was firmly convinced that the prince wished to marry her solely in order to sacrifice her to the memory of Rich-Cotel. Worried about this, Finette sought counsel from the wise sorceress, who respected her just as much as she despised Nonchalante and Babillarde.

The sorceress did not wish to reveal anything to Finette; she said only: "Princess! You are prudent and cautious; until now you have taken such just measures for your safety that nothing remains for me to tell you except that distrust is the mother of security; continue as before to feel the full value of this rule, and you will be happy without the aid of my art." Finette, receiving no further reliable information from the sorceress, returned to the palace in the greatest confusion.

A few days afterward, the princess was betrothed to Belavoir, whose person was represented by an ambassador who had arrived from his sovereign with this proposal. Afterward, she was conveyed in a magnificent carriage to her lofty bridegroom. In the first two border towns of Mult the Gentle's dominion, Finette was received in the most solemn manner, and in the third, Belavoir himself met her, whom the king, his father, had commanded to accompany the princess to the capital. Everyone was extremely astonished, noticing a certain sorrow depicted on the face of good Belavoir, at a time when an alliance so ardently desired by all was approaching; even the king himself reproached him, and, despite his obstinacy, sent someone to meet the princess.

Belavoir, seeing Finette, was struck by her charms; he began to speak with her, but with such confusion that the courtiers of both courts present, knowing how amiable and clever the prince was, immediately concluded that love had deprived him of his presence of mind. Upon entering the capital, joyful shouts resounded everywhere, music thundered, and the entire city was illuminated. The marriage was performed, and afterward a magnificent ball was given.

Finette, not forgetting the sorceress's advice and acting in accordance with her words, persuaded one of the ladies-in-waiting to bring straw, an ox bladder, blood, and intestines of some animals from the kitchen into the bedroom. She herself, finding a pretext to withdraw for a short time, entered the bedroom and made a dummy out of the straw, placing the intestines and the bladder filled with blood inside it; then she dressed this dummy in a woman's nightdress. Having prepared the doll, Finette returned again to the guests. Soon afterward, the newlyweds were led to the bedroom. When the lady-in-waiting accompanying them had carried out the candles, Finette threw the straw dummy onto the bed, while she herself hid in a corner of the room.

Prince Belavoir, sighing very loudly three or four times, took his sword and plunged it into the heart of the supposed Finette. At that very moment he felt that blood flowed in streams and that his straw spouse lay motionless. "What have I done?" cried Belavoir; "to fulfill a rash oath, I have deprived of life the most lovely and dear princess; captivated at first sight by her beauty, I lacked the strength to despise an oath whose fulfillment is the greatest crime; can one punish a woman for being virtuous? Thus, Rich-Cotel, I have satisfied your unjust vengeance, but I must also avenge Finette by my own death. Yes, beautiful and unfortunate princess, this very sword..." "Hold!" cried Finette, hearing that the prince, in his despair, had dropped his sword and was searching for it in the darkness. "Hold, Prince, I am alive; knowing the goodness of your heart, I was certain that you would repent, which is why I resolved, by an innocent trick, to prevent you from committing murder." Afterward, Finette explained to Belavoir how, as a precaution, she had made the straw dummy. The prince, learning that Finette was alive, fell into extreme delight; he admired her prudence in all such cases and was profoundly grateful to her for not allowing him to commit a crime which he dared not even think of without horror, not understanding how previously he could not have perceived the worthlessness of his oaths, forced through cunning.

If Finetta had neglected the rule that distrust is the mother of safety, she would surely have been slain. Her death would have caused the death of Belavoir. Praise be to caution and presence of mind! They preserved two most worthy spouses from

disaster and prepared for them a better fate. Belavoir and Finetta loved each other passionately until death, and their long life flowed in such happiness and glory that it is difficult to describe.

Here, Countess, is the wondrous story of Finetta; I confess I have been telling it rather long; but when one tells tales, it means there is nothing else to do. The same happened with me. Having written this story to pass the time, although I expanded it somewhat, yet since its content is quite amusing, I am confident it will not tire the reader or the female reader. Moreover, lovely Countess, it can very easily be shortened; I assure you, I could recount Finetta's adventures in a few words, though not at all as they were told to me when I was still a child; back then the narration lasted a good hour.

I do not doubt that this beautiful tale will deserve your approval, but I do not know whether you are aware of what tradition says concerning its antiquity. It assures us that the troubadours or Provençal storytellers invented the story of Finetta long before Abelard and the famous Count Theobald of Champagne began composing romances. Tales of this kind contain sound morality. You will certainly notice this, and it will be very just, that nannies, nursemaids, and governesses would do well to tell them to children in order to instill in them a love for virtue. I do not know whether, when you were still a child, the story of Finetta was told to you; but as for me:

Moral.

From my dear mother, may heaven grant her kingdom,
I heard the tale of Finetta many times;
She repeated to me—almost every hour,
That cunning, flattery, deceit, treachery
Will never remain unpunished in any way;
That sooner or later, for malicious scheming,
Terrible vengeance shall overtake the guilty perpetrator!
And here everyone clearly sees an example of this:
Dishonor, laziness, negligence
Were the cause of all the misfortunes of the two sisters.—
Though their transgression was involuntary,
Yet they forgot their duty.
And here is my opinion on the matter:
I do not dispute that error
May sometimes be excused;
But credulity and impatience
Must not be forgiven in young maidens!

And true virtue
The Creator will always reward.
He is the witness of blameless souls,
He is their companion, He is their father!

By scorning the villain's counsel
And by her own foresight,
Did not Finetta prove
That God was her helper?