

"That's settled, then," said the magician. "Now we can get to business," and taking a crystal rod, he touched the prince on the forehead, and the prince immediately fell backwards into a deep, deep sleep on the top of the boa-constrictor, who took no notice of him, for he was asleep too.

Then the magician opened the prince's eyelids, and looked down deep into his eyes, so that he could see his thoughts. And he bared the prince's breast and laid his head on his heart, so that he could hear his dreams. All the while he kept grimly nodding his head and saying to himself, "So, so! He has gone farther than most people, this fellow. I must continue his acquaintance. Yes. Yes. He is something more than a bag of sawdust with a crown and a sceptre. I begin quite to like him."

At last he took the crystal rod and touched him again on the forehead, and the prince sat up and rubbed his eyes, looking sleepily about him, but he had no idea he had been dreaming. The magician actually gave him some wine to drink, saying at the same time: "Come, wake up; it is time you were trudging. Back, as fast as your legs can carry you, to your garden again. You must be sure to be there before the sun rises; you will hear the voice saying, 'Are you there?' You must answer softly, 'Yes, I am here,' and as the sun rises you will see before you an apple tree, in full bloom and full of singing birds. Look at it steadfastly, and under its branches you will see a little glass house with a low iron door, and inside the glass house there will be a woman spinning. You must go up to the door and knock three times, and a voice will say, 'Come in,' but be sure you do not lift the latch until you have knocked three times."

"I will be sure of that," the prince answered eagerly.

"Good luck," shouted the magician.

But the prince never heard him. He was already out of sight. Oh, how his heart beat, as he ran through the wood. He was going to know the secret at last. The secret of his life.

It was already dawn when he reached

the garden. The birds began to sing, and the flowers to open. It seemed like another world after the magician's gloomy home, and while he waited for the sun to rise, again he heard the voice say, "Are you there?" Then he answered, "Yes, I am here," and immediately the sun rose and he saw before him an apple tree in full bloom and full of singing birds. And he saw, too, the little glass house under the branches, with the low iron door, and inside the little glass house sat a woman spinning stars.

Oh, she was beautiful!

Her eyes were like a summer night, and her mouth was sweet like music, and her long dark hair fell like a cloud over her blue mantle. As she spun she sang, and as she sang, the stars she was spinning moved round her in a circle; wider and wider, and farther and farther, as far as all the world.

The prince scarcely dared to breathe for the wonder and beauty of it. Suddenly she looked at him with large solemn eyes, and he fancied that she smiled. He thought his heart must break for joy. He sprang towards her with a loud cry and put his hand on the latch of the iron door, but he quite forgot to knock three times as the magician had told him.

As he opened the door the singing stopped; the spinning-wheel went round and round madly, with a harsh, whirring noise and stopped too; and the stars flew out in all directions, like sparks of fire, and blinded him, so that he had to close his eyes.

It was only for a minute, but when he opened them again everything was gone.

The beautiful woman, the wheel, the music, the stars—even the apple tree was gone. The prince stood alone in the garden.

It was raining.

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Now, many years had come and gone, and the prince was old, with long hair and dim, sad eyes. For a long time he had been king of the land. A good, gentle king, but he had never done any-