

It was a hot day. All the doors were open, and it so happened that the swineherd sat in the kitchen hard by, making music for the servants.

"Music!" said the Queen, and something like a taint light flickered across her face.

The Court band immediately set up a merry jig. But that was not what she meant.

"Oh, no; not that," she said. "It came from without."

Then one of the ladies in waiting volunteered the information that it was not music, only the swineherd amusing himself in the kitchen.

"Bring him here at once. At once," said the Queen, in the voice of one who will be obeyed.

"You are to go into the presence of the Queen at once, blockhead," they said to the swineherd, and he answered, "Oh, am I? Very well." And he walked into the hall just as he was, because the Queen had said "At once," with the free step of a man who has the use of all his limbs.

Of course the Court were all laughing in their sleeves at the figure he cut, but he saw nothing of that. Only he saw the pale face of the Queen and heard her voice. There were only himself and the Queen in the whole world.

"Will you not sing to me, swineherd? Your voice is like the forest in spring-time," she said.

But when he opened his mouth not a sound came out of it, and turning on his heels, he ran with all his might out of the Court, never stopping till he reached his old hut in the forest.

How they all laughed at the idiot!

"Your Majesty has not lost much," simpered the lady-in-waiting. But the Queen sighed wearily.

"It was music," she said.

As for the swineherd it was just the same for him in the forest. Always the face and the voice.

In the sunshine, in the cool green twilight, in running water, and the song of birds. Everywhere. Everywhere. Always the face and the voice.

"Surely I shall see her again," he thought.

He did indeed see her again, the very

next time he went to the Palace, but she was paler and stiller than ever.

She was lying in state in the banqueting hall, so that all the people might take a last look at their Queen. They filed in, one by one, and amongst the humbler sort came the swineherd.

The hall was lighted with candles, for the shutters were closed, and the air was heavy with the scent of rare waxen white flowers. The Queen did not look very different, only now the strange eyes were closed. The heavy crown was still on her head, and the heavy sceptre was still in the long, pale fingers. It broke the swineherd's heart to look at her.

"It was here I stood before," he thought, "and I could not even sing to her; such a little thing, and now——"

He seemed quite lost, and stood so long at her feet that an official poked him roughly with a gold stick.

"Get on, get on," said the official; for there were crowds more to come.

But when the swineherd got so far as the Queen's face, he flung up his arms suddenly with a loud cry. Of course everyone said, "Hush, Hush!" but he took no notice of that.

"How is this?" he said. "Why have you brought her here to be stifled?"

Oh, he was mad! There could be no doubt of it!

"How can she be stifled when, alas! she is dead?" they said.

"She is no more dead than you are," said the swineherd.

What a hubbub arose, to be sure.

Not dead! Had not the Court physician and the Lord High Chamberlain said that she was dead? What more could he want? Was she not lying in state? It was scandalous! It was positively indecent!

"She is not dead," said the swineherd, "only let me carry her into the air and the sunshine. Only let me carry her out of this stifling room."

"How dare you dream of such a thing?" said the Court officials, and everyone tried to push him out of the hall; but he fought desperately.

"Only let me try," he cried. "Take my life afterwards. Only let me try."

Of course they were too many for him. They soon pushed him out of the